



# The Use of Gun Enhancements in California Before and After Senate Bill 620

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If a person is convicted of a felony offense that involves a gun, they may also have a gun enhancement added, which adds additional years to their sentence. The California Penal Code includes 18 separate gun enhancements. Until 2018, judges were legally required to apply the most common of these enhancements (including those with the longest sentences) if charged. However, Senate Bill 620 (SB 620), which went into effect in 2018, gives judges discretion in whether to apply several enhancements that were previously mandatory. This policy brief describes how gun enhancements have been used in California before and after that policy change.

## Key Findings

- **After SB 620, there were shifts in the application of gun enhancements, which resulted in shorter average sentence lengths.** For individuals with at least one gun enhancement affected by SB 620, the average sentence length was 28 years — roughly two years shorter than the 30-year average before SB 620. For sentences affected by SB 620, the average enhancement time was shortened by 1.7 years compared to unaffected sentences.
- **There was a temporary decrease in the use of SB 620-modified gun enhancements which coincided with the pandemic.** There was also a decrease in the share of individuals admitted to prison with any gun enhancement, from 5.3% in 2019 to 4.3% in 2020, but this rebounded to 5.4% by 2025.
- **Admissions with gun enhancements decreased by 24% since 2014.** This trend largely mirrors the broader 30% decline in prison admissions during the same period.
- **Racial disparities in enhancement length declined over the last decade.** While Black individuals still constitute a larger share of people with gun enhancements relative to their representation in the prison population, the gap in enhancement lengths for Hispanic and Black individuals relative to White individuals has substantially declined.
- **Transition-aged youth now comprise a smaller share of those receiving any gun enhancement.** By 2025, young adults (aged 18–25) made up a smaller share of individuals with both SB 620-affected and unaffected gun enhancements compared to 2014.

## Policy Context

In California, gun enhancements add additional years to an individual's sentence when the underlying felony offense involves a firearm. There are currently 18 gun enhancements in California law. Most gun enhancements make an offense serious or violent, which among other things means any non-probation sentence must be served in state prison and not county jail. These enhancements can also significantly increase the length of prison sentences.

The circumstances under which the firearm is used determines the amount of time that an enhancement can add to a sentence. For example, in 1998, California enacted legislation creating the 10–20–life sentence enhancement. This enhancement increases a sentence for a specified felony — including robbery, several sex offenses, and murder — by 10 years when an individual commits the offense while using a gun, 20 years for firing the gun, and 25 years to life for seriously injuring or killing a victim with a gun.

Prosecutors decide what offenses and enhancements are charged in each case. Until 2018, for 5 of the 18 possible gun enhancements, the court was required to enhance a person's sentence if the prosecutor proved that the person used a gun during the commission of certain felonies.<sup>1</sup> However, starting on January 1, 2018, SB 620 granted judicial discretion in the application of these 5 previously mandatory firearm enhancements — which collectively account for the majority (90%) of firearm enhancements attached to prison sentences since 2014 (Table 1). This judicial discretion allows judges to choose shorter sentence enhancements or to remove the firearm enhancements altogether. The 5 enhancements affected by SB 620 are in Penal Code sections 12022.5 (use of a firearm and use of assault weapon/machine gun) and 12022.53 (use of a firearm, discharge of weapon, and great bodily injury or death resulting from firearm use).<sup>2</sup>

All 13 gun enhancements unaffected by SB 620 already allowed judicial discretion to remove the enhancement. These statutes include those where an individual is armed with a firearm or assault weapon, when a firearm is used during a carjacking, or use of a firearm during a specified sex offense.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent reforms like SB 81 (2021) established a presumption for dismissal of enhancements when specified mitigating factors are present.<sup>4</sup>

There are two ways an enhancement charge can affect a sentence. In the most straightforward application, a person is convicted and has their sentence lengthened by the enhancement. After SB 620, judges are also able to substitute certain gun enhancements with one that adds less time.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, the enhancement can be dropped or modified as part of a plea deal. The discretion given to judges by SB 620 could also affect the plea bargaining process because it expands the arguments that a defendant could make at a sentencing hearing after a trial. By anticipating that a judge might use a less severe gun enhancement after a trial conviction, a defendant (or their attorney) could bargain with a prosecutor for a less severe enhancement in the offered plea. This is supported by research on plea bargains, which shows that if prosecutors expect a shorter sentence obtained through a trial conviction, then they will typically offer a shorter sentence in their plea bargain.<sup>6</sup>

In December 2025, around a third of all the individuals in prison in California had a gun enhancement on their sentence (24,859 people). Of those, 22,299 individuals (90%) were convicted of an enhancement that was made discretionary in January 2018 by SB 620.

This policy brief describes patterns in the application of gun enhancements among people sentenced to prison in California from 2014 to 2025, looking specifically at trends before and after SB 620 took effect in 2018. We compare firearm enhancements that were affected by the reform to those that remain unchanged.<sup>7</sup>

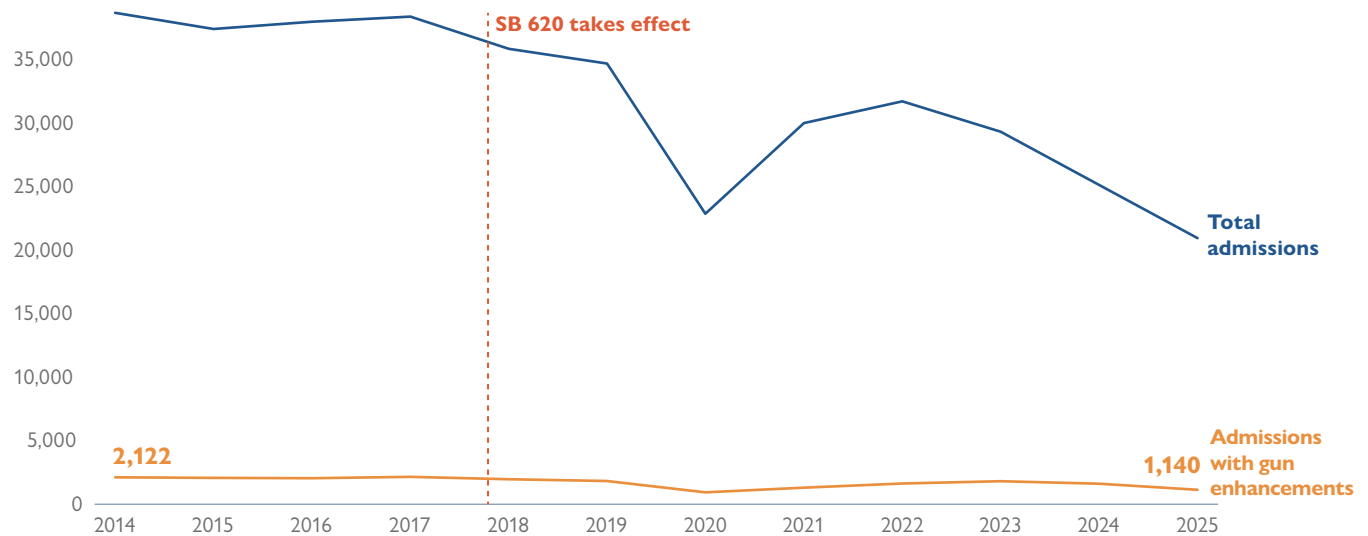
## Trends in Enhancement Use and Sentence Length

**The number of admissions with gun enhancements declined by 24% in the decade following 2014.**

This decline mirrored a 30% decrease in the total number of prison admissions (Figure 1). Admissions as a whole, and

admissions with gun enhancements, decreased during the pandemic and then rebounded slightly by 2022.

FIGURE 1. Admissions with gun enhancements, conviction years 2014–2025



Note: Because enhancements are applied at sentencing, “admissions” and “admission year” throughout this report refer to the year that individuals were convicted. If someone was convicted in 2018 but admitted in 2019, that individual would be included in the 2018 count. This is a different measurement than typical “admission year” counts produced by CDCR and CPL, and should not be compared directly to such counts. Additionally, not all convictions for 2025 have yet appeared in CDCR data due to the typical delay between conviction and admission to prison; totals for these recent years are therefore not complete counts of the convictions for those years. For this reason, calculations of changes in absolute numbers of admissions from 2014–present use 2024 instead of 2025.

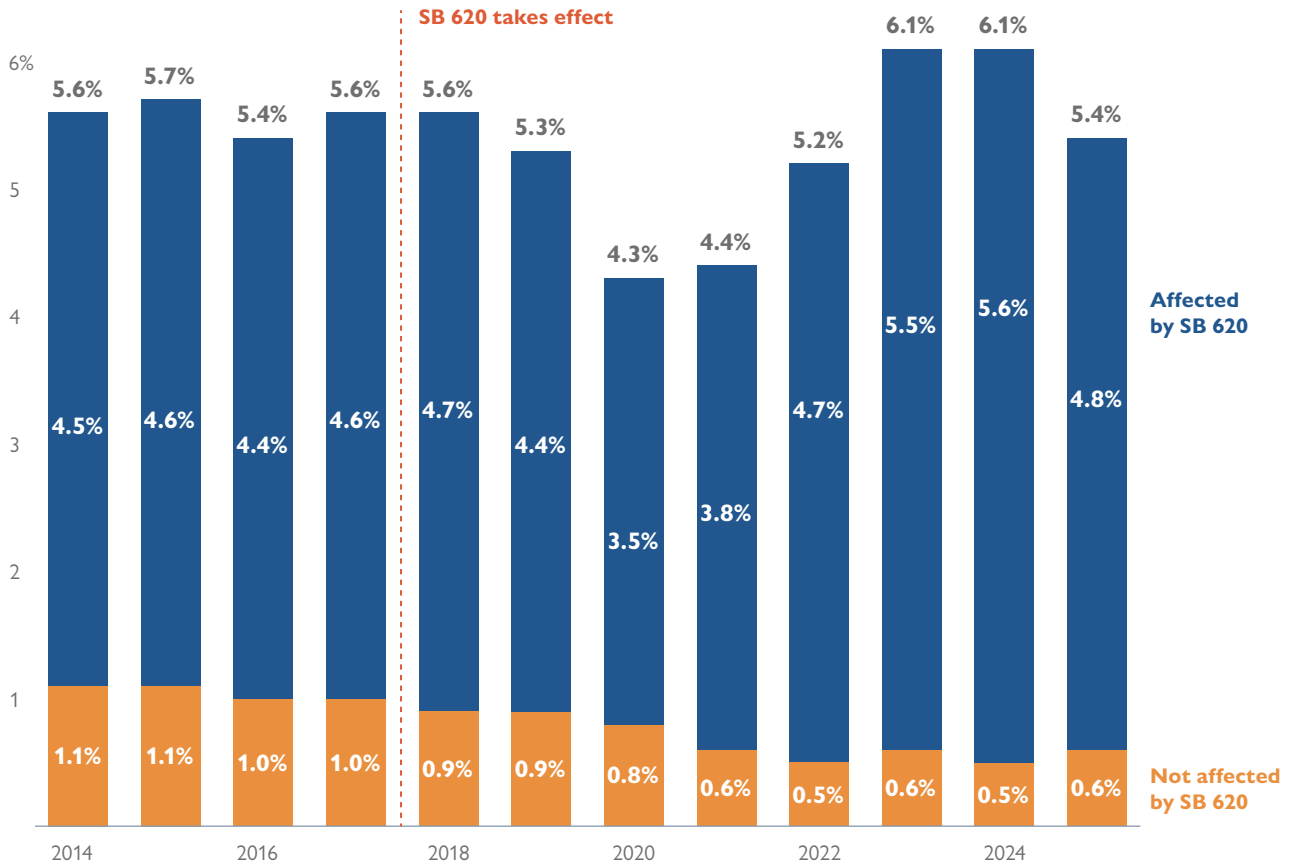
Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

**The temporary decrease in the application of gun enhancements modified by SB 620 coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The share of individuals entering prison with any gun enhancement decreased at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, from 5.3% in 2019 to 4.3% in 2020 (Figure 2). However, since 2022, the share has increased, surpassing pre-pandemic rates in 2023. In 2014, 4.5% of individuals entering

prison had a gun enhancement that would later be affected by SB 620, and in 2025 that number had increased to 4.8% of individuals. The share of individuals entering prison with a gun enhancement that was not affected by SB 620 was 1.1% in 2014 and declined to 0.6% in 2025.

FIGURE 2. Percent of individuals admitted to prison in California with a gun enhancement by conviction year, 2014–2025



Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

**The use of gun enhancements started declining before SB 620 went into effect in 2018, and continued to decrease even more rapidly around the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Table 1).**

The one exception to this trend is a 23% increase over the past decade in the “use of a firearm” enhancement (§ 12022.5(a)), which is also the most frequently applied enhancement.

The application of enhancements that add the most years to a sentence, such as discharge of a weapon during a specified felony (12022.53(c), which adds 20 years) and great bodily injury or death from use of a firearm during a specified felony

(12022.53(d), which adds an indeterminate life sentence), has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.<sup>8</sup> Gun enhancements that are used less frequently were grouped together in the ‘other’ category.

TABLE 1: Number of prison admissions in California with gun enhancements, conviction years 2014–2025

ENHANCEMENT	DESCRIPTION	ENHANCEMENT LENGTH	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025*	INCARCERATED IN DEC. 2025
<b>Unaffected by SB 620</b>															
12022(a)	Armed with a firearm	1 year	249	210	227	231	167	185	119	117	106	120	87	71	1,442
12022.3(a)	Use of a firearm or deadly weapon during specified sex offenses	3, 4, 10 years	7	13	6	12	7	8	9	<5	7	12	5	6	442
Other	(See Note)		154	162	156	151	127	127	43	58	57	55	42	49	450
Subtotal			413	391	399	397	311	323	173	180	172	190	139	125	2,560
<b>Affected by SB 620</b>															
12022.53(b)	Use of a firearm	10 years	411	441	441	394	388	309	162	185	207	207	158	129	4,976
12022.53(c)	Discharge of a weapon	20 years	111	123	126	132	101	98	35	47	72	89	64	54	2,530
12022.53(d)	Great bodily injury or death from use of a firearm	Life	341	301	253	254	296	271	86	141	195	236	217	144	6,977
12022.5(a)	Use of a firearm	3 years	354	347	354	406	371	308	214	303	383	419	389	271	4,233
12022.5(a)	Use of a firearm	4 years	266	277	295	329	270	298	159	271	359	378	366	234	3,885
12022.5(a)	Use of a firearm	10 years	224	199	185	242	225	216	111	179	235	285	283	176	3,471
12022.5(b)	Use of an assault weapon	5, 6, 10 years	5	5	8	8	18	11	<5	6	14	14	8	6	149
Subtotal			1,540	1,535	1,482	1,592	1,503	1,388	705	1,042	1,361	1,478	1,349	925	22,299
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,953</b>	<b>1,926</b>	<b>1,881</b>	<b>1,989</b>	<b>1,814</b>	<b>1,711</b>	<b>878</b>	<b>1,222</b>	<b>1,533</b>	<b>1,668</b>	<b>1,488</b>	<b>1050*</b>	<b>24,859</b>
<b>Other</b>															
12022(b)	Use of a deadly weapon	1, 2, 3 years	570	659	687	700	627	621	304	380	451	406	414	304	5,170

Note: "Other" includes PC § 12022(c), PC § 12022.2(a), PC § 12022.4(a), PC § 12022(a)(2), PC § 12022(d), PC § 12022.3(b), PC § 12022.55, PC § 12021(a), and PC § 12021(b). Use of a deadly weapon, PC § 12022(b), is included in Table 1 for reference as it is a related enhancement for weapons use, but is not included in totals used elsewhere in this report. Currently incarcerated is representative of the individuals incarcerated as of December 2025. To avoid double-counting, rows will not add to subtotals (a small number of individuals receive multiple enhancements).

\*As noted in Figure 1, the 2025 counts are likely undercounts as some people convicted in 2025 had not yet been admitted to CDCR by January 2026.

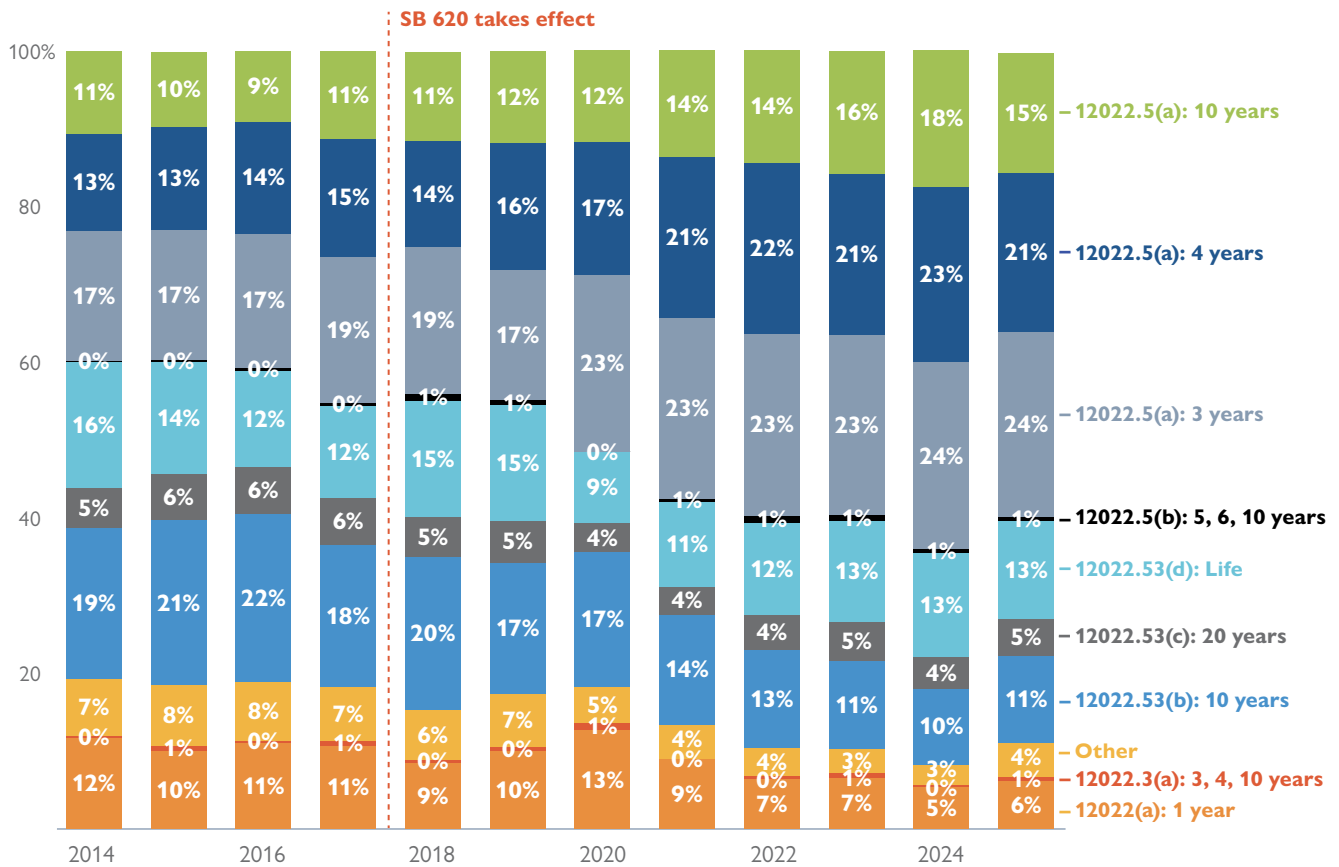
Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

**Shorter enhancements affected by SB 620 increased as a share of all enhancements from 2014–2025.**

During this period, these shorter gun enhancements increasingly replaced the declining use of the longest sentence enhancements affected by SB 620. The gun enhancements affected by SB 620 carry sentences ranging from 3 years to 10 years, 20 years, or even life. During the past decade, 12022.5(a) enhancements, which carry either a 3, 4, or 10-year sentence (the shortest of the enhancements affected by SB 620), increased as a share of all gun enhancements from 41% to 60% (Figure 3). This increase was driven by the share of 3 or 4-year enhancements, which comprised 30% of all gun enhancements in 2014 and 45% in 2025. In contrast, 12022.53(b), which adds 10 years, decreased from a share of 19% to 11% over the past decade. The use of 12022.53(d) enhancements, which carry a life sentence, also decreased from 16% to 13% as a share of all gun enhancements from 2014 to 2025.

Over this period, 12022.53 enhancements — typically applied to robbery, kidnapping, manslaughter, and murder cases — were used less frequently in cases involving these offenses. In other words, the decline in these gun enhancements was not driven by a decline in robbery, kidnapping, manslaughter, and murder convictions relative to other offense types in prison admissions, but instead by less use of these gun enhancements for these types of cases. In all of these offense groups except kidnapping, the use of 12022.5(a) enhancements (3, 4, and 10 years) increased while the rate of 12022.53 enhancements (10 years, 20 years, and life) decreased, representing a substitution from longer enhancements to shorter enhancements. The use of enhancements not affected by SB 620 was generally stable during this time, except for the 1-year 12022(a), which decreased from 12% to 6%.

FIGURE 3. Composition of gun enhancements used each year in California by SB 620 status, conviction years 2014–2025



Notes: The three enhancements not affected by SB 620 (Other, 12022.3(a), and 12022(a)) are shown at the bottom of this figure in shades of orange. All remaining enhancements shown were affected by SB 620.

Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

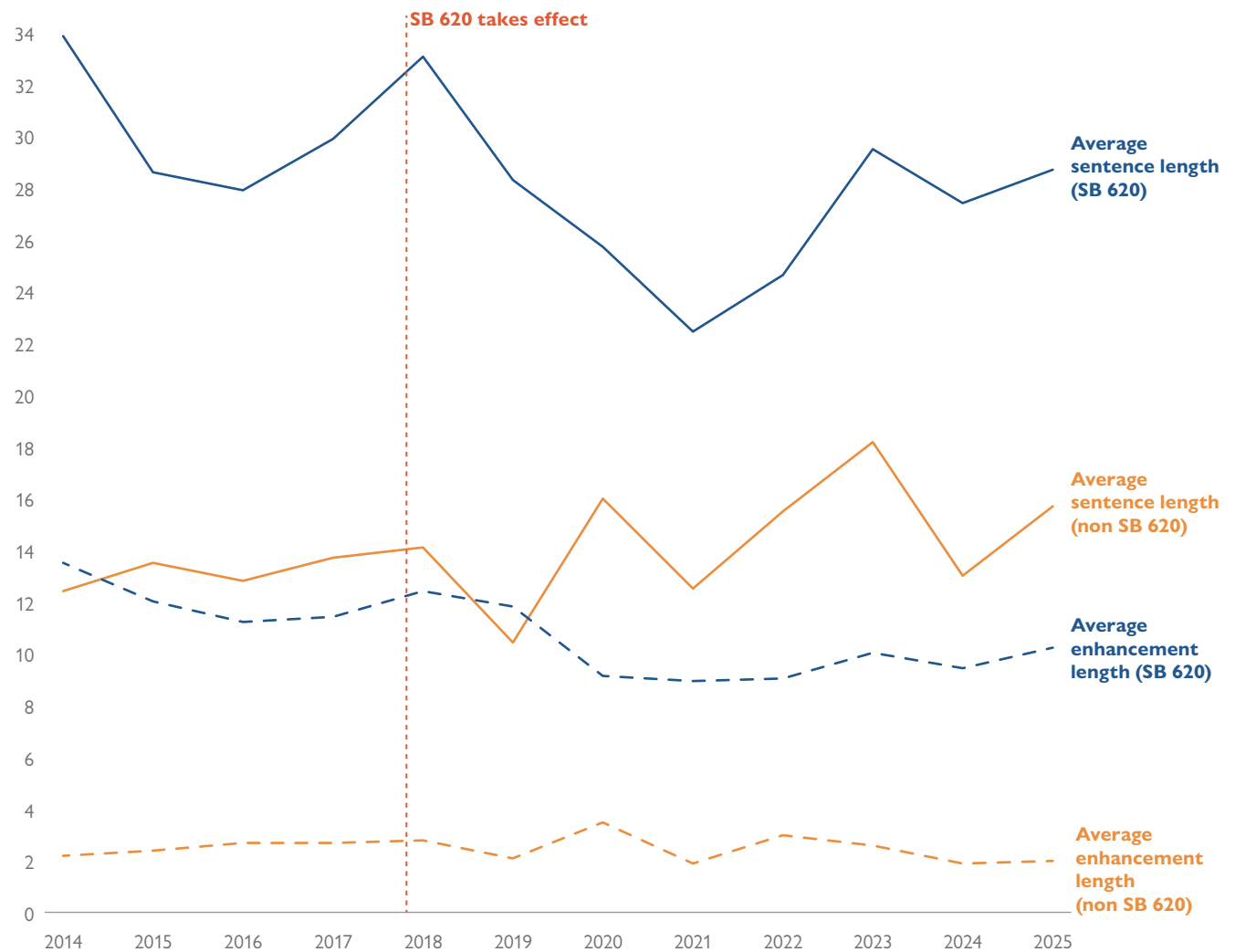
**The average sentence length for individuals with at least one gun enhancement affected by SB 620 decreased after 2018.**

Figure 4 shows that the average sentence length for a person with a gun enhancement affected by SB 620 (solid blue line) was 2.3 years shorter after SB 620 went into effect (28 years on average from 2018–2025) as compared to the years before SB 620 (30.3 years on average from 2014–2017). This decrease is due to the shift towards shorter gun enhancements illustrated in Figure 3, over the same period. The average time added to a sentence by gun enhancements affected by SB 620 decreased by 1.7 years, from a pre-period average of 12.1 to a post-period average of 10.3 years (dotted blue line). The scale of the reduction in

average sentence time for SB 620 enhancements is equivalent to 17,552 fewer years in prison from 2018–2025.<sup>9</sup>

Some of this decrease coincided with the onset of COVID in 2020, which makes it more difficult to directly attribute this decrease solely to SB 620. For instance, the length of the average prison sentence (not just sentences with gun enhancements) also decreased during the pandemic, suggesting that the criminal justice system may have been responding to pandemic-induced strains by handing down shorter sentences.

**FIGURE 4. Average sentence length and gun enhancement time added (in years) for individuals admitted to prison in California with a gun enhancement by SB 620 status, conviction years 2014–2025**



Notes: See [Technical Note](#) in the Appendix for further detail on the methodology for generating enhancement lengths.

Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

## Most Common Controlling Offenses with Gun Enhancements

The most common offenses that also had gun enhancements added from 2014–2025 are robbery in the 2nd degree, attempted murder in the 2nd degree, assault with a firearm, and voluntary manslaughter.

Half of all gun enhancements were added to sentences for one of these four offenses. Table 2 illustrates the five most common offenses associated with each statutory category of gun enhancement among the CDCR admissions population. Gun enhancements fell as a share of all admissions in most

cases, with the exception of 12022.5(a) enhancements, reflecting the trend observed in Figure 3. For context, the vast majority (85%) of admissions with a gun enhancement from 2014 to 2025 only had a single gun enhancement on their sentence.

TABLE 2. Top offenses that receive gun enhancements in California, 2014–2025

ENHANCEMENT	ENHANCEMENT STATUTE	OFFENSE	OFFENSE STATUTE	# OF ADMISSIONS WITH ENHANCEMENT, 2014–17	% OF ADMISSIONS WITH ENHANCEMENT, 2014–17	# OF ADMISSIONS WITH ENHANCEMENT, 2018–25	% OF CONVICTIONS RECEIVING ENHANCEMENT, 2018–25
<b>Affected by SB 620</b>							
Use of Firearm	12022.53(b)	Robbery 2nd	PC212.5(C)	902	41	732	32
		Attempted Murder 2nd	PC187 2ND(664)	182	16	334	17
		Carjacking	PC215	157	39	159	33
		Robbery 1st	PC212.5(A)	113	43	114	36
		Robbery 1st in Concert/ Inhabited Dwelling	PC213(A)	80	41	41	24
Discharge Firearm	12022.53(c)	Attempted Murder 2nd	PC187 2ND(664)	212	20	209	11
		Attempted Murder 1st	PC187(664)	118	22	166	27
		Robbery 2nd	PC212.5(C)	42	2	41	2
		Murder 1st	PC187	22	2	41	2
		Assault w/Semiautomatic Firearm on Peace Officer/Firefighter	PC245(D)(2)	21	49	22	25
Intentional Discharge of Firearm Causing GBI/Death	12022.53(d)	Murder 1st	PC187	707	68	1018	63
		Attempted Murder 1st	PC187(664)	255	53	297	46
		Murder 2nd	PC187 2ND	196	47	289	37
		Attempted Murder 2nd	PC187 2ND(664)	116	-	-	-
		Discharge Firearm Inhabited Dwelling/ Vehicle/Aircraft	PC246	21	30	42	33
Use of Firearm — 3 years	12022.5(a)	Assault with a Firearm	PC245(A)(2)	427	46	585	49
		Robbery 2nd	PC212.5(C)	305	10	506	17
		Assault with Semiautomatic Firearm	PC245(B)	176	41	508	45
		Criminal Threat to Cause GBI/Death	PC422	106	25	145	25
		Voluntary Manslaughter	PC192(A)	84	10	258	13
Use of Firearm — 4 years	12022.5(a)	Robbery 2nd	PC212.5(C)	280	8	402	12
		Assault with a Firearm	PC245(A)(2)	268	27	362	29
		Assault with Semiautomatic Firearm	PC245(B)	145	32	406	33
		Voluntary Manslaughter	PC192(A)	133	15	410	21
		Attempted Murder 2nd	PC187 2ND(664)	69	6	236	11

Table 2 continues

TABLE 2. Top offenses that receive gun enhancements in California, 2014–2025 (continued)

EN-HANCE-MENT	ENHANCE-MENT STATUTE	OFFENSE	OFFENSE STATUTE	# OF ADMISSIONS WITH ENHANCE-MENT, 2014–17	% OF ADMISSIONS WITH ENHANCE-MENT, 2014-17	# OF ADMISSIONS WITH ENHANCE-MENT, 2018–25	% OF CONVICTIONS RECEIVING ENHANCE-MENT, 2018–25
Use of Firearm — 10 years	12022.5(a)	Voluntary Manslaughter	PC192(A)	257	30	634	32
		Assault with a Firearm	PC245(A)(2)	239	24	237	19
		Assault with Semiautomatic Firearm	PC245(B)	109	23	207	17
		Attempted Murder 2nd	PC187 2ND(664)	70	6	218	10
		Robbery 2nd	PC212.5(C)	34	1	78	2
<b>Not Affected by SB 620</b>							
Armed with Firearm	12022(a)	Robbery 2nd	PC212.5(C)	376	16	372	14
		Voluntary Manslaughter	PC192(A)	91	11	121	6
		Robbery 1st in Concert/ Inhabited Dwelling	PC213(A)	67	32	69	41
		Attempted Murder 2nd	PC187 2ND(664)	57	5	57	3
		Murder 1st (LWO)	PC187	49	4	-	0
Use of Deadly Weapon	12022(b)	Robbery 2nd	PC212.5(C)	610	20	531	20
		Attempted Murder 2nd	PC187 2ND(664)	323	28	499	28
		Criminal Threat to Cause GBI/Death	PC422	254	57	327	60
		Voluntary Manslaughter	PC192(A)	253	30	444	26
		Inflict Corporal Injury on Spouse/Cohabitant	PC273.5(A)	199	84	-	0
Use of firearm/ deadly weapon during sex offense	12022.3(a)	Rape w/Force/Violence/ Fear of Bodily Injury	PC261(A)(2)	17	47	21	35
		Oral Cop With Force/ Violence/Fear of Immediate Bodily Injury	PC288A(C)(2) (A)	10	41	7	41
		Assault with Intent to Commit Specific Sex Offense	PC220(A)(1)	9	39	14	43
		Penetration w/Force/ Violence/Fear of Immediate Bodily Injury	PC289(A)(1)(A)	6	38	6	43
		Sodomy/Force/Violence/ GBI	PC286(C)(2)(A)	-	-	-	-

Notes: The table shows the top 5 offenses to receive a gun enhancement for each enhancement affected by SB 620, followed by the top 5 that were not affected (note: PC 12022.a(3) and 12022.5(b) are excluded due to having very small counts). It also presents the total number of admissions with each gun enhancement, along with the percentage of admissions for those offenses with the specified gun enhancement. Cells with a hyphen are suppressed because the counts are less than 5.

Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

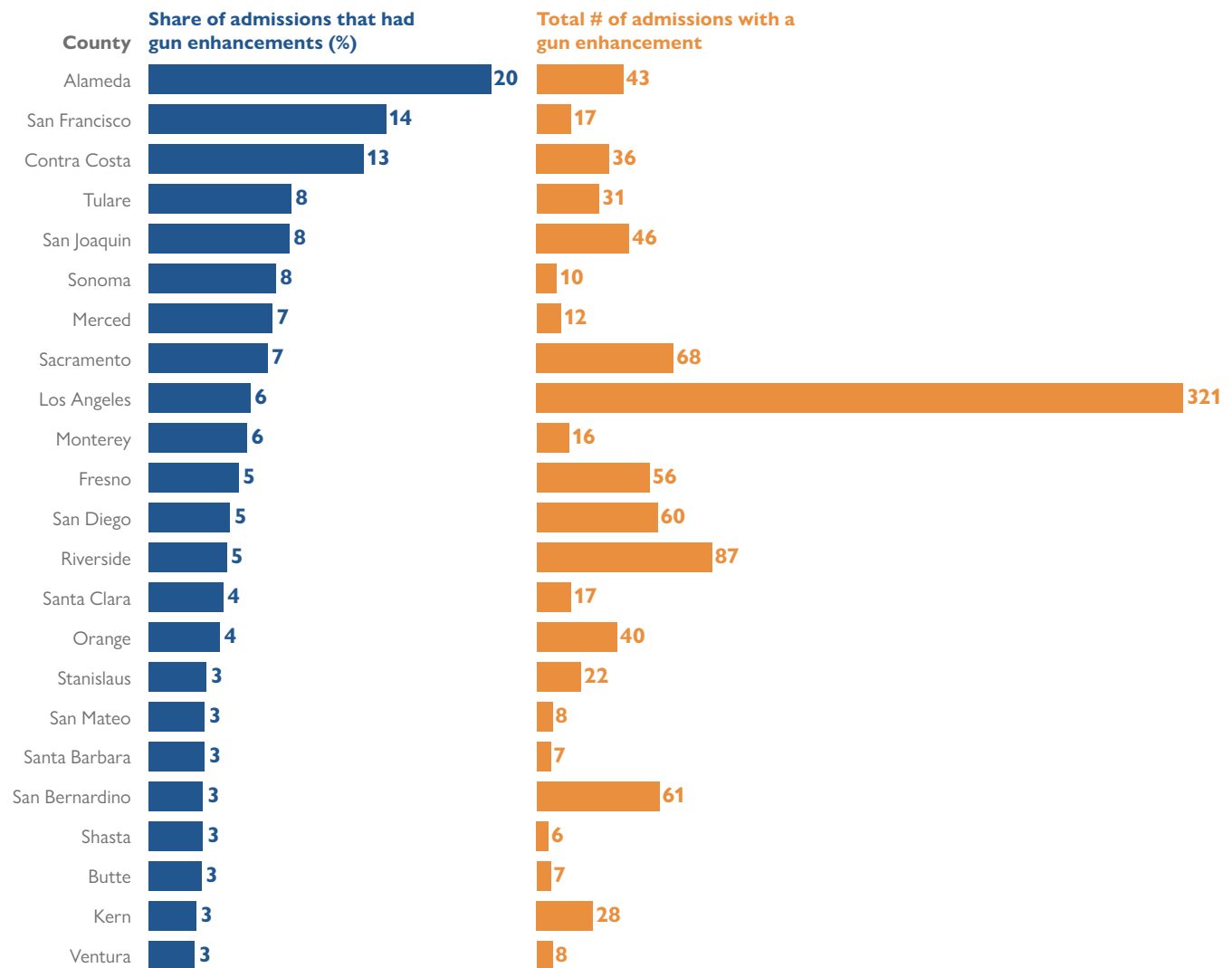
## County Variation in Gun Enhancements

**Alameda, San Francisco, and Contra Costa counties apply gun enhancements most frequently as a share of all prison admissions.**

These Northern California counties apply gun enhancements at a higher rate than other counties. However, Los Angeles County contributes the highest volume of admissions with gun enhancements to prison. A higher rate of gun enhancement use does not necessarily signify a harsher sentencing environment: because gun enhancements are most often applied to convictions for violent crimes, counties with a larger share of prison admissions for violent crimes are more likely to have higher shares of gun enhancements.

For instance, the elevated rates in Alameda and Contra Costa may be partially explained by their higher proportion of prison sentences with violent offenses relative to other counties.<sup>10</sup> These counties may make greater use of non-prison sentence dispositions (such as county jail sentences or probation) for less serious offenses, causing the composition of sentences with prison dispositions to be more serious. This may explain some of the county-level variation in the enhancement rates illustrated in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5. Number and percent of admissions in 2025 who received any gun enhancement, by county



Note: The 35 counties with fewer than five admissions with gun enhancements in 2025 are not shown.

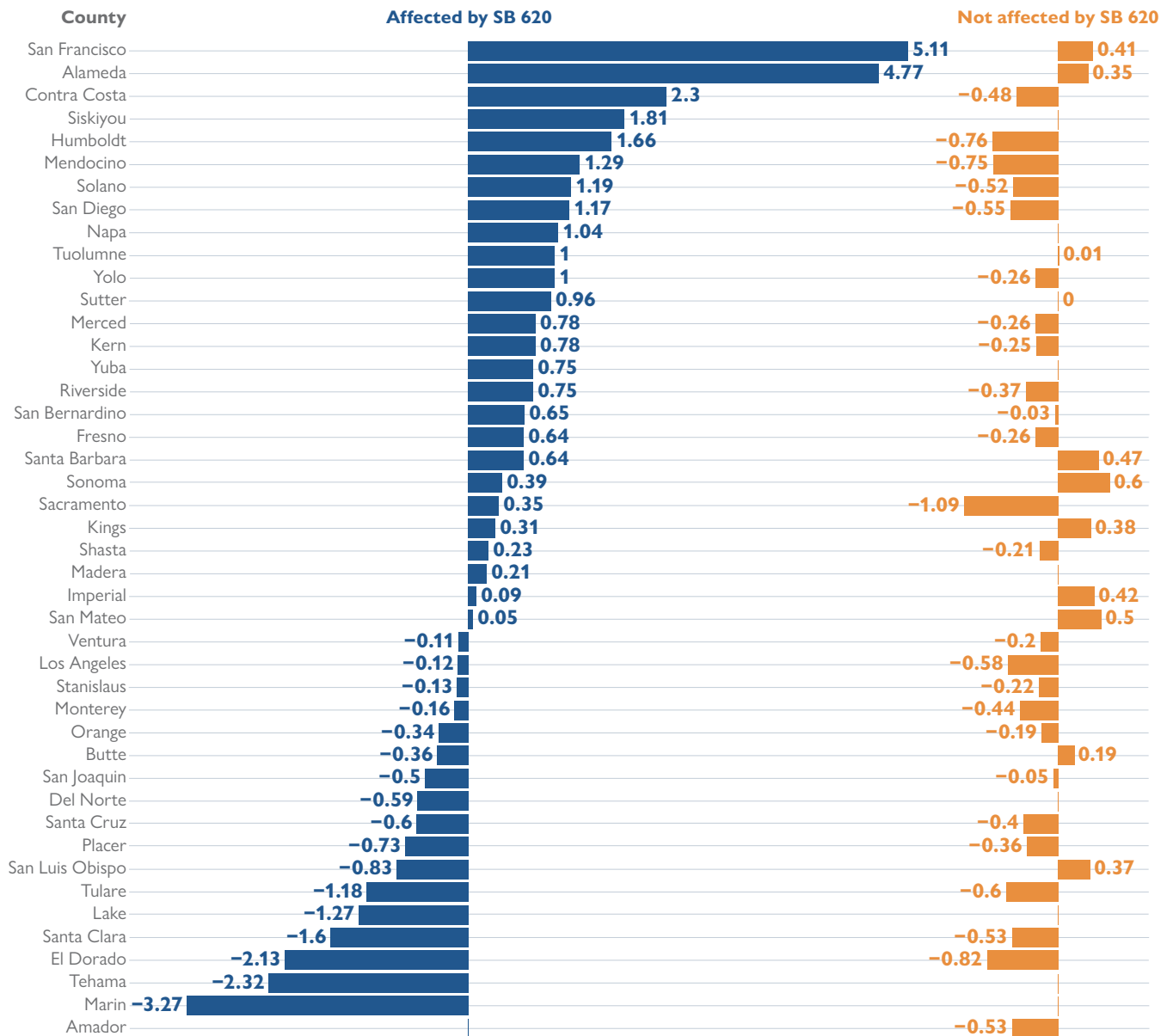
Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

**Figure 6 shows that after SB 620 went into effect (in 2018), county application of gun enhancements varied, with some counties increasing the share of admissions with a gun enhancement affected by SB 620 and other counties decreasing admissions.**

The share of admissions with an SB 620-affected gun enhancement increased in 26 counties between 2018-25. The largest increase in the use of gun enhancements occurred in San Francisco (5.1 percentage-point increase).<sup>11</sup> The largest decrease was in Marin (3.3 percentage-point decrease).<sup>12</sup>

The changes in gun enhancements not affected by SB 620 were smaller during this period, ranging from a 0.5 percentage-point increase in San Mateo to a 1.09 percentage-point decrease in Sacramento.

**FIGURE 6. Percentage point change in the share of admissions to prison with a gun enhancement by county, conviction years 2014–2025**



Note: Changes are measured between 2014–2017 compared to 2018–2025. Fourteen counties were omitted from the chart because the number of convictions with a gun enhancement was below our sample size reporting threshold of five, or because the combined sample used to calculate the change over time was less than ten. For some counties, only one category is reported because the number of convictions with a gun enhancement in the other category was below the sample size reporting threshold, or because the combined sample in the other category was less than ten. Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

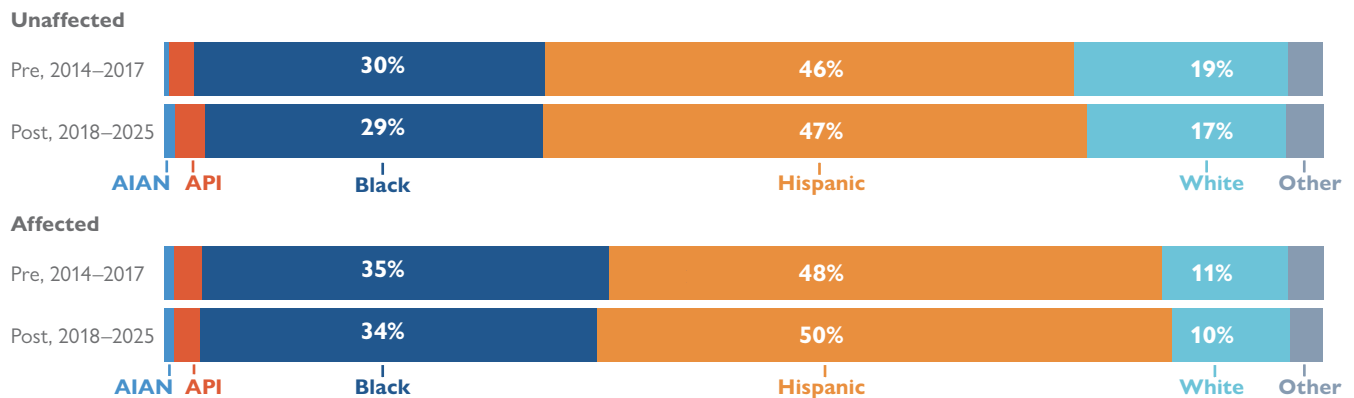
## Demographic Patterns of Gun Enhancement Use

**Black individuals constitute a larger share of people with gun enhancements than their representation in the prison population.**

Among those with a gun enhancement, Hispanic individuals make up the largest proportion, followed by Black, White, “Other” race, Asian and Pacific Islander,<sup>13</sup> and American Indian/Alaska Native individuals, respectively (Figure 7). In contrast to Black and Hispanic individuals, White individuals make up a smaller proportion of individuals with gun enhancements compared to their representation in the general prison

population.<sup>14</sup> From 2014–2025, 3.9% of Alaska Native/American Indian individuals admitted to CDCR received a gun enhancement, as did 6.6% of Asian and Pacific Islander individuals, 7.3% of Black individuals, 5.2% of Hispanic individuals, and 2.4% of White individuals. The overall distribution of gun enhancements by race and ethnicity was consistent before and after the implementation of SB 620.

Figure 7. Racial distribution of people admitted to prison in California with a gun enhancement, conviction years 2014–2025



Note: AIAN = American Indian/Alaska Native. API = Asian and Pacific Islander. Racial categories are reported by CDCR and do not necessarily represent the self-identification of the people within the data.

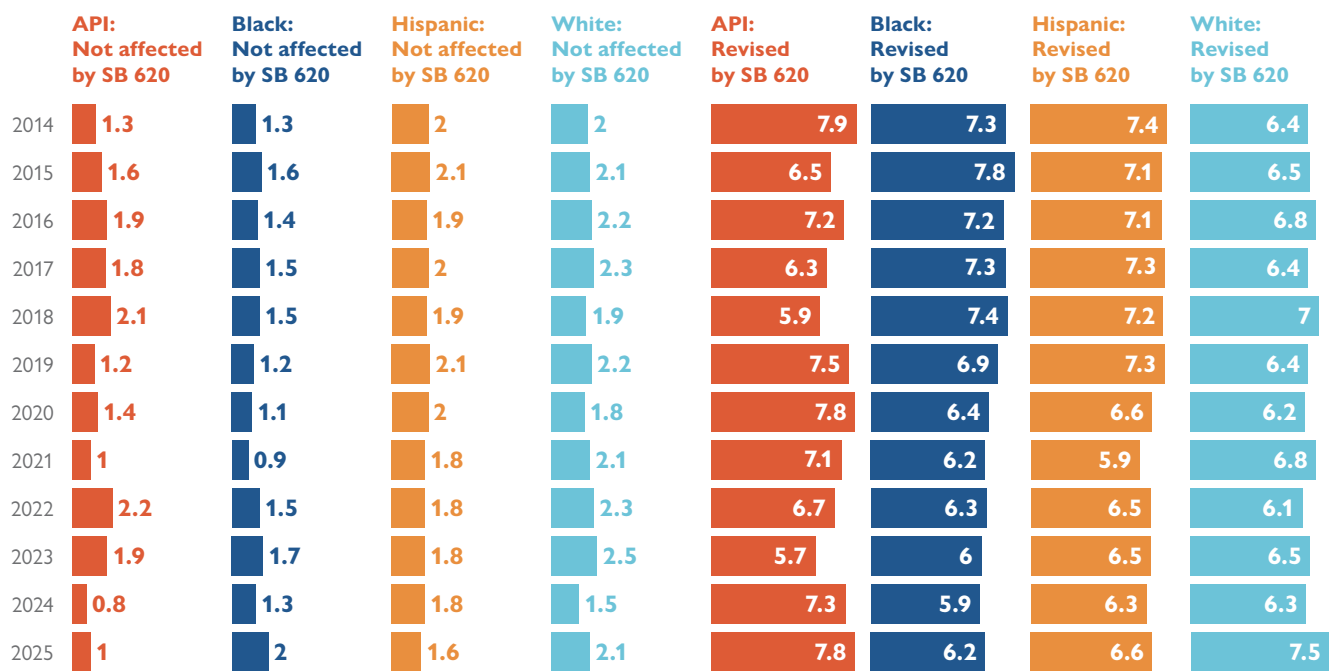
Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

**Racial disparities in the length of enhancements affected by SB 620 have substantially declined, beginning during the COVID era.**

Beginning in 2020, the average lengths of enhancements for Hispanic and Black individuals fell relative to enhancement lengths for White individuals, eventually erasing the racial disparity and in 2025 falling below the average enhancement length for White individuals (Figure 8). Enhancement lengths for Asian Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native people (not pictured) are more volatile due to smaller sample

sizes, so it is difficult to observe consistent trends for these groups. Gun enhancements not affected by SB 620 added much less time to sentences. There was less disparity in enhancement length between Hispanic and White individuals for these enhancements, while enhancement lengths for Black individuals were shorter than those for White individuals.

FIGURE 8. Average length of gun enhancements (years) for enhancements affected and not affected by SB 620, in California by race and ethnicity, 2014–2025



Note: Enhancement lengths shown are for determinately sentenced gun enhancements only; trends are similar when including indeterminately sentenced gun enhancements. See Appendix Table 1 for determinately sentenced enhancements.

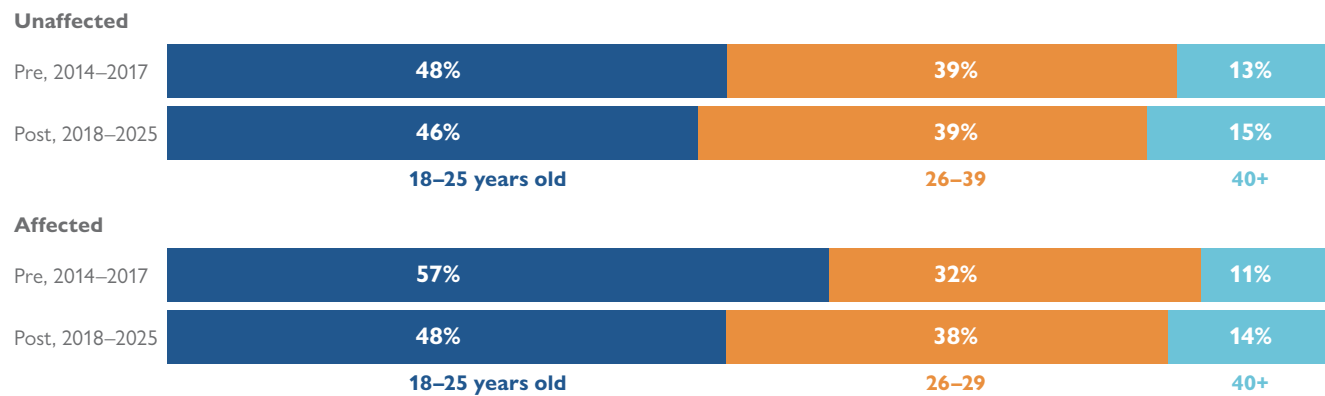
Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

**The proportion of transition-aged youth (aged 18–25) with a gun enhancement decreased after the implementation of SB 620.**

Figure 9 shows that between 2014 and 2017, transition-aged youth made up the largest proportion of admissions with a gun enhancement, followed by 26–39 year olds, and by people aged 40 or older. After SB 620, transition-aged youth made up a smaller share of both affected and unaffected gun

enhancements. For people sentenced with gun enhancements affected by the reform, the proportion who were transition-aged youth dropped from 57% to 48%. The share of transition-aged youth with unaffected enhancements declined by 2.5 percentage points.

**FIGURE 9. Distribution of people admitted to prison in California with a gun enhancement affected and not affected by SB 620, by age, conviction years 2014–2025**



Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

**Conclusion**

Since 2014, the number of prison admissions that include gun enhancements has declined, and 5.4% of admissions had an enhancement in 2025. SB 620 allows judicial discretion in the application of gun enhancements under Penal Codes § 12022.5 and § 12022.53. After it took effect in 2018, the share of prison admissions with gun enhancements has remained stable. This does not necessarily mean SB 620 had no effect — other factors, such as the types and frequencies of gun-related crimes or trends in prosecution charging decisions, may have changed over that period, and we cannot measure the isolated effect of SB 620.

There is some indication that enhancement length shortened following SB 620. While the share of individuals who are receiving gun enhancements appears to have returned to pre-pandemic levels, the average determinate sentence length has decreased since 2018, partially due to a shift in the type of gun enhancements being used towards those that add less time to an individual’s sentence. While racial and ethnic disparities in the application of gun enhancements have not changed, transition-aged youth comprised a smaller share of those receiving a gun enhancement after SB 620, especially for enhancements affected by the policy.

## About this research

This research stems from a [partnership](#) between the California Policy Lab at the University of California and the Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, a state agency that studies and makes recommendations to improve California’s criminal justice system.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Since its enactment in 1997, judges have never had the power to dismiss enhancements under PC § 12022.53 (adding 10 years, 20 years, or life to a sentence).  
The PC § 12022.5 enhancement, added to the Penal Code in 1969, has only had that restriction since 1989. (*People v. Thomas*, 4 Cal. 4th 206 (1992))
- 2 For more information on enhancement types and their frequency in California’s prisons, please refer to CPL’s report [Sentence Enhancements in California](#).
- 3 The full list of gun enhancements can be found in [Appendix Table A1](#).
- 4 Examples of mitigating factors include cases where an enhancement would have a discriminatory racial impact, where the offense is connected to mental illness, prior victimization, or childhood trauma, where the offense is not a violent felony, where a firearm used was unloaded or inoperable, where the defendant was a juvenile when the offense was committed, and others. See CA PC § 1385 for the complete list.
- 5 *People v. McDavid*, 15 Cal. 5th 1015 (2024).
- 6 Dezimmer, A. & Redlich, A. (2019) Plea bargaining in the shadow of the trial. In Spohn, C., & Brennan, P. (Eds). *Handbook on Sentencing Policies and Practices in the 21st century* (pp. 168–187). Taylor & Francis.
- 7 Some gun enhancements are stayed, meaning they are attached to a sentence but do not add time to the sentence. Except for [Appendix Figure A1](#), this brief only describes active enhancements, meaning they add time to a sentence. On average, about 20% of admissions with active gun enhancement sentences also contain at least one stayed gun enhancement or other offense enhancement. Stayed gun enhancements are often included in sentences with an active enhancement to allow judges to activate the stayed enhancement in the event that the active enhancement is struck from the sentence. While rare, this would typically occur if part of a sentence is later struck following an appeal. In that case, the stayed enhancement would become active. See California Rule of Court 4.447(a)(2); *People v. Gonzalez*, 43 Cal. 4th 1118, 1125 (2008). [Appendix Figure A1](#) has more information about stayed enhancements in this population.
- 8 In California, an “indeterminate” sentence is a sentence with a minimum and maximum term (e.g., 25-years-to-life), where release from prison is determined by the Board of Parole Hearings. A “determinate” sentence is a sentence with a set length.
- 9 This total number of years is calculated with the following formula:  $(\text{AvgPre} - \text{AvgPost}) \times \text{CountPost}$ , where AvgPre is the average length added to prison sentences by SB 620-affected gun enhancements from 2014–2017 (prior to SB 620); AvgPost is the average length added to sentences by SB 620 gun enhancements from 2018–2025 (after SB 620); and X is the total number of prison sentences with gun enhancements affected by SB 620 from 2018–2025.
- 10 Based on CPL analysis of CDCR data, these three counties have some of the highest proportions of violent offenses amongst individuals receiving prison sentences.
- 11 Changes with an absolute value less than 0.5 percentage points are considered ‘no change.’
- 12 Changes with an absolute value less than 0.5 percentage points are considered ‘no change.’
- 13 API subgroups vary widely on economic metrics and contact with the criminal legal system, as well as other demographic identifiers. When possible, we disaggregate these groups, but given the small sample sizes we have combined them for this report.
- 14 Between 2014 and 2025 Hispanic and White individuals made up 47% and 25% of the general prison population, respectively, while Black individuals made up 24% of the general prison population.
- 15 Bird, M. et al. (2023). Sentence enhancements in California. California Policy Lab. <https://www.capolicylab.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Sentence-Enhancements-in-California.pdf>

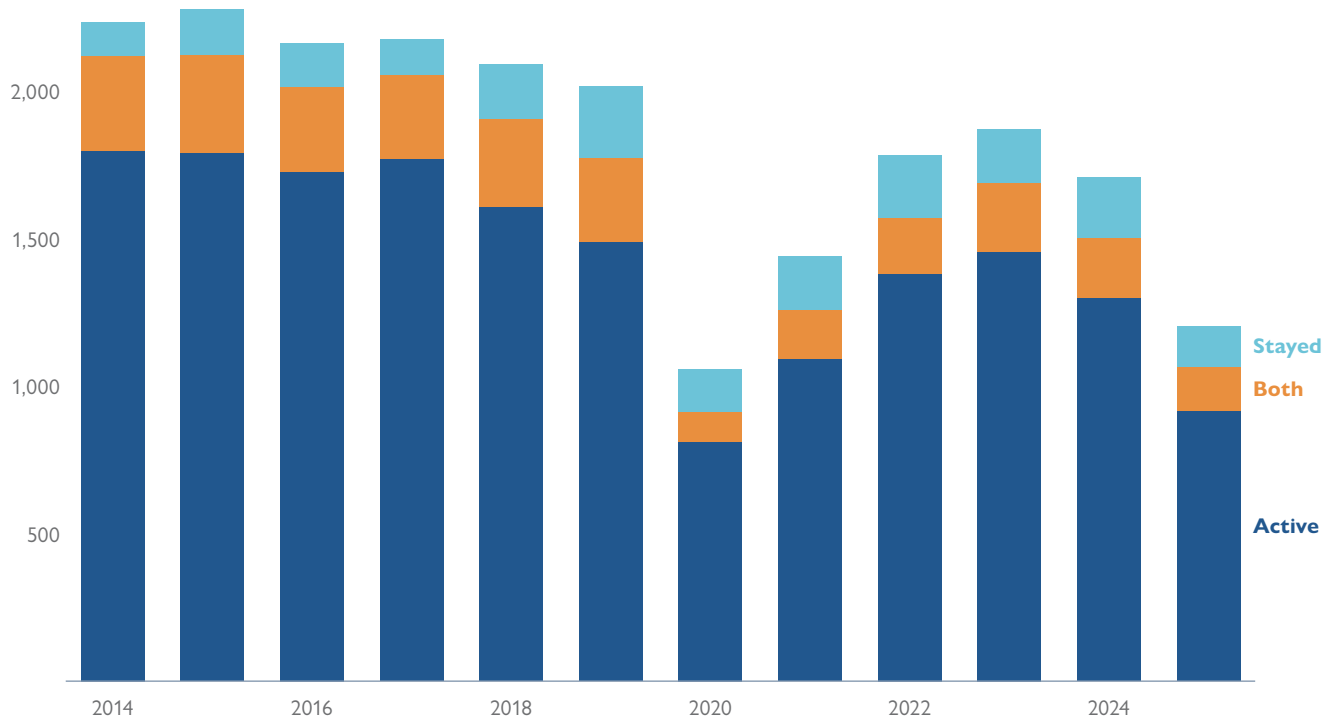
## Appendix

TABLE A1. List of all 18 gun enhancements in California and whether they were affected by SB 620

ENHANCEMENT	DESCRIPTION	SENTENCE LENGTH	PRE-SB 620	POST-SB 620
PC 12022.5(a)	Use of a firearm	3, 4, 10 years	Mandatory	Discretionary
PC 12022.5(b)	Use of an assault weapon/machine gun	5, 6, 10 years	Mandatory	Discretionary
PC 12022.53(b)	Use of a firearm	10–20–Life — 10 years	Mandatory	Discretionary
PC 12022.53(c)	Discharge of a weapon	10–20–Life — 20 years	Mandatory	Discretionary
PC 12022.53(d)	Great bodily injury or death from use of a firearm	10–20–Life — 25-to-life sentence	Mandatory	Discretionary
PC 12021.5(a)	Possession of firearm during commission of street gang crime	1, 2, 3 years	Discretionary	Unchanged
PC 12021.5(b)	Possession of firearm with detachable magazine during commission of street gang crime	2, 3, 4 years	Discretionary	Unchanged
PC 12022.2(a)	Armed with a firearm with ammunition designed to penetrate metal or armor	3, 4, 10 years	Discretionary	Unchanged
PC 12022.3(a)	Use of a firearm or deadly weapon during specified sex offenses	3, 4, 10 years	Discretionary	Unchanged
PC 12022.3(b)	Armed with a deadly weapon during specified sex offenses	1, 2, 5 years	Discretionary	Unchanged
PC 12022.4(a)	Furnish firearm during commission/ attempt to commission a felony	1, 2, 3 years	Discretionary	Unchanged
PC 12022.55	Discharge firearm from a vehicle with intent of GBI/death	5, 6, 10 years	Discretionary	Unchanged
PC 12022(a)(1)	Armed with a firearm	1 year	Discretionary	Unchanged
PC 12022(a)(2)	Armed with an assault weapon	3 years	Discretionary	Unchanged
PC 12022(c)	Armed with a firearm during the commission of specified health and safety code crimes	3, 4, 5 years	Discretionary	Unchanged
PC 12022(d)	Being a principal, knowing another principal is personally armed w/firearm, while committing drug offenses	1, 2, 3 years	Discretionary	Unchanged
PC 30600(b)*	Providing minor with assault weapon or .50 BMG rifle	1 year	Discretionary	Unchanged
PC 30615*	Committing another crime while violating the statutes prohibiting certain acts relating to assault weapons and .50 BMG rifles	1 year	Discretionary	Unchanged

\* Sentence enhancements for PC 30600(b) and PC 30615 were not observed in CDCR data for the 2014–2025 period. Statutes are labeled “discretionary” if judges had authority to strike the enhancement or substitute it with a lesser enhancement. Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

FIGURE A1. Prison admissions with gun enhancements by enhancement status, conviction years 2014–2025



Note: This graph displays counts of all admissions with gun enhancements. “Active” means that all sentence enhancements, including gun enhancements and other types of offense enhancements, on the individual’s sentence are active (adding time to the sentence). “Stayed” means that all enhancements, including gun and other types of enhancements, on the individual’s sentence are stayed. “Both” means that the person has some active and some stayed enhancements, but that at least one of the active enhancements is a gun enhancement. On average, six percent of all prison admissions with gun enhancements do not have any active sentence enhancements. Given sentencing procedures in California, this would not be expected to occur. These admissions may represent data entry errors; the authors were not able to identify a conclusive explanation. Regardless, the presence of stayed enhancements does not have a practical effect on sentence length.

Source: CPL analysis of CDCR data.

## Technical note

This report uses CDCR-provided data in the form of several tables: inmate information, admission term information, sentence component (conviction) information, and offense enhancement information. For a detailed description of the methods used to process these data, see Appendix A of the California Policy Lab’s report on sentence enhancements.<sup>15</sup> We omitted some sentence components in the sample used for this analysis. This did not result in the omission of any person’s CDCR admission, but rather portions of some people’s conviction data that appeared to be inaccurate.

The length of an enhancement is the calculated total time added to an individual’s sentence by any given gun enhancement after accounting for state sentencing rules. If an individual has multiple consecutive counts for a given felony, then each count receives an offense enhancement.

For example, if a person has two consecutive counts of burglary and a firearm enhancement is attached to that felony, two firearm enhancements are applied to the sentence and “enhancement length” is the resulting total of those two enhancements. If an offense enhancement is attached to a concurrent felony that is not adding any years, it does not contribute to sentence length, but will be kept in any totals of firearm enhancements. To calculate total offense enhancement years within a term, we add the offense enhancement years imposed for each unique offense enhancement.