Trends in Homicide

What You Need to Know

October 2026

From 2019 to 2020, the U.S. experienced an historic 30% increase in its homicide rate. By the second half of 2022, the rate began to decline, and in 2025, it fell to 4.1 per 100,000 people, the lowest level recorded in public health and law enforcement data since at least 1900.

This brief brings together data from multiple sources to place the recent decline in context. It examines long- and short-term trends, how homicide is concentrated across the country, victimization and offending by race, age, and sex, and changes in firearms, circumstances, victim-offender relationships, and clearance rates.[1]

Key Takeaways

- In 30 American cities with publicly available data through June 2026, the average homicide rate in the first half of the year was 18% lower than during the same period in 2025, 31% lower than in 2019, and **51% lower** than the recent peak in the first half of 2022.
- Homicide is highly concentrated in certain places. Out of all 3,144 counties in the U.S., about **20% account for 90% of the nation's homicides**. The city of Baltimore alone accounted for 8.8% of the net decline in homicide from 2019 to 2025.
- From 2000 to 2024, the cross-national homicide rate **fell 26%**. Unlike the U.S. rate, the global rate did not experience a sharp increase from 2020 to 2022.
- Despite large swings in the nation's overall homicide rate during the past few years, **several characteristics of homicide have changed relatively little** in the past 50 years. These include its concentration in particular places and among younger people and men, as well as the nature of relationships between victims and offenders.
- **The national homicide clearance rate rose** from 50% in 2021 to 69% in 2025, its

highest level since 1988.

Definitions and Sources

For simplicity, this brief uses homicide and murder interchangeably, although the measures are not identical. The FBI defines murder and non-negligent manslaughter as the "willful (nonnegligent) killing of one human being by another." The CDC classifies deaths as homicides when they result from the intentional use of force, including self-defense. CDC homicide counts are typically higher than FBI murder counts, partly due to estimation methods used by the FBI, although the size and direction of the gap have varied over time.

From 1900 to 1959, homicide rates were based on medical and vital statistics that were compiled by Randolph Roth, a professor of History and Sociology at The Ohio State University, and published in American Homicide.[2] These estimates rely primarily on death-registration records and are widely regarded as the most reliable source available before modern national crime reporting began. Since 1960, homicide rates have been drawn from the FBI's Crime in the United States (CIUS) series.[3]

Trends in Homicide Rates

Recent Homicide Trends

Figure 1 displays the average six-month and monthly homicide rates in the 30 large American cities for which incident data were available through June 2026.

- **Change 2025-2026 (January to June):** The average reported homicide rate in the first half of 2026 was 18% lower than during the same period in 2025, representing 215 fewer homicides in the cities that reported data.
- **Change 2019-2026 (January to June):** Across the sample cities, the 2026 average homicide rate was about 31% lower than in 2019.
- **Change from peak (January to June):** Over the past nine years, the highest average homicide rate was in 2022. The 2026 rate was 51% lower than the 2022 rate.
- **Monthly rates:** July 2020 had the highest monthly homicide rate (2.6 per 100,000 people) during the observation period. This rate was 53% higher than the July 2019 rate

and 160% higher than the June 2026 rate.

Figure 1. Six-Month and Monthly Homicide Rates, January 2018 – June 2026

Historical Homicide Trends

Figure 2 shows the homicide rate from 1900 to 2025. After an historic 31% increase in homicides from 2019 to 2020, the largest single-year jump since 1900, the homicide has fallen sharply to a historic low.

- **Change 2020 -2025:** The homicide rate in 2020 (6.6) was the highest national homicide rate since 1997. The national homicide rate in 2025 was 38% lower than the 2020 rate.
- **Change 1980-2025:** In 1980, the homicide rate peaked at 10.2 per 100,000 people. The national homicide rate in 2025 was 60% lower than the 1980 rate.
- **Change 2014-2025:** In 2014, the homicide rate was at its prior historical low, 4.4 homicides per 100,000 people. The national homicide rate in 2025 was 7% lower than the 2014 rate.

Figure 2. Homicide Rate and Year-Over-Year Percent Change in Homicide, 1900-2025

Crime Concentration

Across the U.S.

Figure 3 shows how homicides were concentrated across U.S. counties during three periods: 2017 to 2019, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase in homicides; 2020 to 2022, when homicides rose and began to decline; and 2023 to 2025, as the decline accelerated. The chart is ordered from the highest homicide counties to the lowest homicide counties with publicly available data, with each successive county adding to a smaller share of the nation’s overall number of homicides. The analysis includes counties with at least 10

homicides in each of the three periods; the CDC does not include counties with lower homicide counts in the publicly available data.

- Of 3,144 counties and county equivalents in the U.S., 666 counties (or 21%) account for 9 out of every 10 homicides that occurred in the U.S. during these periods.[4]
- The concentration changed little over time; the 50 counties with the most homicides accounted for 48% to 50% of homicides in the sample in each period.
- Depending on the period, three to five counties accounted for more homicides than all counties not included in the sample (those with fewer than 10 homicides in a three-year period) because of their low incidence of homicide.

Figure 3. Cumulative Percentage of Homicide Incidents by County, 2017 – 2025

Top Contributors to the Homicide Decline

The U.S. recorded 16,501 homicides in 2019 and 14,085 homicides in 2025.[5] Figure 4 shows the top 20 jurisdictions that contributed to the national decline. The analysis compares homicide counts across roughly 9,000 local law enforcement agencies and calculates how much each jurisdiction's decline contributed to the overall national drop from 2019 to 2025. Baltimore accounted for the largest share, at 8.8%.[6]

Figure 4. Jurisdictions With the Largest Contributions to the National Homicide Decline, 2019–2025

Correction—October 22, 2026: Due to an error in national data sources, Louisville, KY has been removed from this figure.

Cross-National Homicide Trends

Figure 5 compares changes in global and U.S. homicide rates from 2000 to 2024, the latest year with broad international data coverage. The year 2000 is the first available year in the cross-national data source and is displayed as a percentage change to allow for easier comparisons between homicide trends in the U.S. and other nations. The cross-national

homicide rate was 26% lower in 2024 than in 2000, compared with a 7% decline in the U.S. rate. Unlike the trend seen in the U.S., the cross-national homicide rate did not experience a sharp increase from 2020 to 2022.

Figure 5. Percentage Change in Cross-National and U.S. Homicide Rates, 2000 – 2024

Demographic Trends

Race

Figure 6 shows the share and rate of homicide victimization among Black and White people from 1976 to 2025. Both categories include Hispanic and non-Hispanic victims. Other racial groups are not shown because they accounted for a small share, between 1% and 3%, of homicide victims in a given year.

- **Shares:** From 1976 to the late 1980s, White people made up a larger share of homicide victims than Black people. The Black share peaked at 60% in 2020 and fell to 57% by 2025.
- **Rates:** From 1976 to 2025, the Black homicide victimization rate was, on average, eight times higher than the White rate. The gap was largest in 2020, when the Black victimization rate was 10 times higher than the White rate. White victimization rates are shown on a separate tab to make changes over time easier to see.

Figure 6. Homicide Victimization Trends by Race, 1976 – 2025

Figure 7 shows the share and rate of homicide offending among Black and White people from 1976 to 2025.

- **Shares:** From 1976 to the late 1980s, White people accounted for a larger share of homicide offenders compared to Black people. The shares were roughly equal from the late 1980s through 2010. From 2016 to 2025, the Black share was about 10 percentage points higher than the White share.

- **Rates:** From 1976 to 2025, the Black homicide offending rate was, on average, about eight times higher than the White rate. The gap was largest in 1993, when the Black offending rate was roughly nine times higher than the White rate. The White offending rate is shown on a separate tab to make changes over time easier to see.

Figure 7. Homicide Offending Trends by Race, 1976 – 2025

Age

Figure 8 shows homicide victimization shares and rates by age. In a typical year from 1976 to 2025, 92% of homicide victims were between ages 14 and 49.

- **Shares:** The share of homicide victims by age groups shown remained relatively consistent over time. People aged 18 to 24 accounted for about 30% to 40% of victims, while the majority of victims were 18 to 34. The share of victims aged 35 to 49 reached a high of 23% in 2025.
- **Rates:** Homicide victimization rates were lower in 2025 than in 1976 for all age groups shown. In 2025, rates among people aged 18 to 34 were at their the lowest levels since 1976 following steep declines beginning in 2022. For people aged 18 to 24, victimization rates were 48% lower in 2025 than in 1976; rates were 59% lower for adults aged 25 to 34.

Figure 8. Homicide Victimization Rates by Age, 1976 – 2025

Figure 9 shows homicide offending shares and rates by age. In a typical year from 1976 to 2025, about 80% of homicide offending involved people ages 14 to 49.

- **Shares:** The share of homicide offending across the age groups shown remained relatively consistent, with 18- to 24-year-olds accounting for about 25% to 30% of total offending. Since 2019, the offending share among people aged 35 to 49 has increased; by 2024, it had surpassed the share among those aged 25 to 34.
- **Rates:** Homicide offending rates were higher among people younger than 35. Rates were lower in 2025 than in 1976 for all age groups shown, and rates among people

aged 18 to 34 hit their lowest point of the study period in 2025, following steep declines that began in 2022. For people aged 18 to 24, offending rates were 33% lower in 2025 than in 1976; for those 25 to 34, rates were 51% lower.

Figure 9. Homicide Offending Rates by Age, 1976 – 2025

Sex

Figure 10 shows the shares of homicide victimization and offending accounted for by males from 1976 to 2025.

- **Victimization:** Males consistently accounted for about 80% of homicide victims.
- **Offending:** Males accounted for 86% to 91% of homicide offenders over the period.

Figure 10. Share of Homicide Victimization and Offending by Sex, 1976 – 2025

Situational and Clearance Trends

Figure 11 shows the share of homicides involving a firearm. Firearms were involved in a majority of homicides throughout the study period, with the share ranging from a low of 59% in several years during the 1980s to a high of 77% in 2021. Since 2015, at least 71% of homicides recorded each year have involved a firearm.

Figure 11. Share of Homicides Involving a Firearm, 1976 – 2025

Figure 12 shows the share of homicides by victim-offender relationship. The distribution of relationship types remained generally consistent over time, with friends or acquaintances accounting for the largest share, at about 50%.

Figure 12. Share of Homicides by Victim-Offender Relationship, 1976 – 2025

Figure 13 shows the share of homicides by circumstance. From 1976 to 2025, about 50% of homicides were associated with arguments, and roughly 20% occurred during the commission of other felony offenses, most commonly drug- or robbery-related crimes. The remaining 30% involved other, unspecified, or unknown circumstances.

Figure 13. Share of Homicides by Circumstance, 1976 – 2025

Clearance Rates

Figure 14 shows the clearance rates for homicides from 1964 to 2025. A homicide is considered cleared when law enforcement resolves the case through an arrest or, in a smaller share of cases, through "exceptional means." Exceptional clearances occur when police identify the person responsible and have enough evidence to make an arrest, but circumstances outside their control prevent the arrest or prosecution, such as the death of a suspect.

- **1964-2021:** Homicide clearance rates were highest in the mid-1960s at roughly 82% to 83%, then generally declined. Since 1986, the rate has not exceeded 70%, and by 2021 it had fallen to a low of 50%.
- **2022-2025:** Clearance rates rose to 52% in 2022 and 58% in 2023. In 2025, the rate reached 69%, its highest level since 1988.

Figure 14. Homicide Clearance Rates, 1964 – 2025

Acknowledgements

Ernesto Lopez was the author of this report, with support from Stephanie Kennedy and other members of the Council on Criminal Justice team.

The author thanks James Alan Fox for providing an updated version of the imputed Supplementary Homicide Report covering 1976 to 2025.

This brief was produced with support from Fund for a Safer Future, Arnold Ventures, The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T.

MacArthur Foundation, the Kaiser Permanente Center for Gun Violence Research and Education, and the Public Welfare Foundation. This work was also supported by The Just Trust, Georgia Power Foundation, and other general operating contributors.

Suggested Citation

Lopez, E. (2026). *Trends in homicide: What you need to know.* Council on Criminal Justice. https://counciloncj.org/homicide-trends-report/.

Endnotes

[1] Several of the analyses rely on data provided by James Alan Fox of Northeastern University. Professor Fox and his team created a modified version of the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports that adjusts for much of the missing information. At the time of publication, the data were not publicly available, but will eventually be placed at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan.

[2] Roth, R. (2009). *American homicide.* Harvard University Press. https://www.hup.harvard.edu/books/9780674064119

[3] Homicide Rates from 1900-1959 were reproduced from the book American Homicide (Roth, 2009). For 1960 to 1980, data were obtained from the Disaster Center, which digitized historical FBI crime rate tables that predate the FBI's provision of downloadable datasets. From 1981 through 2025, homicide rates are taken directly from the FBI's Crime in the United States (Table 1) reports, using the most recent releases available.

[4] The five boroughs of New York City are independent counties, but they are collapsed into one county for
this analysis.

[5] See Table 1: Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2026). *Crime in the United States.* Crime Data Explorer.

https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/home

[6] Jurisdictions that were missing homicide data for 2019 or 2025 were not included in this analysis.