



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

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With the largest cities leading the way, the Nation's murder rate in 1997 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 20.3 per 100,000 last year. 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 new 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 32 graphics and supporting tables and includes the recently released 1997 data.

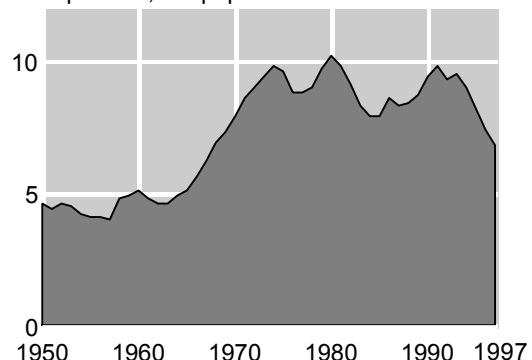
Other major findings include —

The Nation's murder rate was 6.8 per 100,000 population in 1997 compared to 4.6 per 100,000 population in 1950.

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

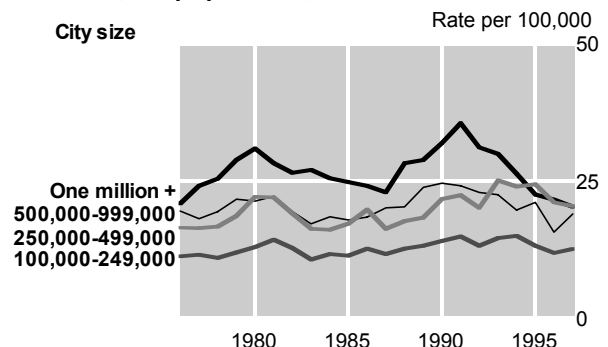
Homicide victimization, 1950-97

Rate per 100,000 population



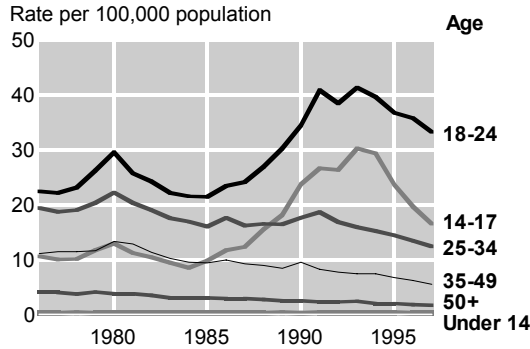
Changes in homicide trends have been driven by changes in homicide rates in the largest American cities

Homicide victimization rates for cities over 100,000 population, 1976-97



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, 1976-97

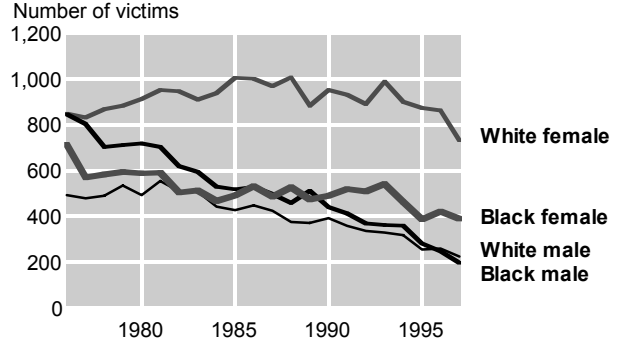


Homicide victimization and offending rates for younger groups — teenagers and young adults — rose sharply in the late 1980's and early 1990's before falling more recently, but the rates for those 25 years old and older have declined steadily during the last two decades. Despite the encouraging improvement 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, 1976-97



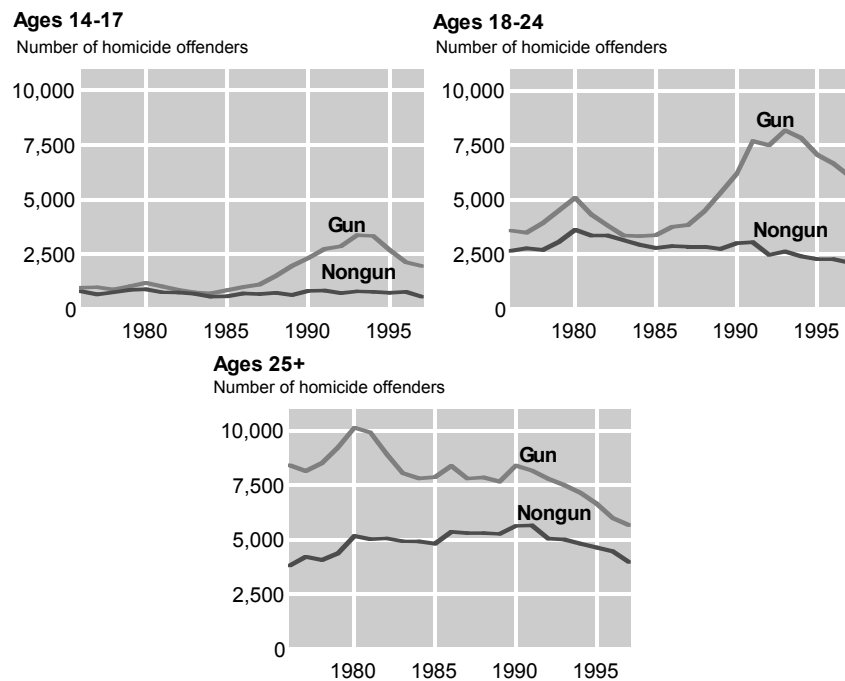
males in the late 1980's and 1990's before recent declines in both categories.

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 crimes 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.

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, 1976-97



There has been a decline in homicide of intimates, especially male victims. The number of husbands, wives, boyfriends and girlfriends killed in each race and gender group has fallen over the last two decades: among black female victims by 46%, black males by 77%, white males by 55% and white females by 14%.

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

Eighty-five 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 annual number of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty declined mostly because of the decline in handgun murders.

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 16% in 1997. The percentage of homicides involving multiple victims increased gradually during the last two decades from just under 3% of all homicides to 4% in 1997.

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.

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

The number of homicides cleared by arrest of the perpetrator has been declining: 66% of all homicides were cleared in 1997 compared to 79% in 1976.

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 Rhonda Keith, Tina Dorsey, and Tom Hester verified the data. The report was reviewed and prepared for printing by Yvonne Boston, supervised by Marilyn Marbrook.

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Homicide Trends in the United States

Set your Internet web browser to this location:
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/homtrnd.htm

Organized for easy access, this section of the BJS Internet site 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
 Intimates
 Law enforcement officers
Multiple victims and offenders
Circumstances
Weapons trends
Regional trends
Trends by city size
Clearances

The data for each of the 32 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 web site.

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" web site, NCJ 174433, \$10.60 postage and handling.