



Bureau of Justice Statistics

Crime Data Brief

January 2003 NCJ 197471

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/homtrnd.htm

Homicide Trends in the United States: 2000 Update

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Homicide rates recently declined to levels last seen in the late 1960's. The Nation's homicide rate was 4.6 per 100,000 population in 1950. It doubled from the mid-1960's to the late 1970's. In 1980 it peaked at 10.2 and fell to 7.9 in 1985. It rose again in the late 1980's and early 1990's to another peak of 9.8 in 1991. After 1991 the homicide rate declined sharply. In recent years the decline has slowed. The Nation's murder rate was 5.5 in 2000 compared to 5.7 in 1999.

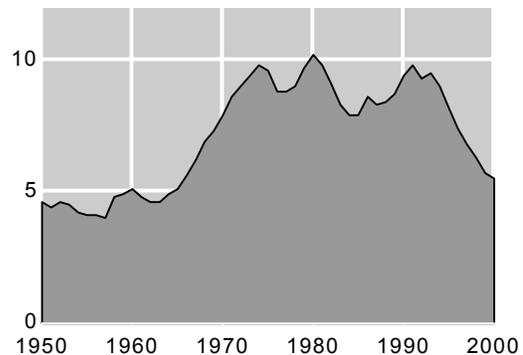
These findings and many more are from *Homicide Trends in the United States*, a section of the BJS web site that describes homicide patterns and trends in the United States since 1976. The site displays 50 graphics and supporting tables updated with the 2000 data. Homicide is of interest not only because of its severity but also because it is considered by experts to be a fairly reliable barometer of violent crime. At a national level, no other crime is measured as accurately and precisely.

For teens and young adults, homicide victimization rates exploded in the late 1980's but fell dramatically after 1993. During the same period, rates for older people declined. From 1999 to 2000, rates for adults ages 25-34 increased slightly while the rates for all other age groups declined slightly.

The homicide rates for teens reflect a reversal from dramatic increases in the early 1990's. From 1976 to

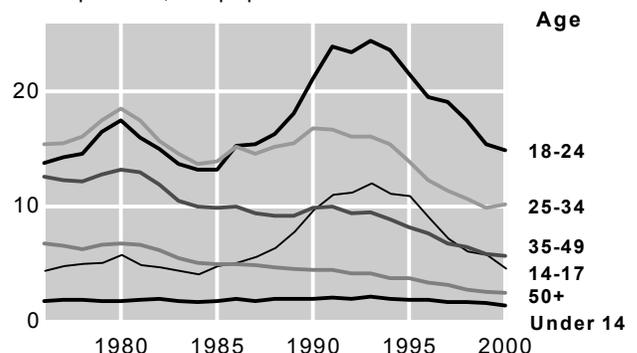
Homicide rates recently declined to levels last seen in the late 1960's

Homicide victimization, 1950-2000
Rate per 100,000 population



Victimization rates for teens and young adults increased dramatically in the late 1980's while rates for older age groups declined

Homicide victimization by age, 1976-2000
Rate per 100,000 population



1985, the rates for young teens (ages 14-17) were below those for all older age groups. After 1995 they rose to exceed the rates for persons age 35 or older. They have now fallen back to levels below those of persons ages 35-49 — levels similar to those from 1976 to 1985 — reversing one of the most dramatic trends in homicide victimization.

The sharp increase in homicides in the late 1980's and much of the subsequent decline were attributable to a rise and fall in gun violence by teens and young adults. Despite the moderation since 1993, the levels of gun homicides by teens and young adults remain well above those of the mid-1980's.

Other major findings—

Gender

Males are most often the victims and the perpetrators in homicides: males were 10 times more likely than females to commit murder, and male and female offenders were more likely to target male than female victims.

Race

Blacks were 6 times more likely to be homicide victims and 7 times more likely than whites to commit homicides in 2000.

Eighty-six percent of white murder victims were killed by whites, and 94% of black victims were killed by blacks.

Among homicides in which the victim was killed by an acquaintance, 1 in 10 were interracial, whereas when the killer is a stranger, 3 in 10 were interracial.

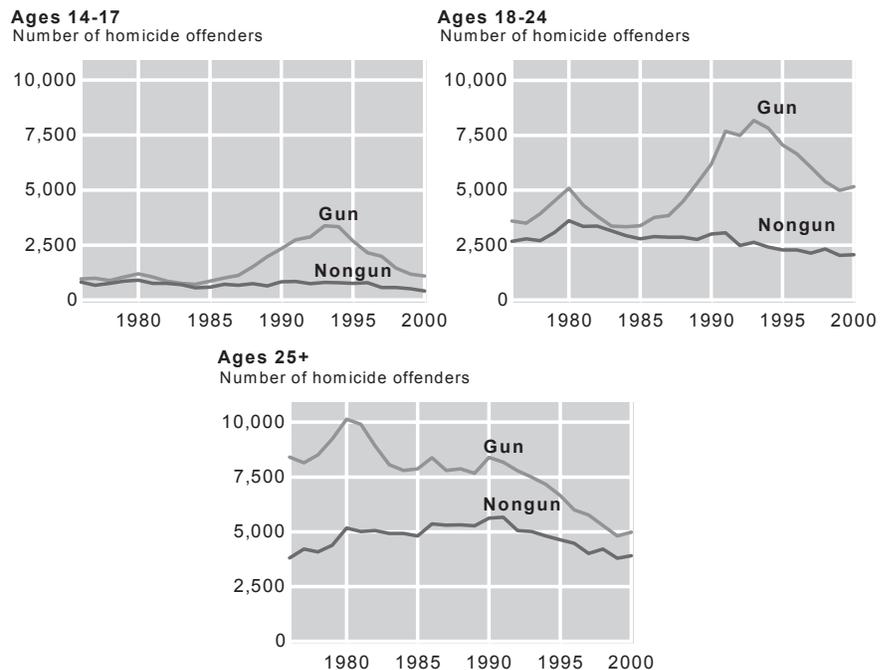
Age, race, and gender

There were dramatic increases in both homicide victimization and offending rates among young black males in the late 1980's and 1990's before recent declines in both categories.

From 1999 to 2000, older teens and young adults and older adults from all race and gender groups were no longer experiencing double digit declines in homicide rates. The rates for older black males and older teen and young adult black females increased slightly. The offending rates displayed similar patterns.

Gun homicides by teens and young adults rose sharply beginning with the mid-1980's and have fallen since 1993

Homicide offending by age of offender and weapon use, 1976-2000

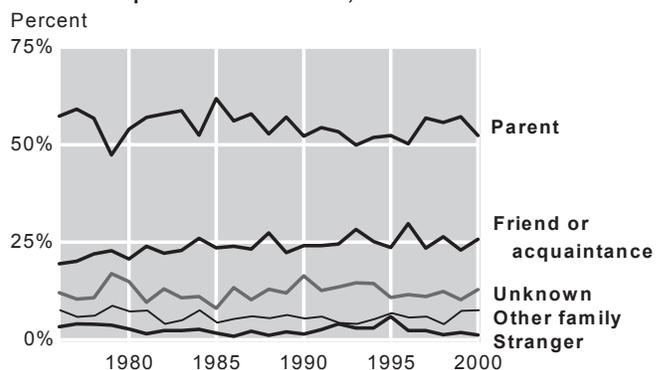


Infanticide

The number of infanticides (victims under age 5) has grown roughly in proportion to the number of young children in the population, with most perpetrators being a parent.

Most children under age 5 who are victims of homicide are killed by a parent

Homicides of children under age 5 by relationship with the offender, 1976-2000



New! State and local homicide trends and characteristics from Crime & Justice Data Online.

Create customized tables by State since 1976 or by large localities since 1985.

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/dataonline/

Eldercide

The number of homicides of persons age 65 and over has been decreasing. Yet among all age groups, the elderly have the highest percentage of homicides that occur during the commission of a felony.

Intimate homicide

There has been a decline in homicide of intimates, especially male victims. The number of white females killed by intimates rose in the mid-1980's and declined after 1993. Since 1998 the number of white women killed by intimates has increased but has not reached earlier levels. The number of intimate homicides for all other race and gender groups declined over the period; black males killed by intimates dropped 77%, white males by 54%, and black females by 53%.

Law enforcement officers killed

From 1976 to 2000, the number of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty declined, mostly because of the decline in law enforcement officers killed with handguns.

Multiple victims and offenders

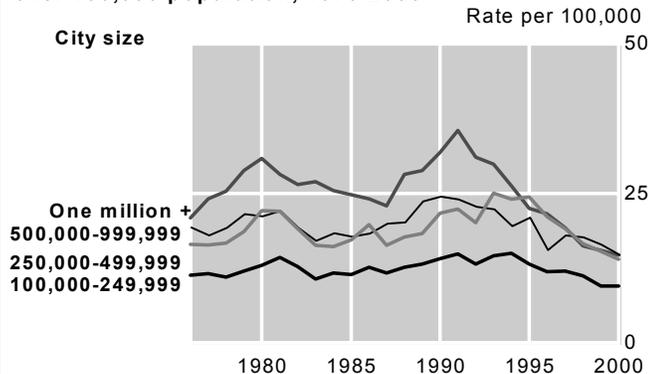
Few homicides involve multiple offenders, and fewer involve multiple victims. The percentage of homicides involving multiple offenders increased dramatically in the late 1980's and early 1990's, from 10% in 1976 to almost 18% in 2000. The percentage of homicides involving multiple victims increased gradually during the last two decades from just under 3% of all homicides in 1976 to 4% in 2000.

Circumstances

The mix of circumstances surrounding homicides has changed over the last two decades. Although the number of homicides resulting from arguments has declined, arguments remain the most frequently cited circumstance.

Until recently, changes in homicide rates for large American cities varied by size

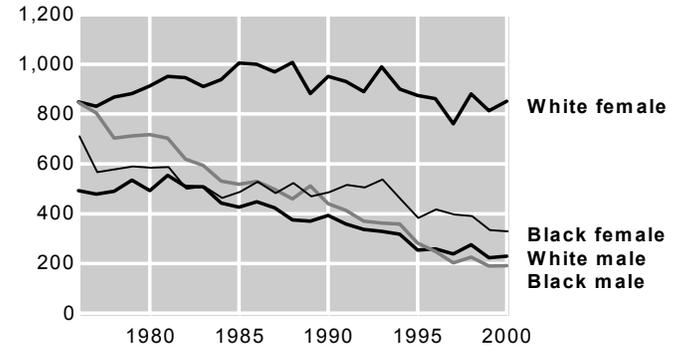
Homicide victimization rates for cities over 100,000 population, 1976-2000



Except for white females, the number of intimate victims (husbands, wives, boyfriends, and girlfriends) in each race and gender group has fallen dramatically

Homicides of intimates by gender and race of victim, 1976-2000

Number of victims



City size

The homicide victimization rates in cities with a population of 1 million or more have declined to the lowest level during the study period. In the late 1990's, the rates of homicide for cities in all groups of 250,000 or more population were about the same. Most of the swings in the prevalence of homicide during the past two decades occurred in cities with a population of 100,000 or more and in suburbs. Small cities and rural areas experienced relatively little change in homicide prevalence.

Region

Compared to the national average, homicide rates, especially those involving guns, were higher in the South and lower in New England, the Mountain region, and the West North Central region of the United States.

Clearances

The number of homicides cleared by arrest of the perpetrator declined until recently: 63% of all homicides were cleared in 2000 compared to 79% in 1976.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics is the statistical agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. Lawrence A. Greenfeld is director.

This report was written by James Alan Fox, BJS Visiting Fellow, and Marianne W. Zawitz of BJS. Ms. Zawitz produced the report, and Rhonda Keith verified the data. Jayne Robinson reviewed and prepared the report for printing.

January 2003, NCJ 179767



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Homicide Trends in the United States — www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/homtrnd.htm

Organized for easy access, this section of the BJS website contains graphics, text, and data concerning various aspects of homicide:

- Long term trends
- Demographic trends by —
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Race
 - Age, gender, and race
- Trends in special groups —
 - Infanticide
 - Eldercide
 - Intimates
 - Law enforcement officers
- Multiple victims and offenders
- Circumstances
- Weapons trends
- Regional trends
- Trends by city size
- Clearances

The data for each of the 50 graphics are provided and linked to a spreadsheet which can be downloaded. Links to other web resources on homicide and violent crime are included.

The site analyzes data collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation through the Uniform Crime Reporting Program. Most of the data are from the Supplementary Homicide Reports and are adjusted for missing reports and unsolved cases. The data files are available from the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/index.html).

Paper copies of the materials on the Internet site may be ordered by contacting the BJS Clearinghouse at 1-800-732-3277: "Homicide Trends in the United States" website, NCJ 197471, US\$15.00 / FOR\$16.50 postage and handling.