



# Department of Justice



## Office of Justice Programs

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BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS  
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### **HOMICIDES FALL TO LOWEST RATE IN FOUR DECADES**

WASHINGTON – The nation’s homicide rate fell to 4.8 homicides per 100,000 U.S. residents in 2010, its lowest level in four decades, the Bureau of Justice Statistics announced today. Much of the decline was in the nation’s largest cities, those with a population of one million or more, where the homicide rate dropped dramatically from 35.5 homicides per 100,000 U.S. residents in 1991 to a low of 11.9 per 100,000 in 2008.

The sharp increase in homicides from the mid-1980s through the early 1990s, and much of the subsequent decline, is attributable to gun violence by teens (age 14 to 17) and young adults (age 18 to 24). Despite the recent decline, the number of gun homicides committed by teens and young adults in 2008 remained similar to the counts of the mid-1980s.

Most murders were intraracial. From 1980 through 2008, 84 percent of white homicide victims were murdered by whites and 93 percent of black victims were murdered by blacks. During this same period, blacks were disproportionately represented among homicide victims and offenders. Blacks were six times more likely than whites to be homicide victims and seven times more likely than whites to commit homicide.

The number of homicides known to involve adult or juvenile gang violence has quadrupled since 1980, increasing from about 220 homicides in 1980 to 960 homicides in 2008. From 1980 to 2008, gang violence increased from one percent to six percent of all homicides. During this same period, gun involvement in gang-related homicides increased from 73 percent to 92 percent.

Among the report’s other findings:

- From 1980 to 2008, nearly a quarter of the victims (24 percent) of gang-related homicides were juveniles (under age 18). Juveniles were also a fifth (19 percent) of persons killed by family members and a fifth (18 percent) of persons killed during the commission of a sex-related crime.
- In 2008, two of every five female murder victims were killed by an intimate. Among female murder victims for whom the victim/offender relationships were known, 45.3 percent were killed by an intimate whereas only 4.9 percent of male homicide victims were killed by an intimate.

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- Overall, more than two-thirds of victims murdered by a spouse or ex-spouse were killed by a gun. Boyfriends were more likely than any other group of intimates (50 percent) to be killed by a knife and girlfriends were more likely than any other group of intimates (15 percent) to be killed by force involving hands, fists or feet.
- Most homicide victims under age 5 were killed by a parent. In 2008, 59% of young child homicide victims were killed by a parent, 10% were killed by some other family member and 30% were murdered by a friend or acquaintance.
- From 1980 to 2010, the number of reported law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty dropped by 46 percent, from a reported 104 law enforcement officers killed in 1980 to 56 reported law enforcement deaths in 2010.
- Most justifiable homicides by police were the result of attacks on officers, accounting for 64 percent of these homicides in 2008. The most frequent circumstance cited for justifiable homicides committed by citizens was the disruption of a crime in progress (55 percent of justifiable homicides by a citizen in 2008) or when a citizen was attacked (41 percent of justifiable homicides by a citizen in 2008).

Most of these findings are based on the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR), which collects yearly supplementary data regarding homicides committed in the United States. From 1980 to 2008, contributing agencies provided supplementary data for 508,568 of the estimated 565,636 murders. The FBI's annual report, *Crime in the United States*, provides additional summary data for 2009 and 2010.

The report, *Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008* (NCJ 236018), was written by BJS statisticians Alexia Cooper and Erica L. Smith. Following publication, the report can be found at <http://www.bjs.gov>.

For additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics' statistical reports and programs, please visit the BJS website at <http://www.bjs.gov/>.

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The Office of Justice Programs (OJP), headed by Assistant Attorney General Laurie O. Robinson, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice, and assist victims. OJP has six components: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. More information about OJP can be found at <http://www.ojp.gov>.