

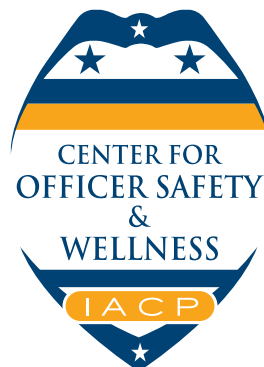


The International Association
of Chiefs of Police

AMBUSH FACT SHEET



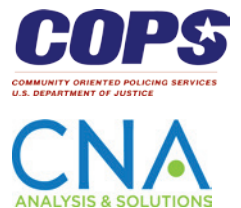
A combined effort of



AMBUSH FACT SHEET



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INTRODUCTION

This report was developed as part of an initiative with CNA, the Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) to build knowledge on the topic of ambush assaults against law enforcement. This oft-neglected topic has garnered increased attention in recent years, as officer safety has come to the forefront of many criminal justice discussions. In 2011, the U.S. Attorney General acknowledged the many initiatives making an impact on officer safety and pledged that more work was needed, including the identification of tactics and protocols to protect officers from ambush-style assaults. In response, CNA, IACP, and COPS have initiated long-overdue foundational research on ambush assaults against law enforcement.

The report presents descriptive findings from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) in the Line of Duty data collection program. Two datasets are used: an incident-level supplemental dataset of serious injurious and fatal assaults against police; and an agency-level dataset that captures all assaults—non-injurious, injurious, and fatal—per agency.

WHAT IS AN AMBUSH?

Generally, four factors have come define an ambush assault:

- Element of surprise
- Concealment of the assailant, their intentions, or weapon
- Suddenness of the attack
- A lack of provocation

Ambushes are classified in two ways:

- Entrapment ambushes are premeditated. This sort of attack is what many police consider to be the “traditional” ambush, where the offender lures an unsuspecting officer into a location to execute an attack.
- Spontaneous ambushes are unprovoked attacks without long-term planning. These types of attacks are often considered “crimes of opportunity.” The assailant makes the decision at the time of the officer’s approach and surprises the officer with an unprovoked assault.

Figure 1 shows that, since 1990, the majority ambushes reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) via incident data have been classified as “spontaneous.”

Ambush Classifications, 1990 - 2012

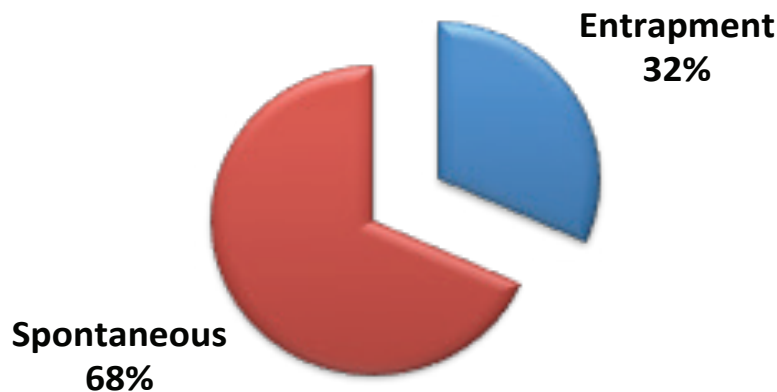


Figure 1

TRENDS INDICATE A GENERAL DECLINE IN AMBUSH INCIDENTS, FATAL AND NONFATAL, SINCE 1990

In 1991, the nation saw a total of 526 ambush attacks against law enforcement, including fatal and nonfatal incidents, which is the highest number in the past 25 years. That number declined precipitously through the 1990s and leveled off through the early and mid-2000s. Since 2000, the average annual number of ambushes is around 215. There was a recent uptick in incidents from 2008 through 2010, and more recently in 2012. Figure 2 shows the trend in ambushes from 1990 through 2012. The solid red bars represent the total number of ambushes per year, while the shaded red area illustrates the general trend.

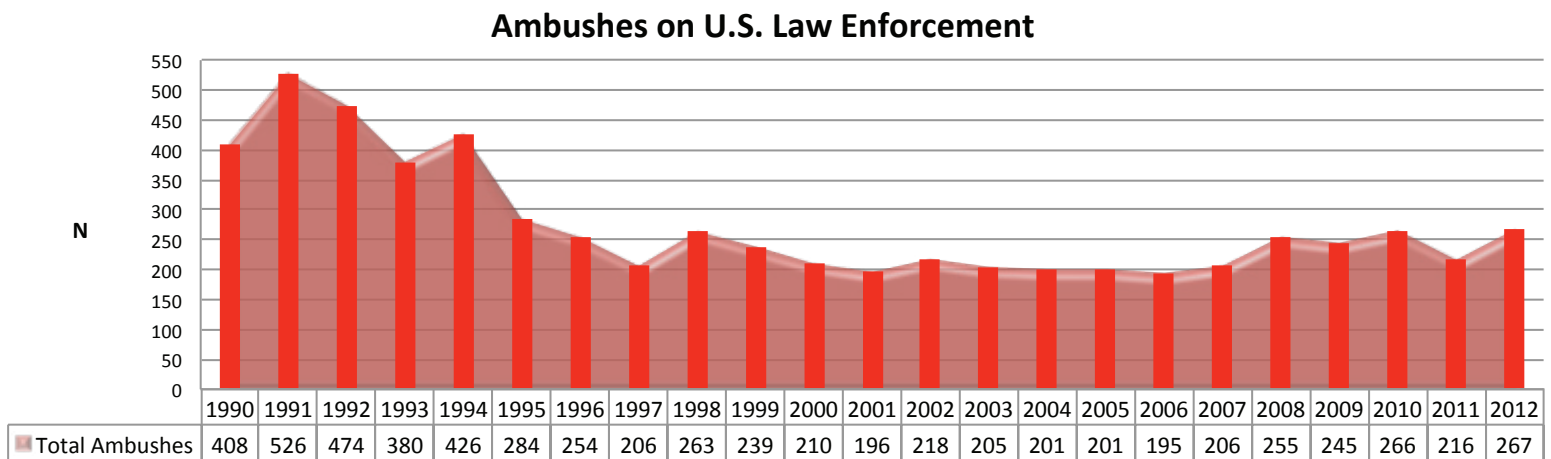


Figure 2

OFFICERS MURDERED IN THE LINE OF DUTY ARE INCREASINGLY LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN AMBUSHED

Since 1990, 1,219 law enforcement officers have been murdered. Annual figures vary considerably, whereas the annual average is about 55. From 2008 to 2011, the number of officers murdered increased from its lowest figure in two decades (40) to the second highest in that time period (68), representing a 70 percent increase. In 2012, murders of the police declined considerably.

An increasing proportion of police murders have been classified as ambushes. Between 1990 and 2000, police murders that were attributable to ambush assaults was about 12 percent; from 2001 to 2012, that figure was 21 percent.

Figure 3 shows the total number of felonious deaths, along with the number of those that are from ambush attacks, from 1990 through 2012. The shaded areas illustrate the general trends, while totals are presented at the bottom of the graph.

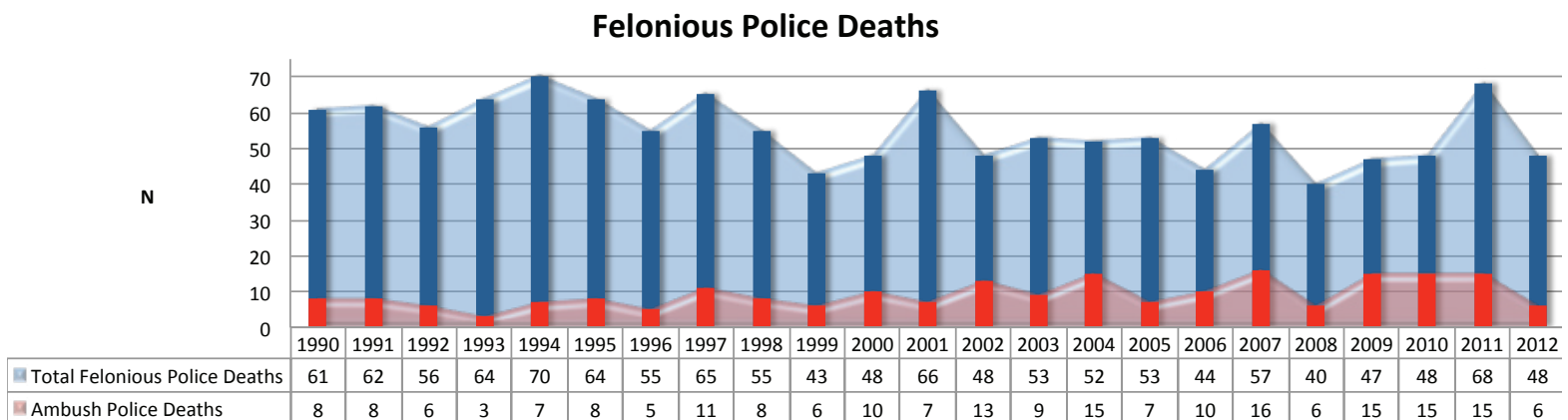


Figure 3

THE AGENCIES

Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the geographic dispersion of ambush assaults, fatal and nonfatal, since 1990. Figure 4 shows that the Pacific, South Atlantic, and Middle Atlantic Regions of the United States have had the greatest number of ambush assaults, with over 750 each. New England has had the fewest— less than 250— in this time period.

Figure 5 normalizes the number of ambushes by the number of agencies in the regions. When accounting for the total number of agencies, we see that the trends change little. The Pacific Region has the greatest average annual number of ambushes per 1,000 agencies, with over 15. New England remains as the least prevalent location for ambushes, with fewer than 6 per 1,000 agencies per year.

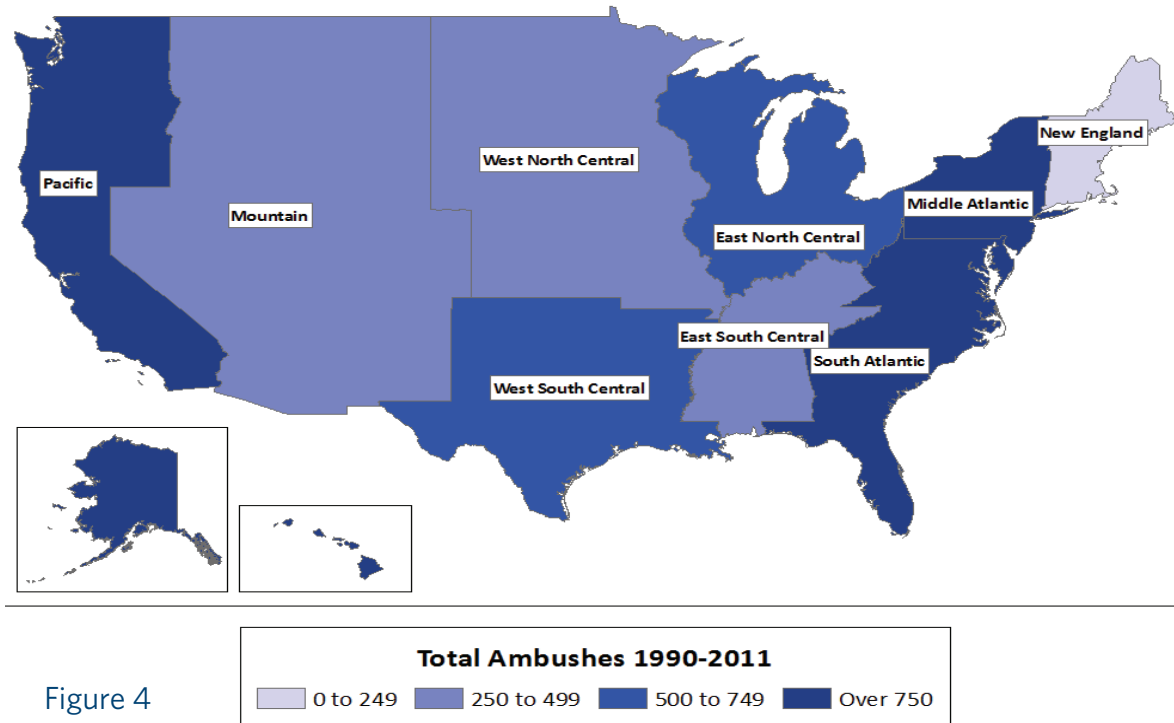


Figure 4

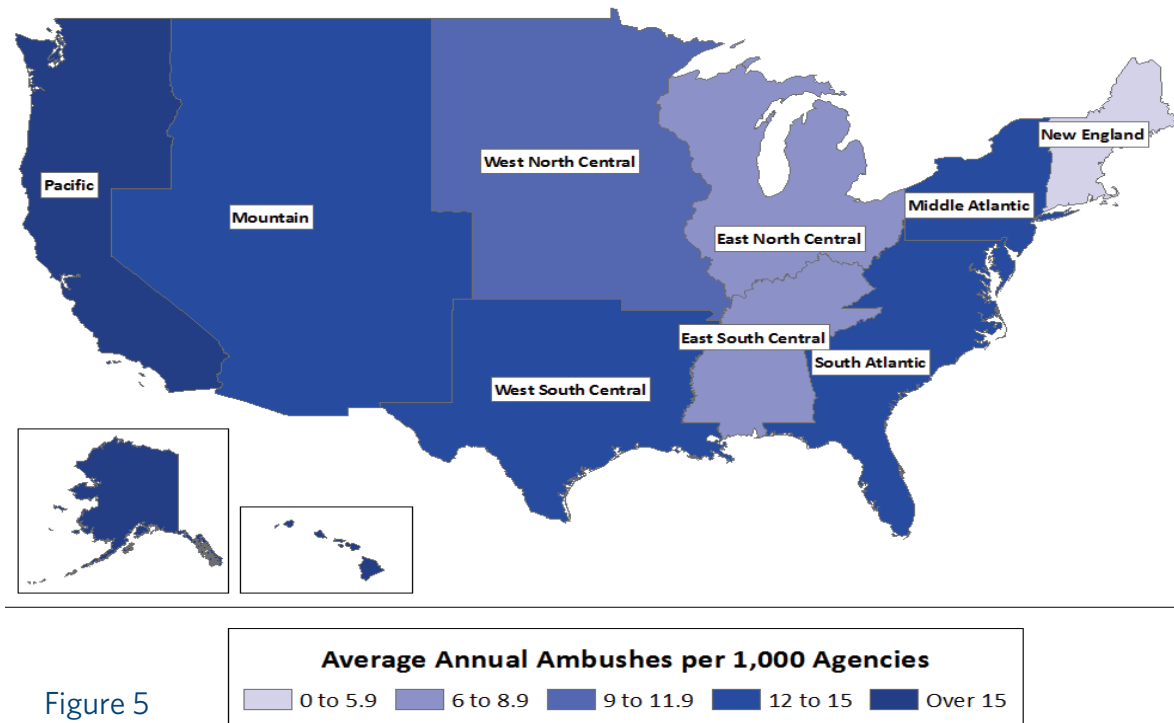


Figure 5

THE OFFICERS

The profile of an ambushed officer is a 38-year-old male with 11 years on the job and an average build. Because of the diversity of law enforcement agencies and command structures in the United States, their ranks range widely. Yet from what is reported, we know that these officers are most likely to be patrol officers (38%), deputy sheriffs (17%), or sergeants (15%). The vast majority (82%) of officers are alone at the time of the ambush. More than half (55%) were assigned to one-officer patrol vehicles at the time of the assault. About 12 percent were on foot patrol, and 10 percent were in two-officer vehicles. The rest were detectives, undercover, on special assignment, or off-duty.

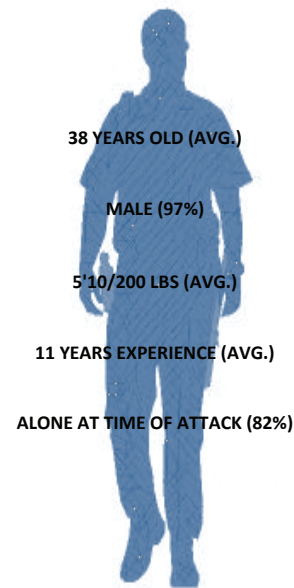


Figure 6

THE ASSAILANTS

The assailants in ambush incidents are 30-years-old, on average. Three-quarters of the assailants have a criminal record. A sizable minority (40%) have a violent criminal record. More than a quarter are under judicial supervision at the time of the assault. Close to one in four have some sort of prior relationship with the officer in the incident, including personal interactions and previous arrests. The vast majority (83%) of assailants acted alone. Nine percent of the time, there are two assailants. In 8 percent of ambush incidents, there are 3 or more assailants.

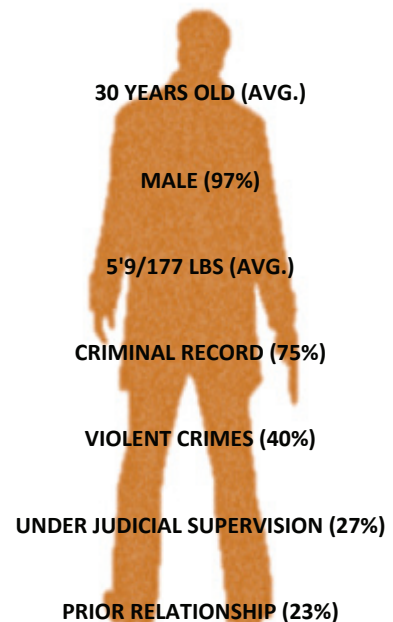


Figure 7

WEAPONS

Figure 8 illustrates the makeup of weapons assailants have used in ambush assaults. Overall, firearms have been the weapon most commonly used by assailants in ambush attacks. However, a significant proportion of assailants use only their hands as weapons. Knives and other sharp objects are the least frequently used weapon. Interestingly, a substantial proportion of ambush assaults are carried out using “other” deadly weapons, which include anything from a blunt object to a motor vehicle. Figure 9 shows that, over time, the proportion of ambushes in which hands were the assailant’s weapon has increased, whereas the proportion of firearms as weapons has generally decreased. In 2012, hands and firearms were used almost equally to carry out ambush assaults.

Weapons Used in Ambushes

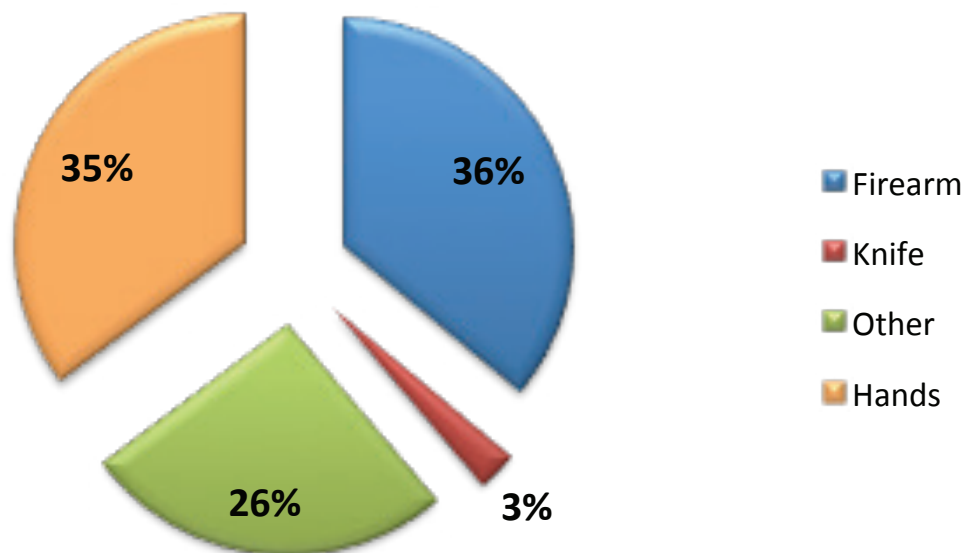


Figure 8

Weapons Used in Ambushes - Firearms and Hands

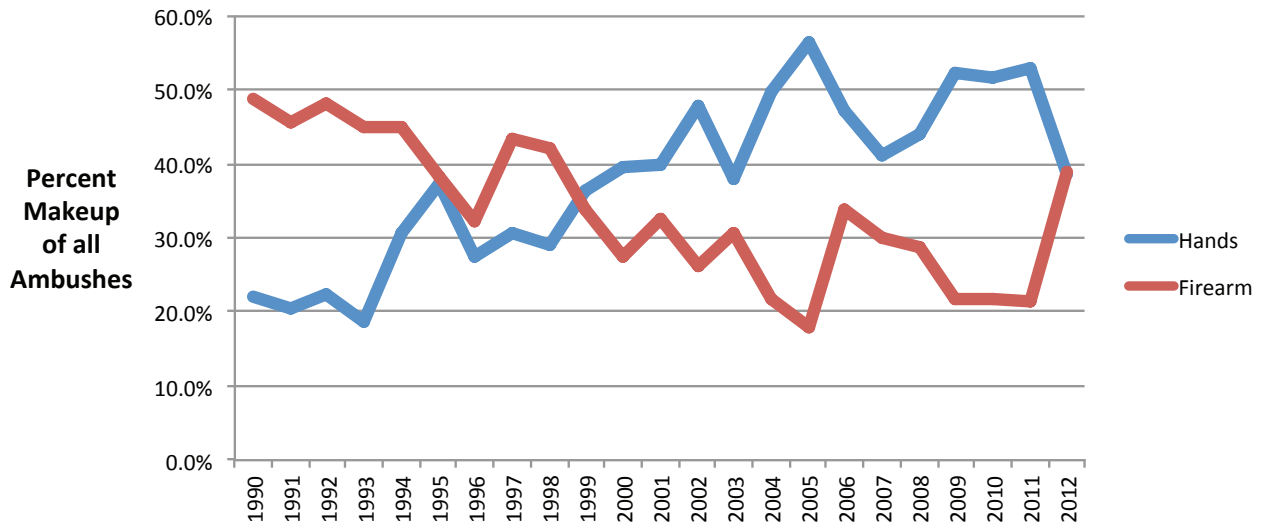


Figure 9

The most common firearm used in an ambush was a handgun, followed by a rifle, then a shotgun, as shown in Figure 10.

Firearms Used in Ambushes

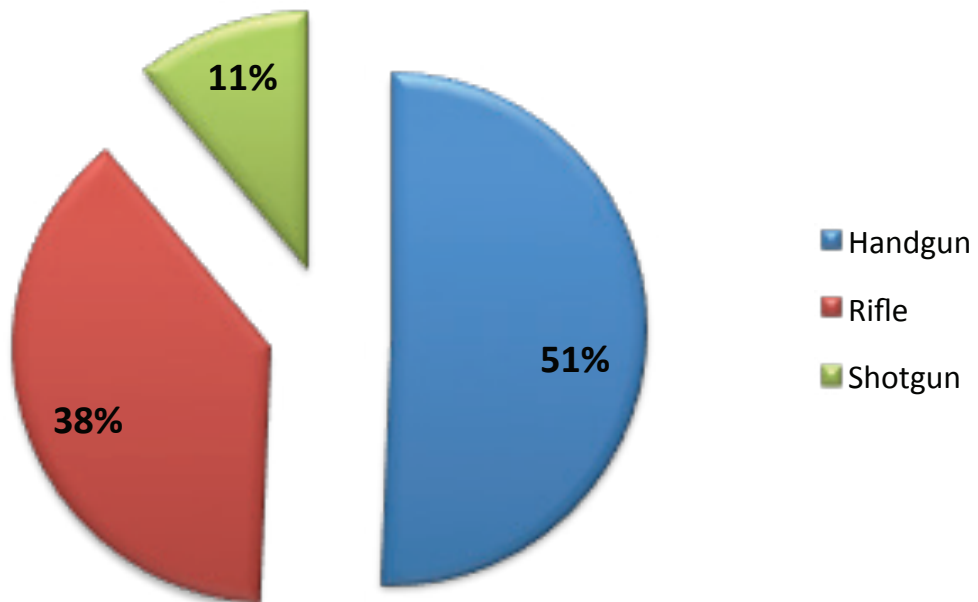


Figure 10

AMBUSH SURVIVABILITY

Figure 11 compares the survival rates for entrapment ambushes and spontaneous ambushes. Entrapment ambushes have been more fatal. Of the officers involved in an entrapment ambush, 41 percent survived, compared to 49 percent in spontaneous attacks. The overall survival rate for ambush assaults is about 46 percent.

Ambush Survival Rate by Type of Attack

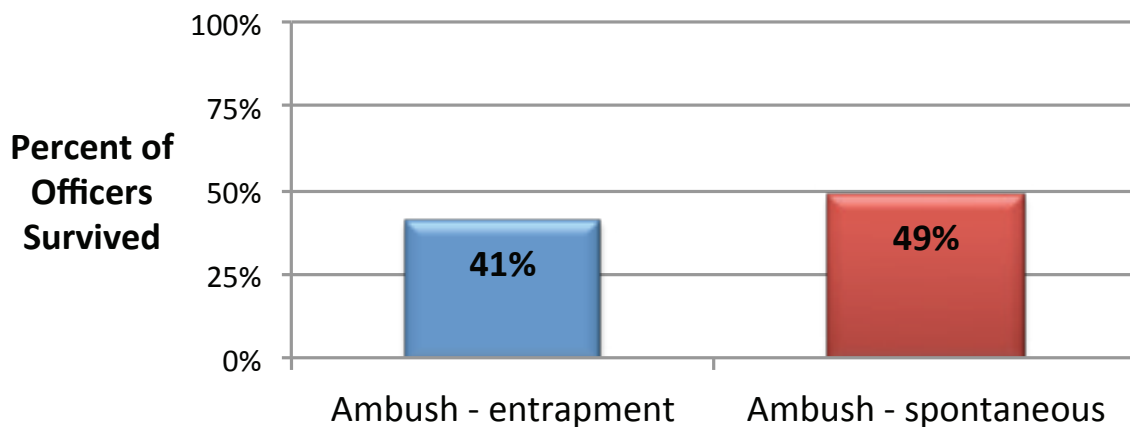


Figure 11

The table below compares the survival rates for ambushed officers, broken down by different factors that may improve survivability. The differences are stark: Officers who were wearing protective body armor survived 53 percent of the time, compared to 30 percent who were not. Officers who took cover and officers who returned fire were also much more likely to survive than those who did not.

Dynamic Incident Characteristics	Survival Rate	
	With	Without
Wearing Body Armor	53%	30%
Taking Cover	68%	39%
Returning Fire	68%	39%

CLEARANCE RATES

Clearance rates for both assaults and ambushes have increased over time; however, ambush clearance rates remain considerably lower than assault clearance rates. In 1990, ambushes were cleared in just 49 percent of cases; this increased to 83 percent by 2011.

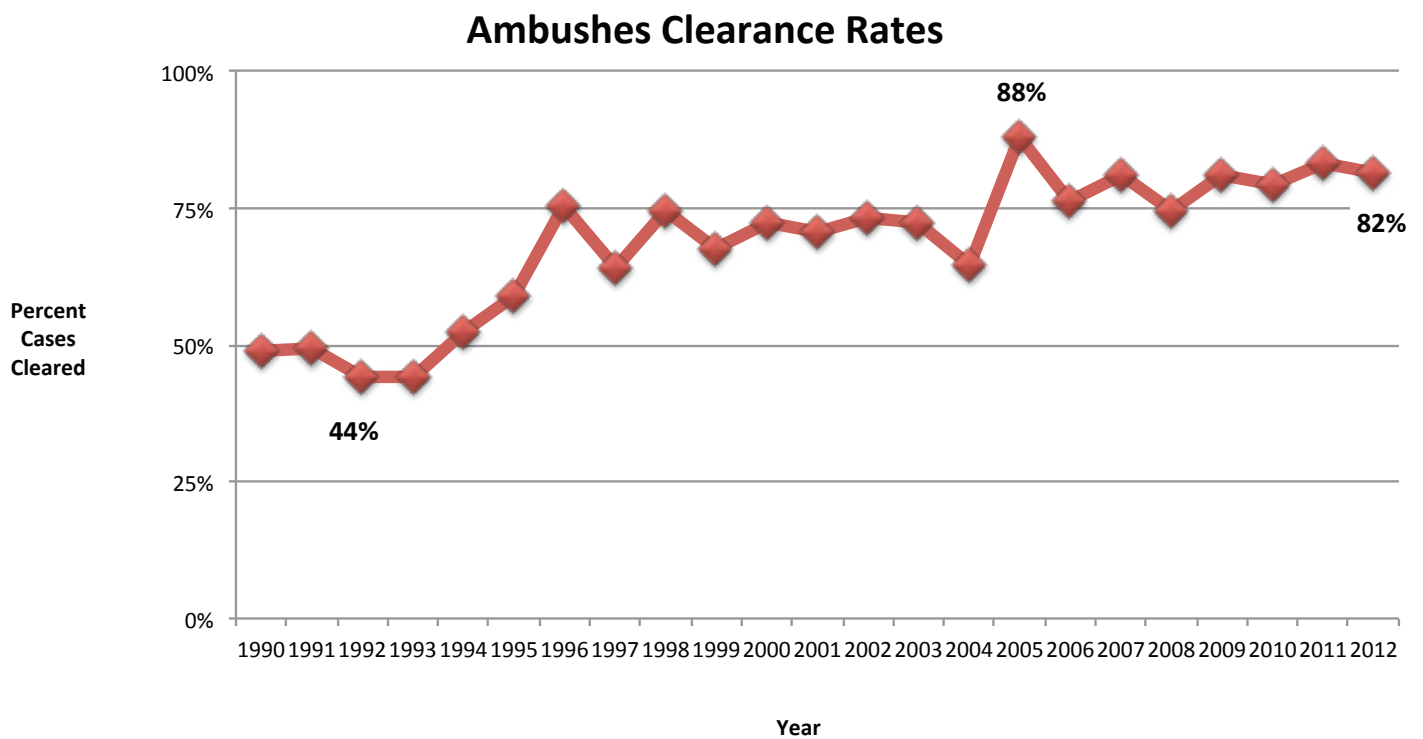


Figure 12

