**Our Community**

The City of Sebastopol is a small semi-urban community located in California on the western edge of the Santa Rosa plain. It is 50 miles north of San Francisco, 8 miles west of Santa Rosa, 10 miles from Bodega Bay, and about 15 miles from the Russian River. The City, incorporated in 1902, currently has a population of about 7,800 people and serves a trade area population in excess of 50,000 people.

**Local Government**    -

Sebastopol has a Council-Manager form of government, with five Council members elected at large. The City has its own Police, Fire, and Public Works departments, as well as other city departments. With a very low crime rate, Sebastopol remains among the safest cities in Northern California.
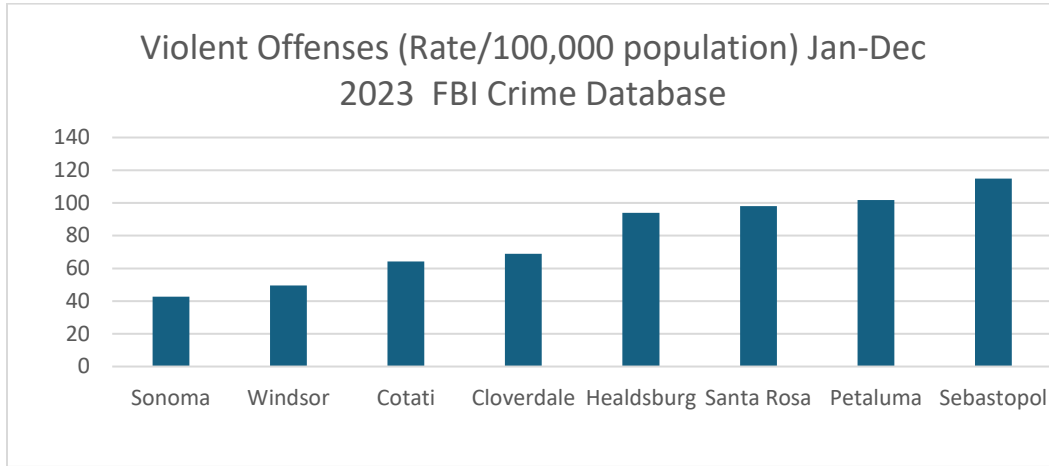
As the city extends a new contract to Chief Nelson and begins searching for a long-term replacement it is important to let the search be influenced by actual data on crime in Sebastopol.

A recent survey showed that public safety is the #1 concern of Sebastopol's citizens.  The city website offers the assurance that Sebastopol is among the safest cities in Northern California. Unfortunately, just because the website says it is a safe city, actual data contradicts the claim. The three graphs below, constructed using data from the FBI crime database, show that:
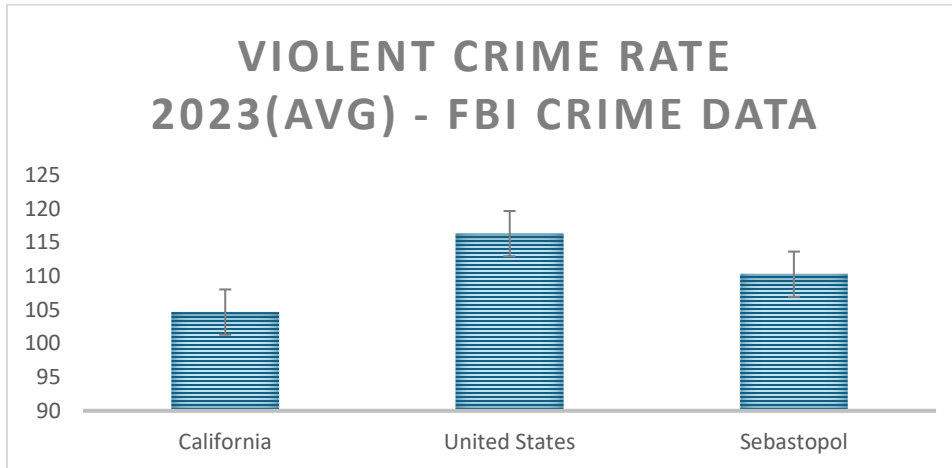
- **Sebastopol has the _highest per capita rate of violent crime in Sonoma County_.**
- **The city has a higher violent crime rate than the State of California.**
- **The number of violent crimes reached 100 in 2023 which was a 10-year record for the city**.

Combine this data with the fact that Sebastopol has the highest per capita rate of homeless in the county and the Chief certainly  his work cut out for him.
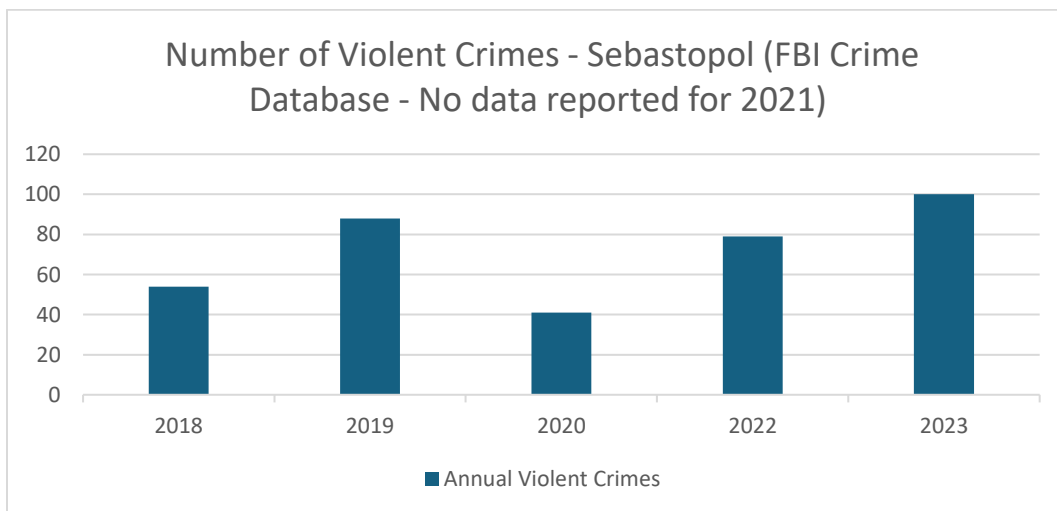
Graph 1

Violent Offenses (Rate/100,000 population) Jan-Dec 2023 FBI Crime Database

| City | Rate |
|------|------|
| Sonoma | 42 |
| Windsor | 49 |
| Cotati | 64 |
| Cloverdale | 69 |
| Healdsburg | 94 |
| Santa Rosa | 98 |
| Petaluma | 102 |
| Sebastopol | 114 |

Graph 2

VIOLENT CRIME RATE 2023(AVG) - FBI CRIME DATA

| Region | Rate |
|--------|------|
| California | 105 |
| United States | 116 |
| Sebastopol | 110 |

Graph 3

Number of Violent Crimes - Sebastopol (FBI Crime Database - No data reported for 2021)

| Year | Annual Violent Crimes |
|------|------|
| 2018 | 54 |
| 2019 | 88 |
| 2020 | 41 |
| 2022 | 79 |
| 2023 | 100 |

■ Annual Violent Crimes

During the last year much of the discussion at city council meetings has been around reducing the number of police officers serving the city. We have heard it is difficult to get experienced officers when we recruit without offering higher starting salaries. There was a comfort level with hiring recruits right out of training. There was resistance to having a captain and sergeants on every shift to support patrol officers. There is an active proposal to shift police funding to a mental health tactical unit.

*All of this took place in the context of a tacit assumption that we have very little "real crime" in Sebastopol*. It turns out **Sebastopol has the highest per capita rate of violent crime in Sonoma County. Violent crime is happening in public spaces and our youth are being impacted.**

- **Almost 1/3 of those violent crimes involved youth 0-19.**
- **1/4 occurred on streets or in parking lots and in public parks around the city.**
- **10% occurred in parks or on playgrounds**

**SEBASTOPOL POLICE DEPARTMENT, GOALS FOR RECRUITMENT**

As City Staff and Council embark on the search for a new Chief of Police, this data should be used to inform the selection process for the new Chief. From the data, it is clear that the City needs to hire a person experienced in creating partnerships with schools, leveraging County resources to sustain better policing, communicating with the public, business owners, Council and City Staff regarding crime and crime trends, working with the Sheriff's office to reduce crime in the general area, and employing crime reduction strategies within a small town that is surrounded by a larger sphere of influence.

**Sebastopol needs experienced police officers and the tools to investigate and solve serious crimes.** If patrol officers are less experienced, then we need to assure an experienced sergeant, or a captain are on the shift as well. This was the advice of our Police Chief during that meeting. We are fortunate to have such an experienced Chief for the last few years.

**Police need to adopt techniques to prevent these crimes from happening in the first place**. Community policing was prioritized by the council. **The focus needs to be reducing serious crime in the city**. If community policing is the tool to get this done, then great. **The priority needs to be reducing crime.**

**There needs to be more transparency**. The police department reports crimes to the FBI database. This data should be shared with the city council and the public. **If the public is aware of increased risks, they can take more precautions and may in fact report more suspicious activity**.

**PUBLIC SAFETY AND SEBASTOPOL**

Digging deeper into the data in the appendix below you will **see it is difficult to describe Sebastopol as a sleepy little town without crime when we see kidnapping and human trafficking among the offenses linked to violent crimes.**

Almost half of the violent crimes reported to the FBI was committed by or perpetuated on victims who were aged 19 or younger.

- **28% of violent crimes were committed by individuals under the age of 19.**
- **20% of the victims were also young**.

We are not improving our community by arresting teenagers and starting them down a dark path.   We need to identify root causes of crime involving youth and prevent these crimes.  **The school staff, school district and county education and the Sebastopol police need to work together to develop a plan to prevent these crimes**. The plan needs to be tracked to ensure the plan is effective.  **The city goal should be no teenagers committing violent crime or being a victim of violent crimes.**


## PUBLIC SPACES

Public spaces are widely reported as important to the community however crime may be a deterrent.

- **10% of attacks occur in parks or playgrounds.**
- **40% of the reported violent crime occurred on city streets, parking lots, businesses and doctor's offices.**

These are public spaces that need police presence.  If we don't have the staff, the topic of surveillance cameras needs to be discussed.  In the past the council has made an issue of any kind of surveillance technology.  **Do you still feel the same way about surveillance in light of the fact Sebastopol has the highest violent crime rate in the county**?

The police chief reported at the last meeting that the police were increasing their interactions with the local school officials.  This is a good step in the right direction.  W**e need the schools to step up**.

## YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING

There is a proposal by city council to offer mental health counseling to the homeless.  Priority should be funding for counseling students who might be at risk of committing or being the victim of violent crimes.  Many of these students are from outside the city.  The cost of police

services to address these crimes should not be Sebastopol city's problem.  The county needs to step up with money to reimburse the city.

**COUNCIL'S ROLE IN MAKING SEBASTOPOL SAFE**

Last, we need the city council to become more curious. Frequently the council is flooded with pages of information, and financial data that requires much critical thinking.  Sometimes the data provided is not terribly meaningful.

**At the last council meeting the police report included all kinds of data on police activities and no data on crimes reported in the city**.  It is natural to assume there is no serious crime in Sebastopol if the data is not being shared**.  Now w***e know from the FBI data that violent crimes occur every month in Sebastopol.  Add property crimes reported to the FBI and our police are busy investigating serious crimes each month.*

- In 2023 there were four robberies; 67% involved a weapon – armed robbery
- Two rapes – one involving a child under 10 years old; one involving the homeless
- Twenty-one aggravated assaults; 38% of offenders under 20 years old; 21% of victims were under 20.
- Offenses reported linked to another violent crime included Kidnapping/Abductions, Human Trafficking/Commercial Sex Acts, Pornography, Criminal Sexual Contact and Destruction of Property.

There are many non-violent crimes reported as well.

- Property crimes occur many times per month. More than 130 property crimes were reported to the FBI in 2023.
- Larceny occurs 2-4 times every month.
- Eight cases of counterfeiting and forgery were reported in 2023.
-  Nine cases of credit card/ATM Machine Fraud occurred.
- 40 reports of destruction of property were reported.
- There were 40 drug equipment violations and 30+ drug violations reported by the public.
- Nine reports of intimidation were received just in November 2023.

**Bottom line, monthly data on crimes reported and crimes solved would be more meaningful than just measures of activity, such as numbers of calls.**

**CONCLUSION**

Sebastopol is not one of the safest cities in northern California**. This should be removed from our website**. **In 2023 Sebastopol had the highest rate of violent crime in Sonoma County.**

- The fact that city council and city priorities have not reflected a focus on reducing crime is a concern.

**This situation is an example of why data is critical to the effective functioning of our city government**.

Once the data is accepted, the root causes for the increase in violent crime can be identified and a plan developed to address the problem. **Given the disproportionate involvement of our city's youth in the problem, <span style="color:red">partnerships with the County and the Schools</span> are urgently needed to address the future of our city.**


**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**:

**Recent proposals to reduce the size of our police force and substitute a mental health crisis team might be a mistake given the increasing number of violent crimes and our ranking as the worst city in Sonoma County**. Emphasizing community policing might make sense if everyone involved is focused on **reducing violent crime in the city**. A summit with the Sheriff's and CHP might identify additional resources to fight this problem.

**The dramatic increase in homelessness may be related to increases in serious crimes**. Police report up to 50% or more of their time involved with the homeless. The FBI data does not break out homeless crime except to identify Shelter-Mission/Homeless as a location where a crime occurs. Since we don't really have a formal shelter or mission the statistics don't help. Two violent crimes were, however, attributed to such a location. One report was a rape. Since homeless people live on the streets, crime in parking lots, streets and parks may be related to homelessness. 36% of violent crimes occurred in those public spaces in 2023. **The relationship between homelessness and crime needs to be understood and addressed.**

**The fact that young people are so often involved is alarming on several levels**. We like to think our city is a safe place for young people. Further, being arrested for a serious crime at an age 19 or less is not a good starting point for the rest of their lives. **Making the city streets and parks safe for young people needs to be a number 1 priority.**

Many of these crimes occur in parking lots or parks. The phenomena of high school students swarming the Safeway parking lot with reports of fights and shoplifting is <span style="color:red">well documented by the Police Department</span> and local residents.

**The comments from the survey of residents earlier this year called for more activities for youth in the city**. While Analy provides many youth activities from sports to choir/band, to theater, the district needs to find resources for students who do not have after school activities**. The school, the school board and our county elected officials and nonprofits need to be involved in finding solutions**.

It is unclear from the data how much of this crime is related to individuals who reside outside the city.  Given the high volume of traffic passing through the city it would make sense to understand this statistic. If it is significant, the County needs to be involved in the discussions and propose funding to reduce violence in this population.  **Like many of Sebastopol's problems we pay the cost of dealing with problems that are in part related to county residents.**

**POLICY ACTIONS**:

1) Fully fund the police.
2) Recruit officers and new Chief that have the skills to reduce crime in Sebastopol's specific situation as a small town with a high number of violent crimes, a high homeless population, need for County partnerships, and more transparency to the public, businesses, City Staff and Council.
3) Having more of a bridge between Analy, County Resources and the police department to address criminal activity/ safety with the youth population.
4) Instead of focusing on mental health for the homeless (especially as there are zero psych beds) the city should seek county resources for the schools to help address conflicts/ conflict resolution, at home abuse, and provide after school programs.
5) Monthly police department reports need to include meaningful data about crimes reported and crimes solved.
6) Council and City Staff must make public safety its number 1 concern.  The city needs to use meaningful data to understand the problem and measure its effectiveness in solving the problems.

Below is an appendix to this document which includes much of the data found in the FBI database.  Copy this link into your browser to view the data for yourself.  CDE (cjis.gov)
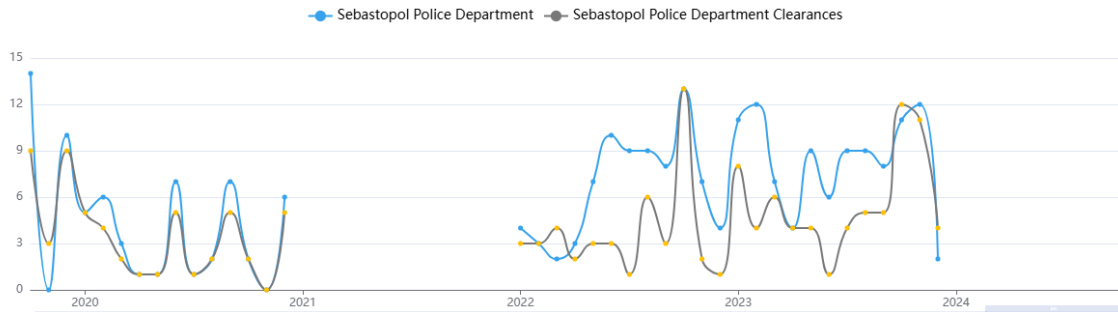
**APPENDIX:**

**OVERALL VIOLENT CRIME STATISTICS**

Data View: Counts ⌄

**All Violent Offenses Reported by Population**

🔵 Sebastopol Police Department  ⚫ Sebastopol Police Department Clearances



Violent crimes include Homicide, Robbery, Rape and Aggravated Assault. The blue line represents the number of violent offenses each month. The darker line is violent crimes that were "cleared" by the Sebastopol PD.

The trend in case counts stands out. It is up substantially beginning in 2022 and continuing through 2023. Many are cleared but the clearance rate appears to be down a bit from 2020 when there were substantially fewer cases

Comparisons with other cites with different populations are done by mathematically scaling the crime event to a population of 100,000. The per capita rate of crime in Sebastopol is the highest in the county. We are a small city with a small police force and a very high rate of violent crime per resident compared to other cities in our region. The difference is more significant when you compare Sebastopol to other cities of similar size.

**Violent Offenses (Rate/100,000) Jan-Dec 2023
FBI Crime Database**
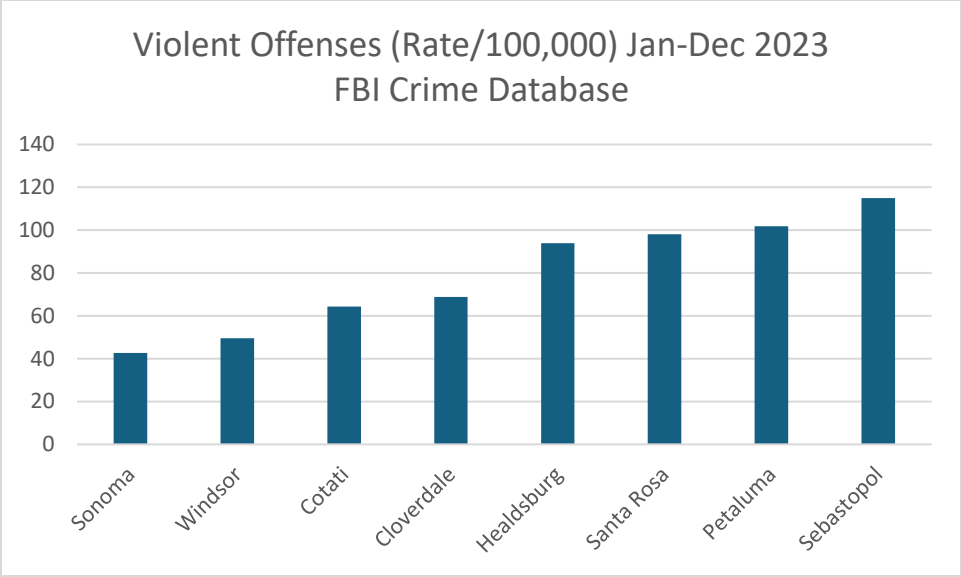
Combining case counts for 2018-2023 shows the recent trend increase more clearly. In 2023 there were 100 reported violent crimes, a record for the last 10-year period.



**Violent Crimes - Sebastopol (FBI Crime Database -
No data reported for 2021)**
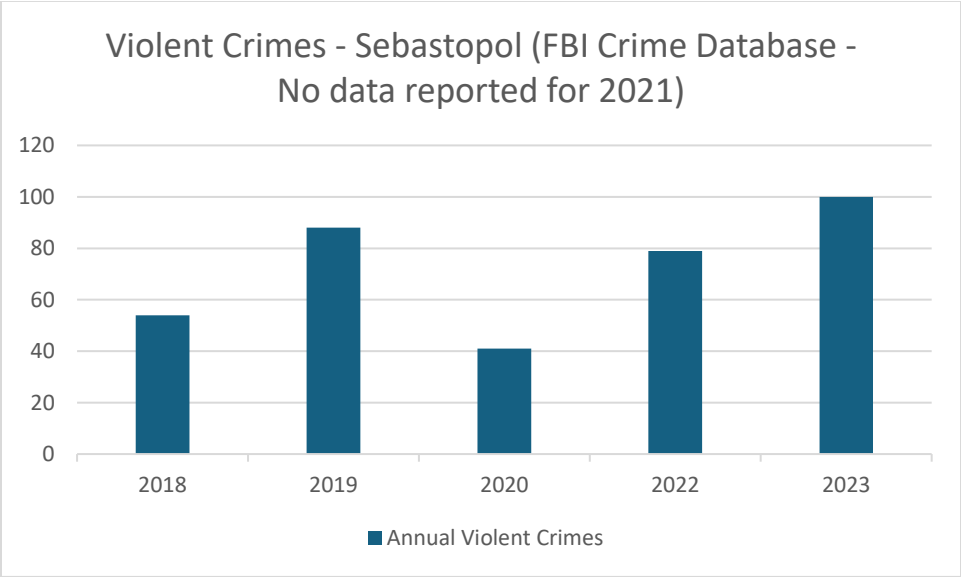
Looking at the monthly data since January of 2022, the average has increased from a little less than six per month to more than eight per month at the end of 2023.

**Violent Crime - Sebsastopol (Cases/Month)**
**2022-2023 FBI Crime Database**
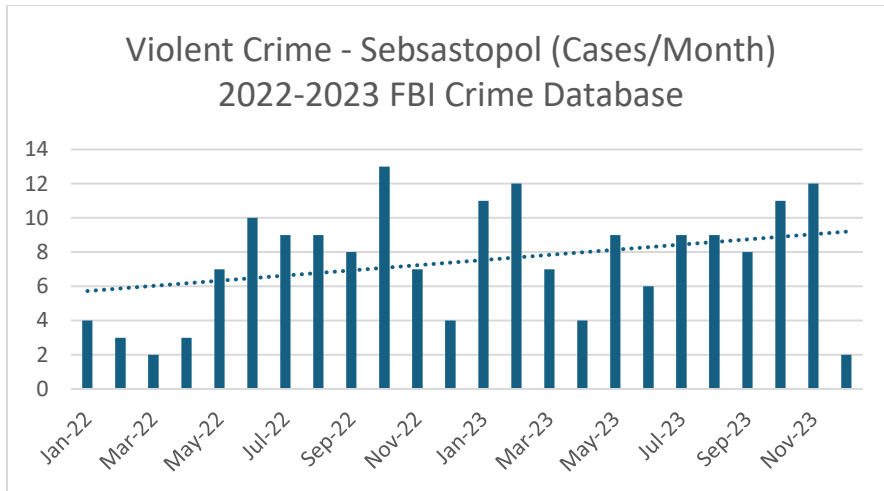
Sebastopol's average annual per capita violent crime rate for 2023 is below the average for the US but nominally 5% above California.

**VIOLENT CRIME RATE 2023(AVG) - FBI CRIME DATA**
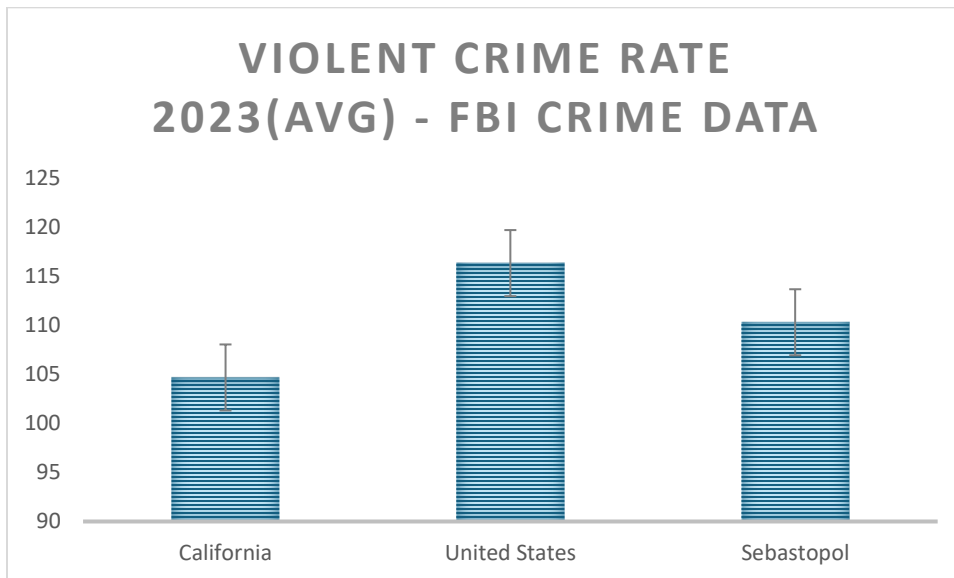
The FBI categorizes Homicide, Robbery, Rape and Aggravated Assault as violent crimes.  Not unexpectedly violent crimes involve weapons and are often linked to other offenses**.  82% of the violent offenses in Sebastopol involved weapons.**

**It is difficult to describe Sebastopol as a sleepy little town without crime when we see Kidnapping, Human Trafficking among the offenses linked to violent crimes**.

## All Violent Offenses Offense Characteristics

Show Percentages: ✓

### Type Of Weapon Involved By Offense

Sort By: **Category**

| | |
|---|---|
| Personal Weapons | 48% |
| None | 18% |
| Other | 15% |
| Knife/Cutting Instrument | 9% |
| Asphyxiation | 3% |

### Offense Linked To Another Offense

Sort By: **Category**

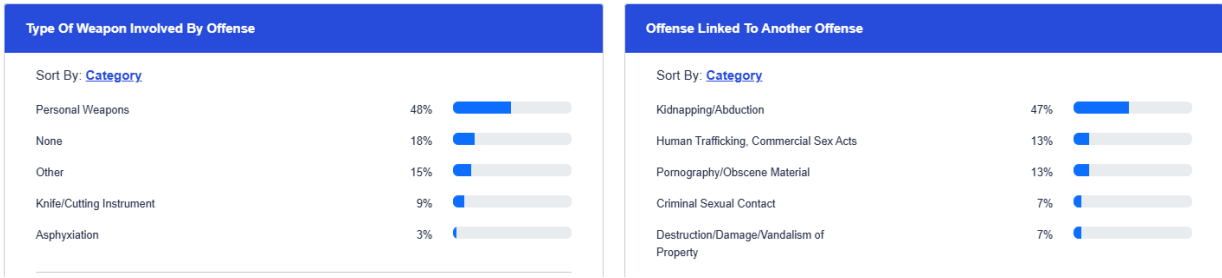| | |
|---|---|
| Kidnapping/Abduction | 47% |
| Human Trafficking, Commercial Sex Acts | 13% |
| Pornography/Obscene Material | 13% |
| Criminal Sexual Contact | 7% |
| Destruction/Damage/Vandalism of Property | 7% |

Age should be a concern for city leaders**.  28% of violent crimes were committed by individuals under the age of 19.  20% of the victims were also young**.

**AGE**          **SEX**          **RACE**          **ETHNICITY**

### Offender Age

Sort By: **Category**

| | |
|---|---|
| 10-19 | 28% |
| 30-39 | 28% |
| 20-29 | 16% |
| 40-49 | 9% |
| 50-59 | 9% |
| Total | 57 |

⊕ DOWNLOAD          SHOW MORE

### Victim Age

Sort By: **Category**

| | |
|---|---|
| 10-19 | 20% |
| 20-29 | 19% |
| 40-49 | 19% |
| 30-39 | 17% |
| 50-59 | 14% |
| Total | 59 |

⊕ DOWNLOAD          SHOW MORE
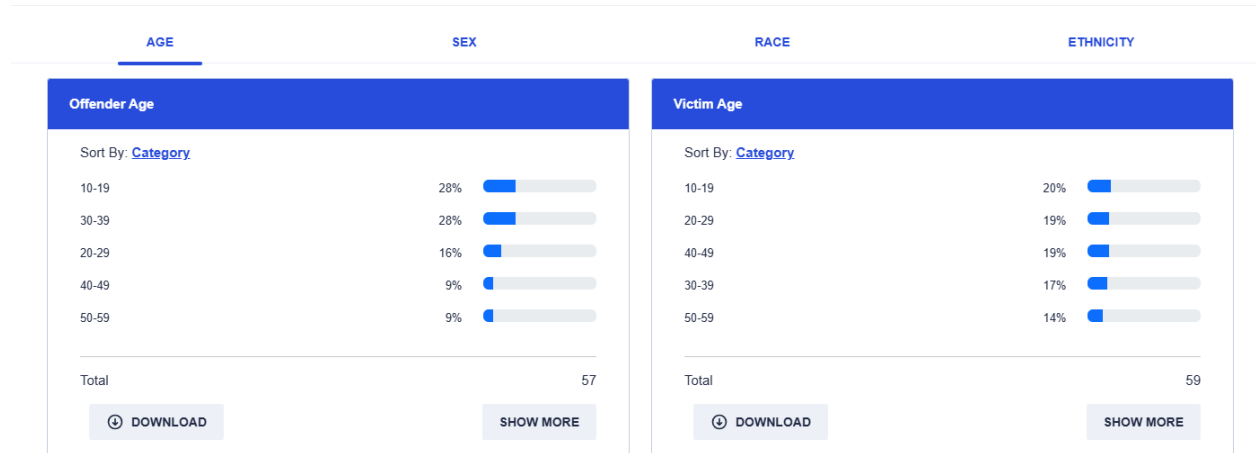
60% of the victims of violent crimes in Sebastopol knew their attacker.   26% of attacks occur in the home.  **City leaders should be concerned that 10% of attacks occur in parks or playgrounds.  26% occur on streets sidewalks and parking lots**.

| Location Type | | | | Victim's Relationship To Offender | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sort By: Category | | | | Sort By: Category | | |
| Residence/Home | 26% | | | Stranger | 41% | |
| Other/Unknown | 15% | | | Acquaintance | 19% | |
| Highway/Road/Alley/Street/Sidewalk | 13% | | | Boyfriend/Girlfriend | 10% | |
| Parking/Drop Lot/Garage | 13% | | | Friend | 7% | |
| Park/Playground | 10% | | | Neighbor | 7% | |
| Bank/Savings and Loan | 5% | | | Spouse | 4% | |
| Grocery/Supermarket | 5% | | | Child | 3% | |
| Bar/Nightclub | 3% | | | Ex-Relationship (Ex-Boyfriend/Girlfriend) | 3% | |
| Commercial/Office Building | 2% | | | Relationship Unknown | 3% | |
| Drug Store/Doctor's Office/Hospital | 2% | | | Sibling | 1% | |
| School-Elementary/Secondary | 2% | | | Babysittee | 0% | |
| School/College | 2% | | | Child of Boyfriend or Girlfriend | 0% | |
| Shelter-Mission/Homeless | 2% | | | Cohabitant (non-intimate relationship) | 0% | |
| Specialty Store | 2% | | | Common-Law Spouse | 0% | |

## CRIMES BY CATEGORIES

As mentioned above the FBI categorizes violent crimes as Homicide, Robbery, Rape and Aggravated Assault.  There were no Homicides in Sebastopol during 2023.
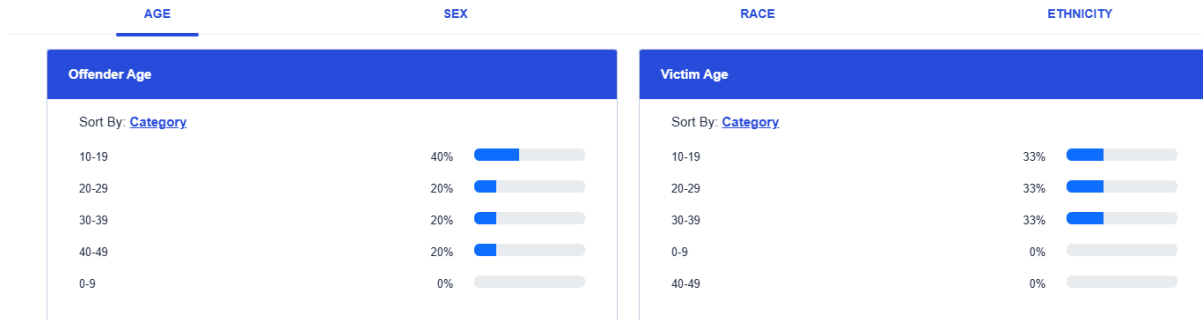
## ROBBERIES

There were six robberies reported from November 2022 to November 2023.
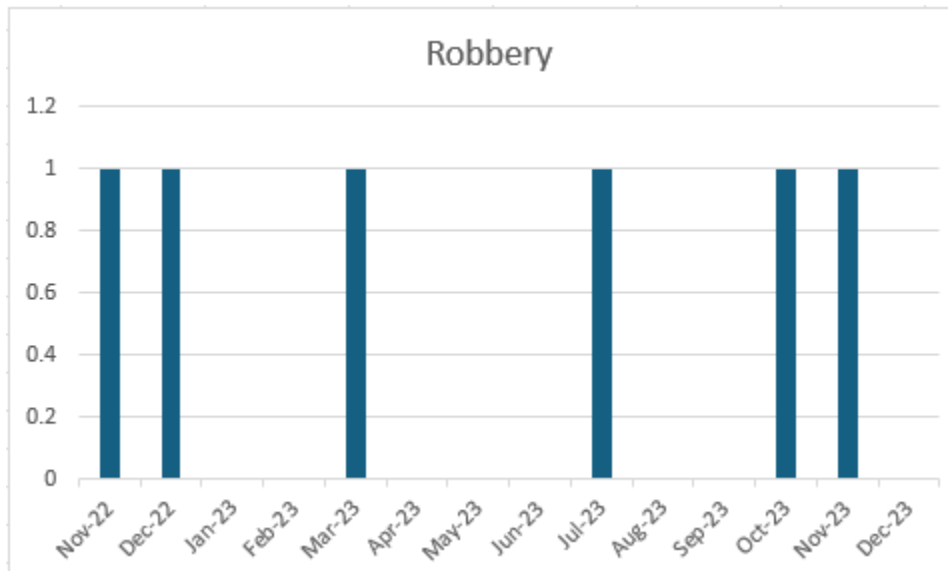
Again, youth involved crimes are significant with 40% of offenders aged 19 or under and 33% of victims.

**Robbery Offender vs. Victim Demographics**    Show Percentages:

| AGE | SEX | RACE | ETHNICITY |
|---|---|---|---|

**Offender Age**

Sort By: Category

| | |
|---|---|
| 10-19 | 40% |
| 20-29 | 20% |
| 30-39 | 20% |
| 40-49 | 20% |
| 0-9 | 0% |

**Victim Age**

Sort By: Category

| | |
|---|---|
| 10-19 | 33% |
| 20-29 | 33% |
| 30-39 | 33% |
| 0-9 | 0% |
| 40-49 | 0% |

60% of the robberies happened in parks/playgrounds or parking lots around the city.  14% on roads and streets.  29% of robberies occurred at a grocery/supermarket.  60% of the victims did not know their attacker.

**Location Type**

Sort By: Category

| | |
|---|---|
| Grocery/Supermarket | 29% |
| Park/Playground | 29% |
| Parking/Drop Lot/Garage | 29% |
| Highway/Road/Alley/Street/Sidewalk | 14% |

**Victim's Relationship To Offender**

Sort By: Category

| | |
|---|---|
| Stranger | 60% |
| Acquaintance | 20% |
| Friend | 20% |
| Babysittee | 0% |

**2/3 of the robberies involved a knife or other weapon.  These were not generally minor offenses where no one would get hurt**.

## Robbery Offense Characteristics

**Type Of Weapon Involved By Offense**

Sort By: Category

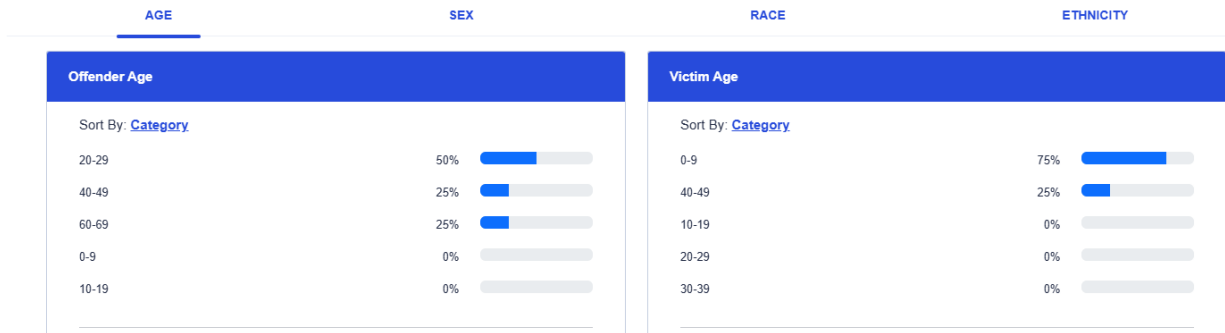| | |
|---|---|
| Knife/Cutting Instrument | 33% |
| None | 33% |
| Other | 17% |
| Personal Weapons | 17% |
| Asphyxiation | 0% |

**RAPES**

The rape statistics for Sebastopol include 4 reported rapes during the reporting period.
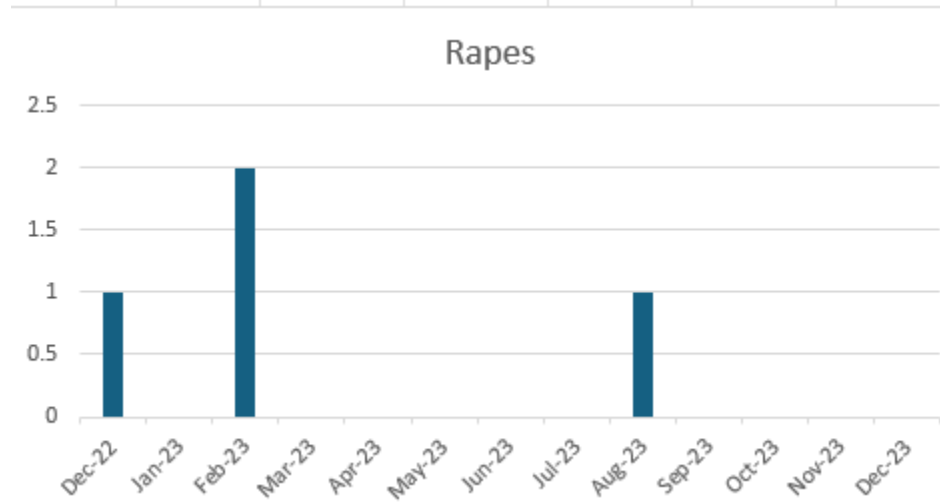


Here the victims' age stands out with 75% of the victims under the age of 10 years old



Most occurred in the home, with one associated with the homeless.   50% of the victims were the child of the offender.
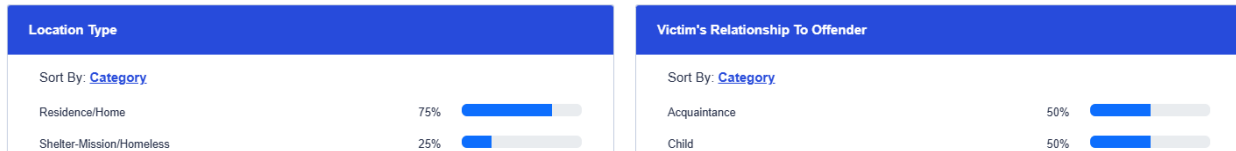
Aggravated assault was the most common serious crime with 20 events reported to the FBI. The FBI defines it as an unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury. There is no data on serious injuries associated with the assaults committed in Sebastopol.
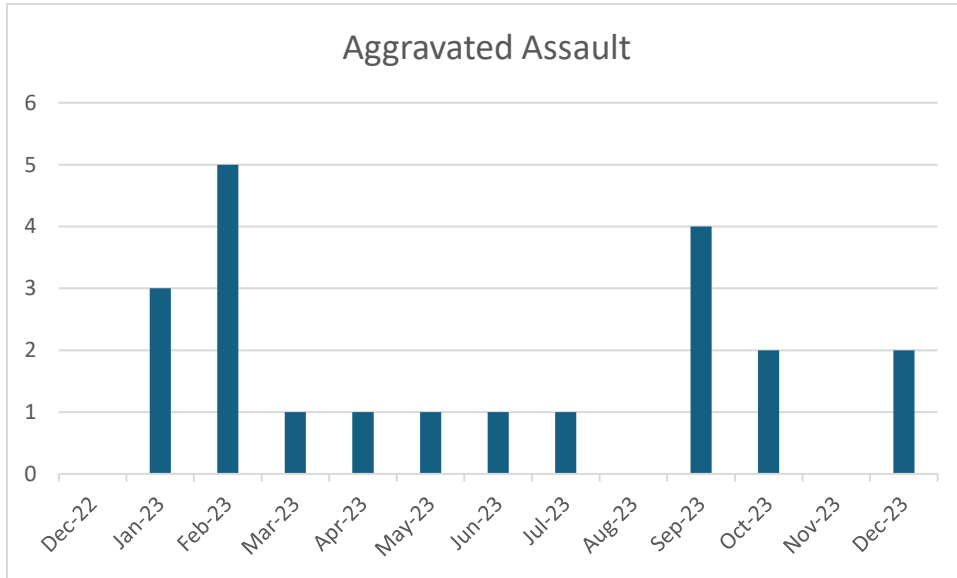


Again, we see a pattern of young people committing a serious crime. 38% of the offenders were 19 years younger -  21% of victims.
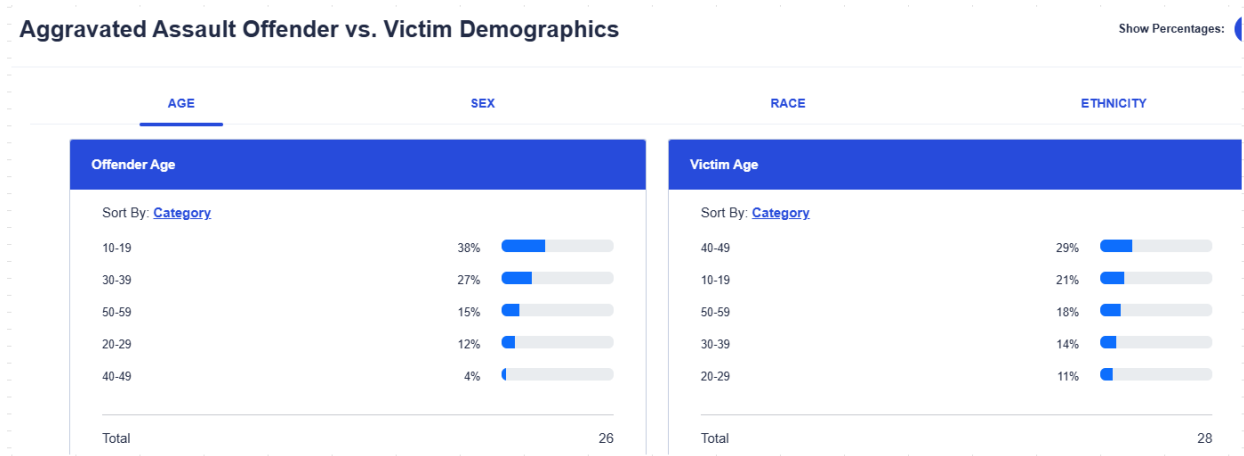
**This is not just friendly fights.  43% of the victims did not know their attacker.  64% occurred outside the home with 18% in a parking lot and 8% in a park or a school.**

## Aggravated Assault Victim Demographics

Show Percentages: ✓

### Location Type

Sort By: **Category**

| | |
|---|---|
| Residence/Home | 36% |
| Other/Unknown | 29% |
| Parking/Drop Lot/Garage | 18% |
| Bar/Nightclub | 7% |
| Highway/Road/Alley/Street/Sidewalk | 4% |
| Park/Playground | 4% |
| School-Elementary/Secondary | 4% |
| Abandoned/Condemned Structure | 0% |
| Air/Bus/Train Terminal | 0% |

### Victim's Relationship To Offender

Sort By: **Category**

| | |
|---|---|
| Stranger | 43% |
| Boyfriend/Girlfriend | 11% |
| Friend | 11% |
| Neighbor | 11% |
| Acquaintance | 8% |
| Ex-Relationship (Ex-Boyfriend/Girlfriend) | 5% |
| Spouse | 5% |
| Relationship Unknown | 3% |
| Sibling | 3% |