



Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief

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

Homicide Trends in the United States: 2002 Update

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Following a sharp increase in the late 1980's, the homicide rate fell dramatically after 1991. Since 1999 the rate has stabilized. The Nation's murder rate was 5.6 per 100,000 population in 2001 and 2002, similar to the rates seen in the late 1960's.

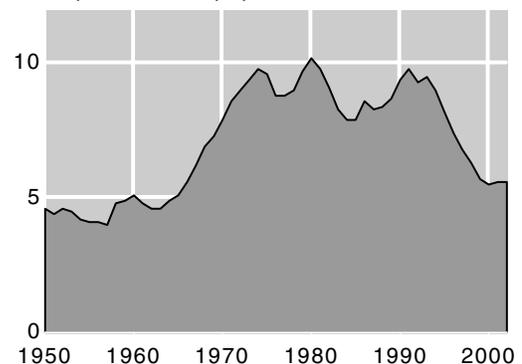
These findings and many more are from *Homicide Trends in the United States*, a section of the BJS web site that describes homicide patterns and trends in the United States since 1976. The site displays over 50 graphics and supporting tables updated with the 2001 and 2002 data. Homicide is of interest not only because of its severity but also because it is considered by experts to be a fairly reliable barometer of violent crime. At the national level no other crime is measured as accurately and precisely.

For teens and young adults, homicide victimization rates increased in the late 1980's but fell sharply after 1993. During the same period rates for older people declined. Adults ages 25-34 were the only group to experience increases in victimization rates since the late 1990's. Offending rates show a similar pattern.

The homicide rates for teens reflect a reversal from the dramatic increases in the late 1980's and early 1990's. From 1976 to 1985, the rates for young teens (ages 14-17) were below those for all older age groups. After 1985 they rose to exceed the rates for persons age 35 or older. They have now fallen back

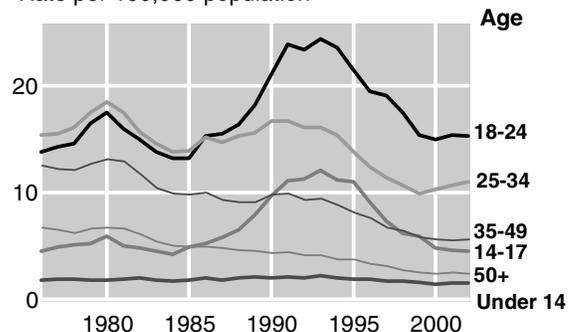
Homicide rates recently stabilized after declining to levels last seen in the late 1960's

Homicide victimization, 1950-2002
Rate per 100,000 population



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

Homicide victimization by age, 1976-2002
Rate per 100,000 population



to levels below those of persons ages 35-49 — levels similar to those from 1976 to 1985 — reversing the trend.

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 above those of the mid-1980's.

Other major findings—

Gender

In 2002 males were 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 2002.

During the study period 1976-2002, 86% 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.

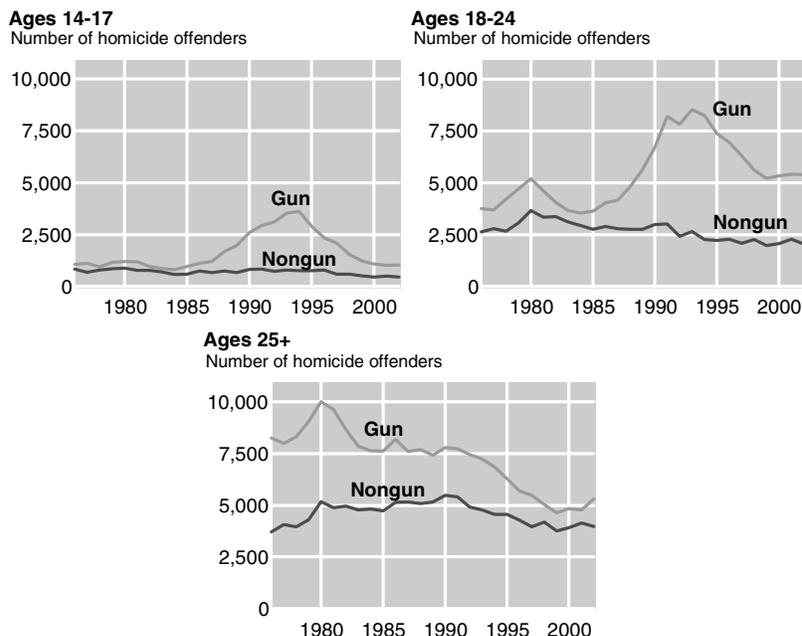
Age, race, and gender

There were large increases in both homicide victimization and offending rates among young black males in the late 1980's and 1990's before declines and stabilization in both measures.

After increases in the late 1980's and early 1990's, 14-17 year olds in all racial and gender groups experienced homicide offending rates in 2002 that were lower than the levels recorded in 1976. Young adults (ages 18-24) continue to have the highest offending rates in each racial and gender group. Although much lower than the offending rates experienced in the late 1980's and early 1990's, rates for black and white males ages 18-24 remain higher in 2002 than in the mid 1980's.

Gun homicides by teens and young adults rose sharply beginning with the mid-1980's, fell after 1993, and stabilized

Homicide offending by age of offender and weapon use, 1976-2002



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.

Eldercide

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

Law enforcement officers killed

From 1976 to 2002 the number of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty declined, mostly related to the decline in law enforcement officers killed with handguns.

Multiple victims and offenders

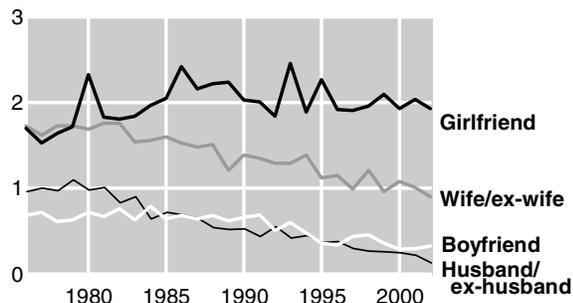
Few homicides involve multiple offenders, and fewer involve multiple victims. The percentage of homicides involving multiple offenders increased in the late 1980's and early 1990's, from 11.5% in 1976 to almost 19% in 2002. The percentage of homicides involving multiple victims increased gradually from about 3% of all homicides in 1976 to almost 5% in 2002.

Except for white girlfriends, the homicide victimization rate for intimate partners in each racial and gender group has fallen

Intimate homicide rate by race, gender, and relationship, 1976-2002

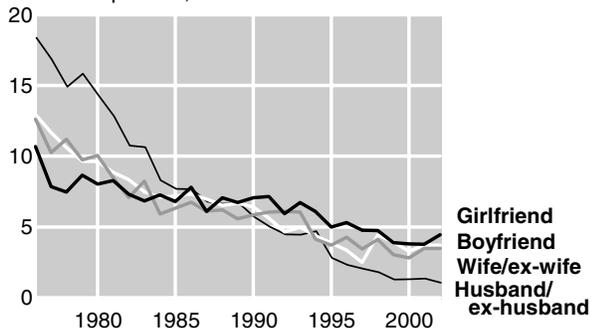
White victims

Murder rate per 100,000



Black victims

Murder rate per 100,000



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 among those that were known.

City size

In 2002 the homicide victimization rate for cities with a population of 1 million or more reached the lowest level recorded since 1976.

Most of the swings in the prevalence of homicide during the past two decades occurred in large cities (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 the New England, Mountain, and West North Central regions of the United States.

Clearances

The number of homicides cleared generally by arrest of the perpetrator declined until 2001: 62% of all homicides were cleared in 2001 compared to 79% in 1976. It increased to 64% in 2002.

Justifiable homicides ← NEW SECTION!

Most justifiable homicides by police are the result of attacks on officers. The most frequent circumstance cited for justifiable homicides by citizens is to disrupt a crime while in progress.

Intimate homicide

There has been a decline in homicide of intimates, especially male victims. The number of intimate homicides declined over the period; black males killed by intimates dropped 81%, white males by 56%, black females by 49%, and white females by 9%.

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

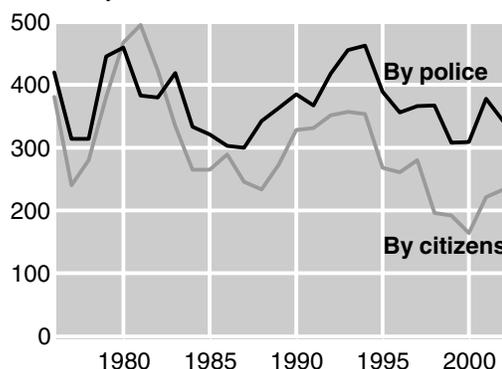
This report was written by James Alan Fox, BJS Visiting Fellow, and Marianne W. Zawitz of BJS. Ms. Zawitz produced the report, and Rhonda Keith prepared the graphics. Shannan M. Catalano verified the data. Jayne Robinson reviewed and prepared the report for printing.

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The number of justifiable homicides has declined

Number of justifiable homicides by police and citizens, 1976-2002

Number of justifiable homicides





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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
- Justifiable homicides **←NEW!**

The data for each of the graphics are provided and linked to a spreadsheet which users can download. 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).

Data on State and local homicide trends and characteristics are also available. Create customized tables by State since 1976 or by large localities since 1985. See:

Crime & Justice Data Online
[<www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/dataonline/>](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/dataonline/)