



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: 1998 Update

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With the largest cities leading the way, the Nation's murder rate in 1998 fell to its lowest level in three decades. Much of the decline was in those cities with more than 1 million inhabitants, where the rate fell from 35.5 per 100,000 population in 1991 to 16.1 per 100,000 in 1998. The sharp increase in homicides in the late 1980's and much of the subsequent decline are attributable to a rise and fall in gun violence by juveniles and young adults. Despite the encouraging improvement since 1993, the levels of gun homicides by juveniles and young adults are well above those of the mid-1980'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. Homicide is of interest not only because of its severity but also because it is a fairly reliable barometer of all violent crime. At a national level, no other crime is measured as accurately and precisely. The site displays 50 graphics and supporting tables and includes the recently released 1998 data.

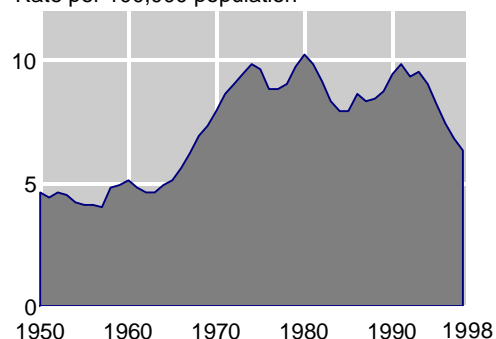
Other major findings include —

The Nation's murder rate was 6.3 per 100,000 population in 1998 compared to 4.6 per 100,000 population in 1950.

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

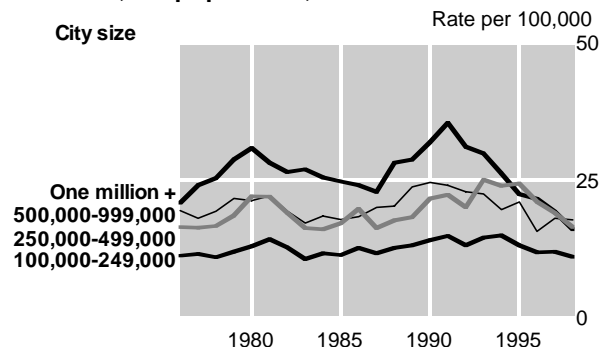
Homicide victimization, 1950-98

Rate per 100,000 population



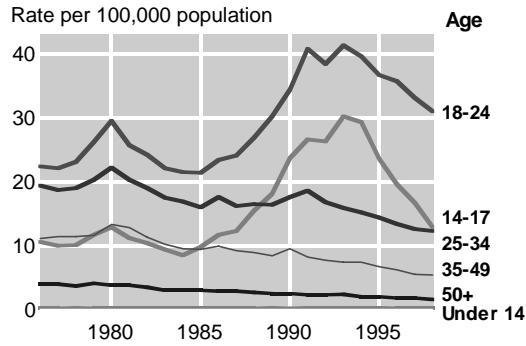
Until recently, changes in homicide rates for large American cities varied by size

Homicide victimization rates for cities over 100,000 population, 1976-98



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

Homicide offending by age, 1976-98

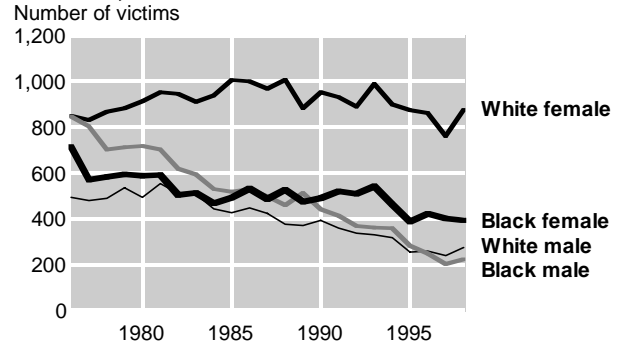


Homicide victimization and offending rates for younger groups — teenagers and young adults — rose sharply in the late 1980's and early 1990's before falling more recently, but the rates for those 25 years old and older have declined steadily during the last two decades. Despite the encouraging improvement since 1993, levels of youth homicide remain well above those of the early and mid-1980's.

There were dramatic increases in both homicide victimization and offending rates among young black

The number of intimate victims (husbands, wives, boyfriends, and girlfriends) in each race and gender group has fallen

Homicides of intimates by gender and race of victim, 1976-98



males in the late 1980's and 1990's before recent declines in both categories.

The sharp increase in homicides in the late 1980's and much of the subsequent decline in homicides are attributable to gun violence by juveniles and young adults, while nongun homicide rates remained largely unchanged.

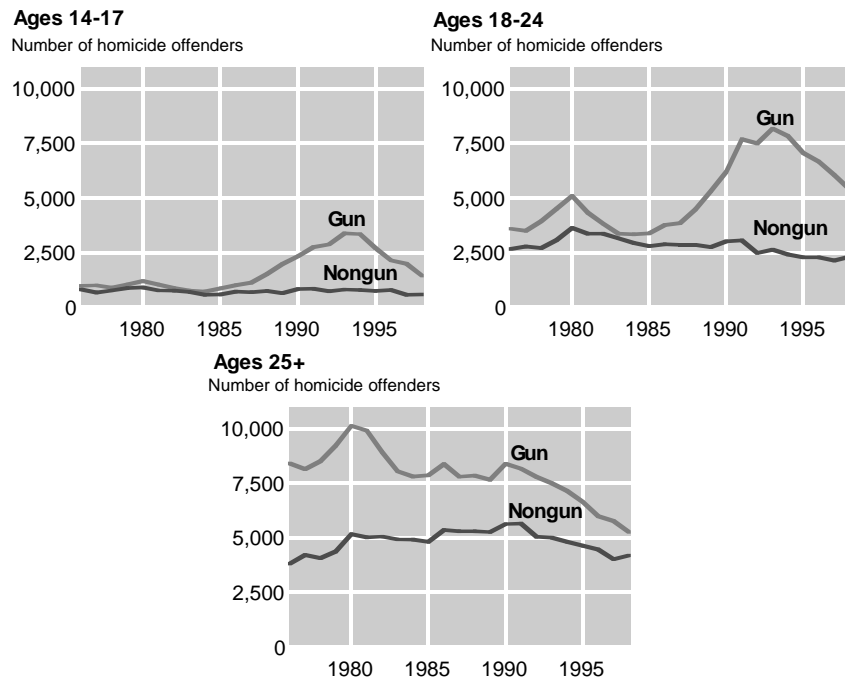
Males are most often the victims and the perpetrators in homicides: males were more than 9 times more likely than females to commit murder, and male and female offenders were more likely to target male than female victims.

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, declined after 1993, and in 1997 reached the lowest level recorded over the past two decades. The number of intimate homicides for all other race and gender groups declined over the period; black males killed by intimates dropped by 74%, black females 45%, and white males by 44%.

Blacks were six times more likely to be homicide victims and seven times more likely than whites to commit homicides.

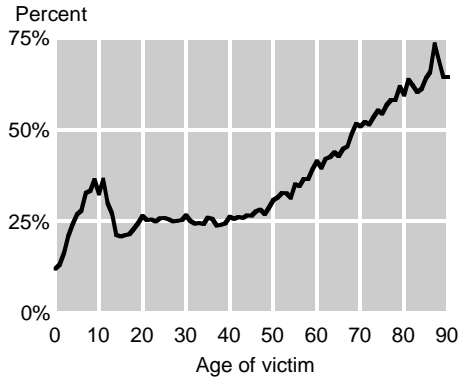
Gun homicides by teens and young adults rose sharply beginning with the mid-1980's and have fallen since 1993

Homicide offending by age of offender and weapon use, 1976-98



Older homicide victims are more likely to have been killed during a felony than younger victims

Percent of homicides committed during a felony by age of victim, 1976-98



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 is killed by an acquaintance, 1 in 10 is interracial, whereas when the killer is a stranger, 3 in 10 are interracial.

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

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

The annual number of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty declined, mostly because of the decline in law enforcement officers killed with handguns.

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, increasing from 10% in 1976 to 17% in 1998. The percentage of homicides involving multiple victims increased gradually during the last two decades from just under 3% of all homicides to 4% in 1998.

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.

The homicide victimization rates of cities with a population of 1 million or more have plummeted to the lowest level in the past two decades. Cities of 250,000 to 499,999 had homicide rates that were the equivalent to the rates of the largest cities. 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. Small cities, suburbs and rural areas experienced relatively little change in homicide prevalence.

Compared to the national average, murder 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.

The number of homicides cleared by arrest of the perpetrator has been declining until recently: 69% of all homicides were cleared in 1998 compared to 79% in 1976.

New on the Homicide Trends in the United States website!

All charts, tables and other information have been updated with the 1998 preliminary and 1997 final Supplementary Homicide Reports data and the 1998 Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted data. In addition, most tables which support the graphics now contain the numbers on which the percentages and rates are based.

A section on eldercide, homicides of persons age 65 and older, has been added. Also, 18 new charts including two animations have been added to the sections on Trends by age, Infanticide, Intimate homicide, Multiple victim and offender homicides, Circumstances, Weapons trends, Regional trends, City trends, and Clearances.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics is the statistical agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. Jan M. Chaiken, Ph.D., is director.

BJS Crime Data Briefs present data on topics of broad current interest in condensed form.

This report was written by James Alan Fox, BJS Visiting Fellow, and Marianne W. Zawitz of BJS. Ms. Zawitz produced the report, and Cathy Maston and Matthew Durose verified the data. The report was reviewed and prepared for printing by Jayne Robinson, supervised by Tom Hester.

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Organized for easy access, this section of the BJS website contains sections with graphics, text and data concerning these 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 presented in text format that can be imported into most spreadsheet and charting programs. 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 will be available from the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data at the University of Michigan, 1-800-999-0960. The archive can also be accessed through the BJS website.

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 174433, \$16.20 postage and handling.