

Fatal Anti-Transgender Violence in America: Building a Database of Transgender Homicides

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Abstract

Violence against the transgender community is a serious social issue, and researchers argue that anti-transgender homicide is an increasingly violent epidemic that proves transphobia is still prominent and dangerous in American society. Addressing this violence requires understanding anti-transgender bias, yet a comprehensive database on victims of anti-transgender violence does not currently exist. Therefore, our research team has been working to create such a database of all known anti-transgender homicides in the United States between 2015 and 2020. Once completed, the comprehensive database will be used to examine (a) broad patterns in incidents over time and (b) individual, situational, and contextual features of fatal violence directed at the transgender population. Preliminary results from these data collection efforts as well as the narratives of transgender people lost to this form of violence will be presented.

Introduction & Definitions

In 2020, the crime clearance rate for murders in the United States was approximately 54.4%. For cases of anti-transgender homicide, the clearance rate was 48%.

Our research analyzes different variables of anti-transgender cases, such as the date of death, location, age, race, and residency of a transgender victim. This database also includes the age, race, weapon use, military status, prior arrests, and red flags of the perpetrator if this information is known and available to the public.

Aside from demographic information on the victim and perpetrator, qualitative information is collected for our databases such as police handling, community responses, and victim narratives for each case of violence. This database also includes information on each case's clearance rates and perpetrator outcomes.

Lastly, we work to code and record variables of violence that specifically affect transgender lives and their loved ones. We account for the presence of deadnaming, whether a case was investigated as a hate crime, perpetrator-victim relationships (if any), and whether perpetrators belong to any hate groups.

The following definitions will assist in a thorough understanding of the data presented.

- Transgender: being a person whose gender identity differs from the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth.
- Deadnaming: calling a transgender person by their birth name when they have changed their name as part of their gender transition.
- Hate Crime: a violent crime that is motivated by prejudice on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, or other grounds.
- Sex Worker: a person whose work involves sexually explicit behavior.



Figure 1: A transgender rally in Boston, MA.

Methods

To gather information for this database, my research team collects information from news-based media sources on more than 300 victims of fatal anti-transgender violence. *Transgriot*, an online blog dedicated to highlighting the struggles and deaths of transgender folks, has been especially helpful in building our database along with various queer-friendly media reports and newspapers. These sources are helpful because they focus more on the victim and their narratives instead of victim-blaming or belittling the incident. Once we identify news sources on a particular anti-trans murder, we begin sifting through these stories to identify the aforementioned variables of trans death and enter this data into our database. After each researcher finishes coding and cleaning their cases, the team comes together to examine the characteristics of each individual incident, examining these incidents in various frameworks including descriptive and multivariate. This research will eventually examine the relationships between victim and perpetrator identities to help us understand why these incidents occur and who they are affecting more often.

Key Takeaways

- 87% of victims identified as female.
- 71% of victims were Black.
- We identified an overall clearance rate of 48.2%.
- Texas and Florida identify as the two states with the highest mortality rate amongst transgender individuals.

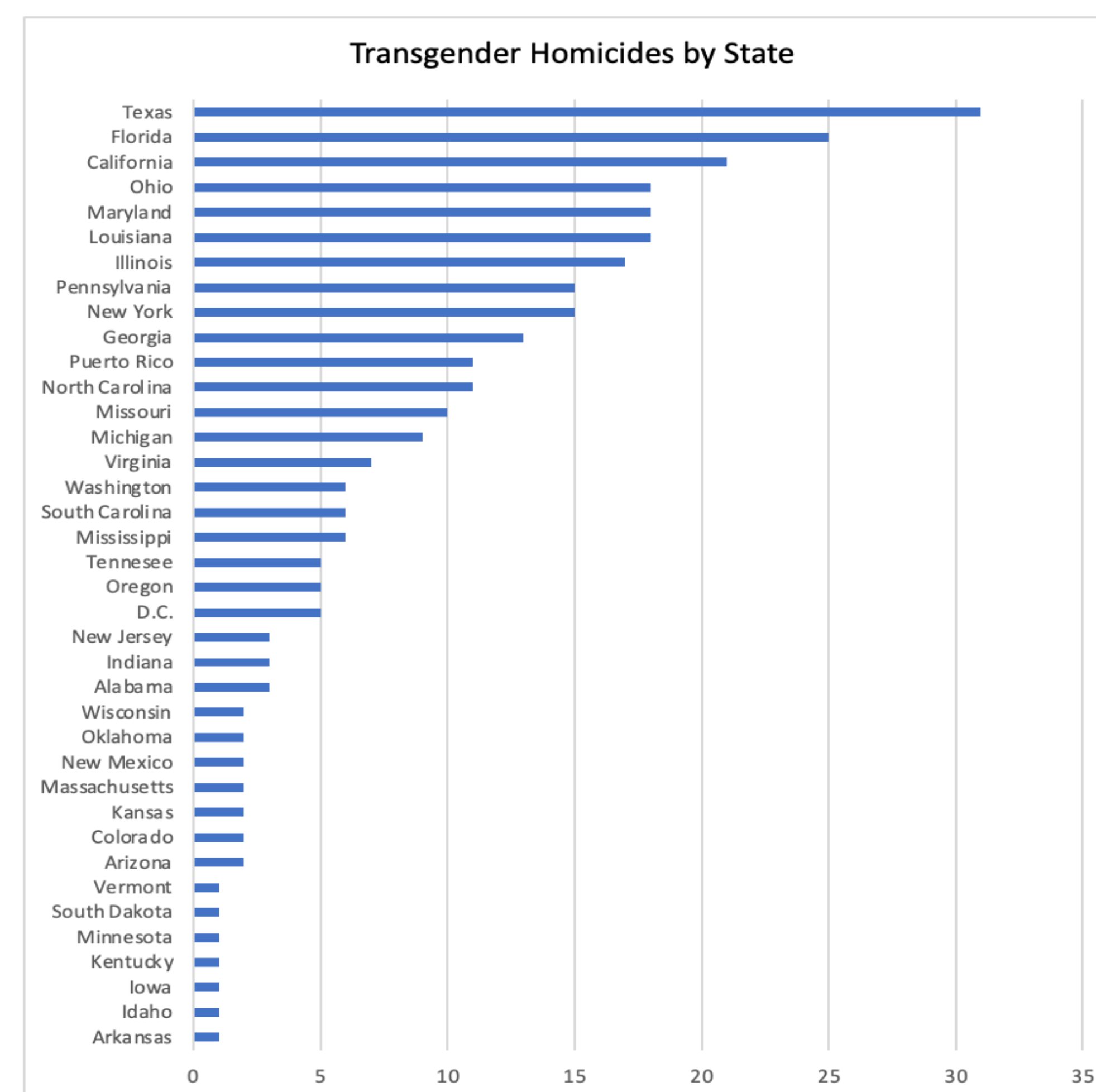


Figure 2: List of the transgender homicides by state, with Texas and Florida being the top two states with cases, 10.2% and 8.3% respectively.

Results

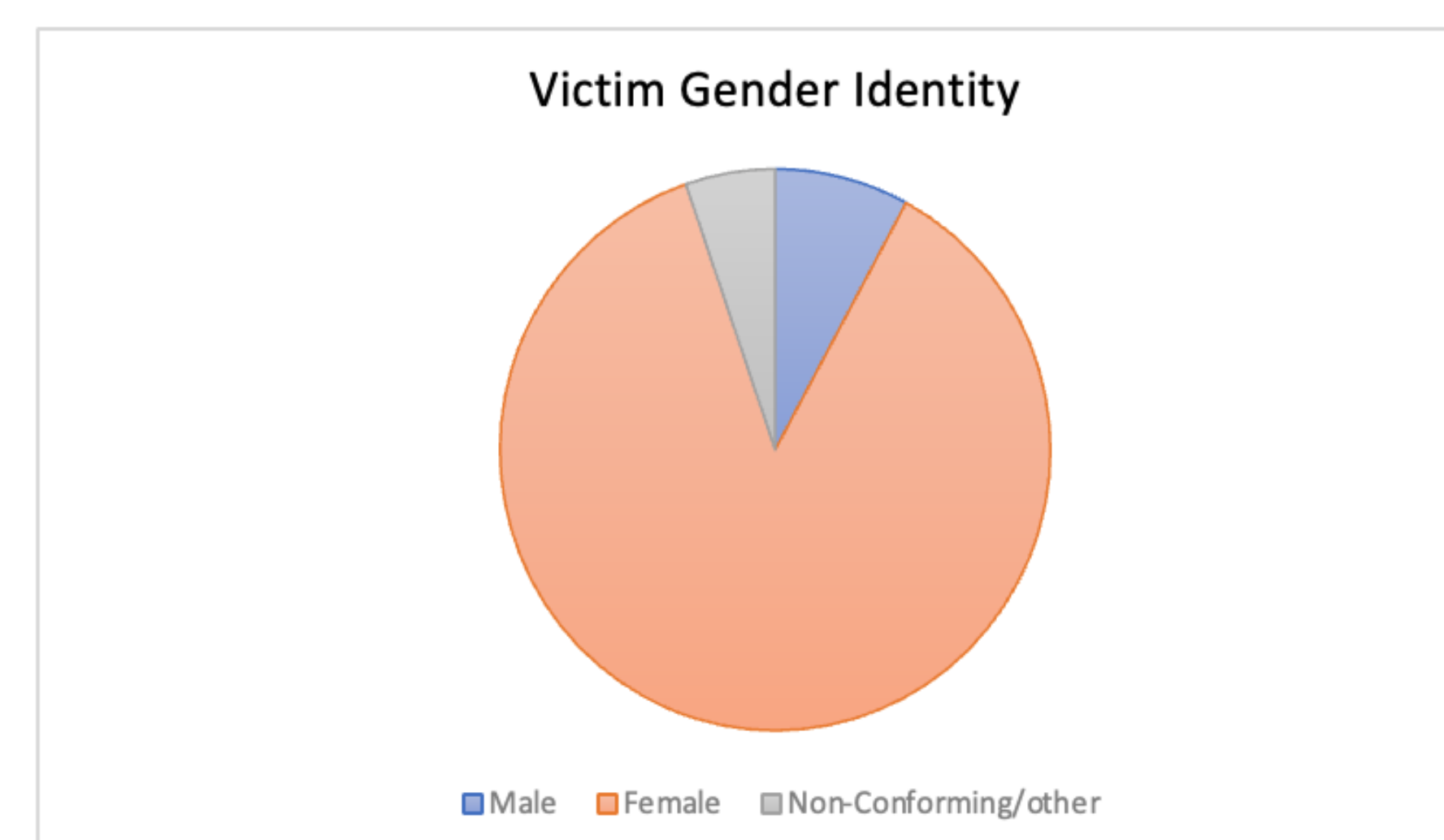


Figure 3: The victims were predominantly female, with 87% of victims identifying as female, 8% identified as male, and 5% identified as gender non-conforming.

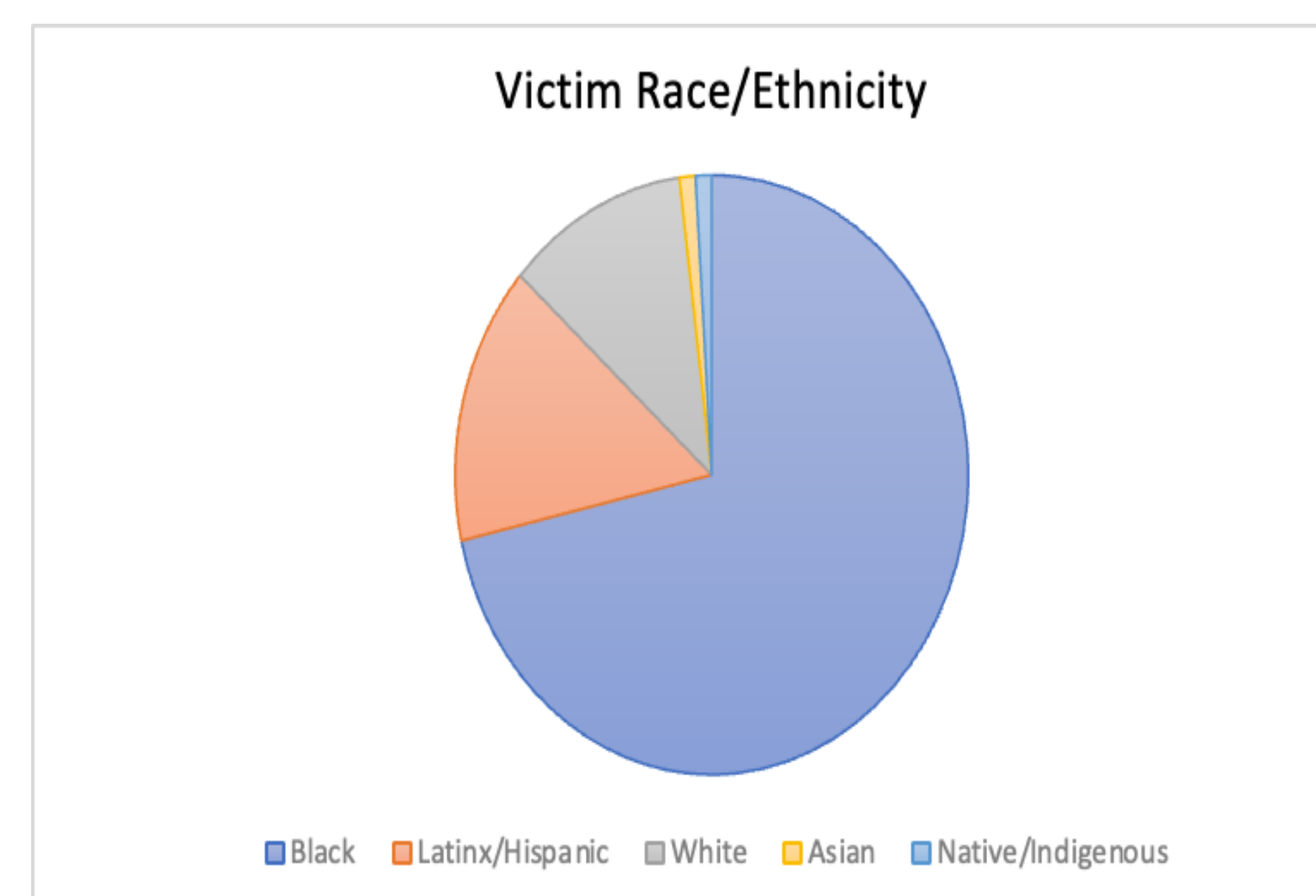


Figure 4: The victims were predominantly black, with 71.5% Black, 15.1% Latinx/Hispanic, 11.4% white, 1% Asian, and 1% Native/Indigenous.

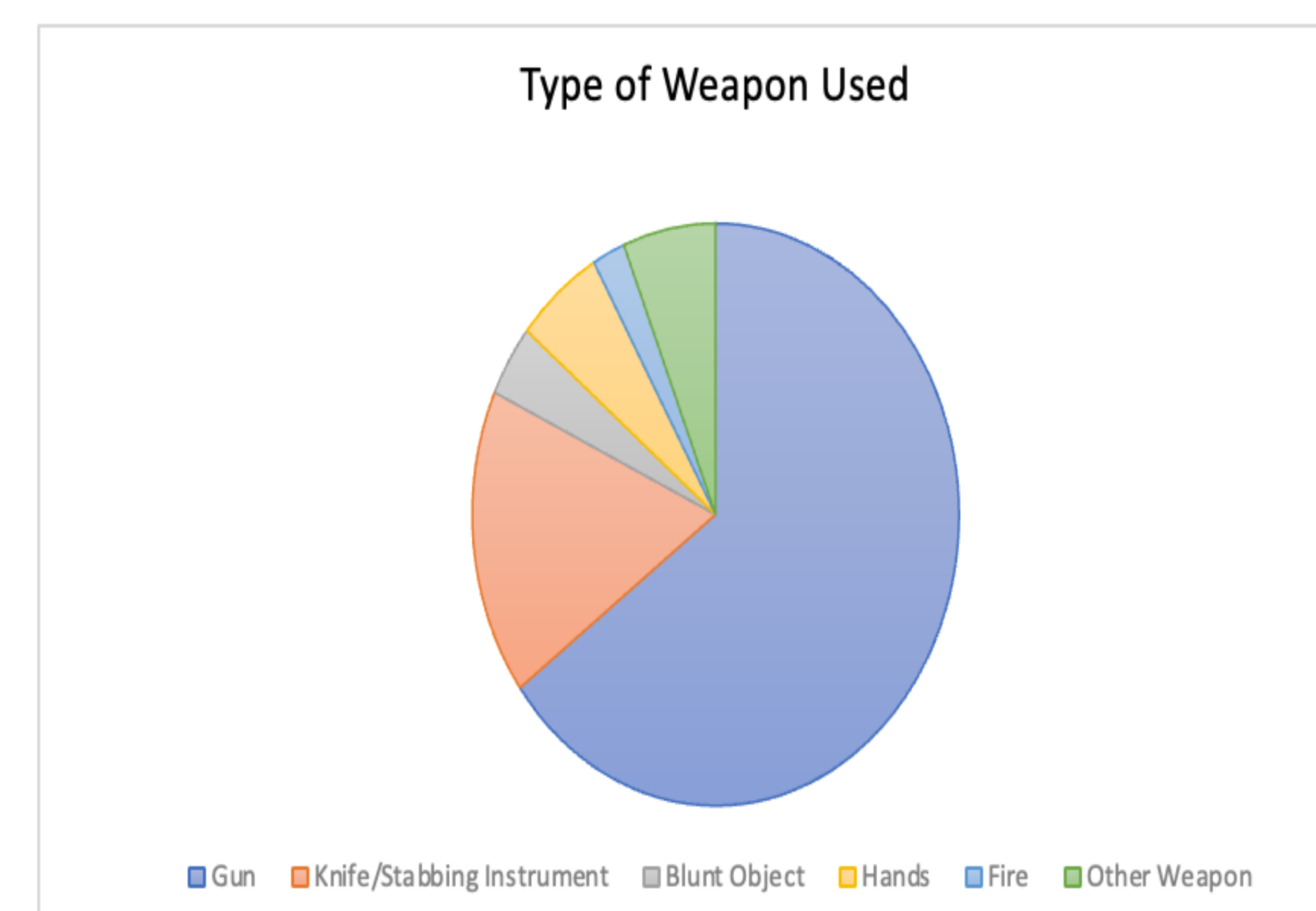


Figure 5: Guns were found to be the most used weapon, with 64.9% of cases being committed with a gun, 17% with a knife or stabbing object, 6.2% being another miscellaneous weapon, 5.8% being hands, 3.98% being a blunt object, and 2.2% being fire.

Analysis

The trends in the data are noticeable: perpetrators target predominantly transgender, Black women. Nearly 87% of the victims are women, with a disproportionate 71% victims being Black. This is especially problematic considering the Black population is only 12.2% of the overall U.S. population. The victims are also extremely young; on average, they are about 28 years old. The majority of the cases we coded are cases of gun violence.

Additionally, there is a geographical concentration of anti-trans murder in Texas and Florida, despite these populations making up 8.65% and 6.41% of the US population, respectively. While many of the cases coded are suspected to be hate crimes, the majority of the cases are defined by police as not hate crimes.

Conclusion

This work serves as a first step to shifting the national conversation regarding society's treatment of transgender lives and raising awareness of transgender deaths. This database functions as a stepping stone for much-needed documentation of transgender narratives and the heinous crimes committed against these communities. Through this project, we aim to uncover patterns within anti-transgender violence and better understand, predict, and anticipate behaviors of perpetrators. Our goal is that this research can serve as an educational tool for people in the United States to understand the differential treatment that transgender people face when they are victims of violent crime. We are continuing to expand and build on this database as more information becomes available relative to anti-transgender murders in 2021. Overall, this research will have a large impact on informing policy and advocacy for transgender people in the United States.

Acknowledgements & References

We would like to thank Dr. Brendan Lantz for allowing us to participate in such an amazing project and Lexi Fulkner for volunteering to code cases with us.

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