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Violence Policy Center

Black Homicide Victimization in the United States

An Analysis of 2016 Homicide Data

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THE EPIDEMIC OF BLACK HOMICIDE VICTIMIZATION

The devastation homicide inflicts on black teens and adults is a national crisis, yet it is all too often ignored outside of affected communities.

This study examines the problem of black homicide victimization at the state level by analyzing unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) data for black homicide victimization submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).¹ The information used for this report is for the year 2016 and is the most recent data available. This is the first analysis of the 2016 data on black homicide victims to offer breakdowns of cases in the 10 states with the highest black homicide victimization rates and the first to rank the states by the rate of black homicide victims.

It is important to note that the SHR data used in this report comes from law enforcement reporting at the local level. While there are coding guidelines followed by the law enforcement agencies, the amount of information submitted to the SHR system, and the interpretation that results in the information submitted (for example, gang involvement) will vary from agency to agency. While this study utilizes the best and most recent data available, it is limited by the quantity and degree of detail in the information submitted.²

NATIONAL DATA

According to the FBI SHR data, in 2016 there were 7,756 black homicide victims in the United States. The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 20.44 per 100,000. For that year, the overall national homicide rate was 5.10 per 100,000. For whites, the national homicide rate was 2.96 per 100,000. Additional information contained in the FBI SHR data on black homicide victimization is below.

SEX

Of the 7,756 black homicide victims, 6,748 (87 percent) were male, 1,003 (13 percent) were female, and five were of unknown sex (less than one percent). The homicide rate for black male victims was 37.12 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for male homicide victims was 8.29 per 100,000. For white male homicide victims it was 4.39 per 100,000. The homicide rate for female black victims was 5.07 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for female homicide victims was 1.97 per 100,000. For white female homicide victims it was 1.55 per 100,000.

- 1 The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program collects basic information on serious crimes from participating police agencies and records supplementary information about the circumstances of homicides in its unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR). Submitted monthly, supplementary data consists of: the age, sex, race, and ethnicity of both victims and offenders; the types of weapons used; the relationship of victims to offenders; and, the circumstances of the homicides. According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program, supplementary data are provided on only a subset of homicide cases. Additionally, SHR data are updated throughout the year as homicide reports are forwarded by state UCR programs.
- 2 In 2016, as in years past, the state of Florida did not submit any data to the FBI Supplementary Homicide Report. Also in 2016, data from Alabama was not available from the FBI. Data from Florida and Alabama was not requested individually because the difference in collection techniques would create a bias in the study results.

AGE

Five hundred one black homicide victims (seven percent) were less than 18 years old and 146 black homicide victims (two percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.

MOST COMMON WEAPONS

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of black victims (6,505 out of 7,442) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 66 percent (4,319 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 540 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 193 victims killed by bodily force, and 117 victims killed by a blunt object. In comparison, 67 percent of white victims and 78 percent of victims of all races were killed with guns.

VICTIM/OFFENDER RELATIONSHIP

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 75 percent of black victims (2,297 out of 3,054) were killed by someone they knew. Seven hundred fifty-seven victims were killed by strangers.

CIRCUMSTANCE

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 71 percent (3,051 out of 4,315) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 48 percent (1,470 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender, and 17 percent (523 homicides) were reported to be gang-related.

There were 116 incidents reported as justifiable homicides of black victims killed by law enforcement in 2016. The SHR does not specifically identify killings by law enforcement that are not ruled justifiable. In the wake of controversial incidents of black citizens killed by law enforcement, media reports have focused on the lack of reliable statistics on lethal incidents involving law enforcement. In December 2015, the FBI announced that it would dramatically expand its data collection on violent police encounters by 2017.³ In October 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice outlined a plan to improve the collection of law enforcement use of force data.⁴

STATE RANKINGS

In 2016, the national black homicide victimization rate was 20.44 per 100,000. For that year, Missouri ranked first as the state with the highest black homicide victimization rate. Its rate of 46.21 per 100,000 was more than double the national average for black homicide victimization. The 10 states with the highest black homicide victimization rates are listed in the following chart. In order to ensure rankings contain stable rates, states with 10 or fewer black homicide victims were not included in the state rankings for 2016. These victims are included in the U.S. total and rate. While not ranked, the number of deaths and black homicide victimization rates for these states are included in Appendix Two.

Additional information for each of these states can be found in Appendix One, including: age and sex of victims; most common weapons used; relationship of victim to offender; and, the circumstances of the homicides. According to the SHR data, for states with more than 10 victims, 17 states had a black homicide victimization rate higher than the national per capita rate of 20.44 per 100,000.

For an alphabetical listing of all states that submitted data to the FBI, please see Appendix Two.

³ "FBI to sharply expand system for tracking fatal police shootings," *The Washington Post*, December 8, 2015.

⁴ "Justice Department Outlines Plan to Enable Nationwide Collection of Use of Force Data," Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, October 13, 2016 (<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-outlines-plan-enable-nationwide-collection-use-force-data>).

NUMBER OF BLACK HOMICIDE VICTIMS AND RATES BY STATE IN 2016, RANKED BY RATE

Ranking	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
1	Missouri	333	46.21
2	Wisconsin	144	37.57
3	West Virginia	24	36.86
4	Illinois*	685	36.40
5	Indiana	205	31.93
6	Kentucky	106	28.85
7	Michigan	402	28.55
8	Tennessee	323	28.41
9	Louisiana	423	27.72
10	Pennsylvania	415	27.50

* Prior to 2016, Chicago and Rockford were the sole reporting jurisdictions that submitted homicide data for inclusion in the FBI Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR). Beginning in 2016, all Illinois law enforcement agencies were required by state law to submit homicide data for inclusion in the SHR.

CONCLUSION

Blacks in the United States are disproportionately affected by homicide. For the year 2016, blacks represented 13 percent of the nation’s population, yet accounted for 51 percent of all homicide victims.⁵

The devastation homicide inflicts on black teens and adults is a national crisis that should be a top priority for policymakers to address. An important part of ending our nation’s gun violence epidemic will involve reducing homicides in the African-American community.

In addition, individuals living in communities where violence is prevalent are at increased risk for a broad range of negative health and behavior outcomes. An increased understanding of how trauma resulting from community violence influences development, health, and behavior can lead to improvements in the way many social services are delivered as well as policy changes at the local and federal levels.⁶

For black victims of homicide, like all victims of homicide, guns — usually handguns — are far and away the number-one murder tool. Successful efforts to reduce America’s black homicide toll, like America’s homicide toll as a whole, must put a focus on reducing access and exposure to firearms.

5 FBI Supplementary Homicide Report 2016, U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

6 For more information on trauma and community violence, see the July 2017 Violence Policy Center study *The Relationship Between Community Violence and Trauma: How Violence Affects Learning, Health, and Behavior* (<http://www.vpc.org/studies/trauma17.pdf>).

Appendix One: Additional Information for the 10 States with the Highest Rates of Black Homicide Victimization

Missouri

There were 333 black homicide victims in Missouri in 2016.

The homicide rate among black victims in Missouri was 46.21 per 100,000 in 2016.

Ranked 1st in the United States

Age	Twenty homicide victims (6 percent) were less than 18 years old and 2 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Sex	Out of 333 homicide victims, 286 were male, 46 were female, and 1 was of unknown sex.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 94 percent of victims (302 out of 322) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 47 percent (141 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 148 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 12 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 2 victims killed by bodily force, and 3 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 72 percent of victims (75 out of 104) were killed by someone they knew. Twenty-nine victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 60 percent (74 out of 124) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 77 percent (57 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Wisconsin

There were 144 black homicide victims in Wisconsin in 2016.

The homicide rate among black victims in Wisconsin was 37.57 per 100,000 in 2016.

Ranked 2nd in the United States

Age	Nine homicide victims (6 percent) were less than 18 years old and 3 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Sex	Out of 144 homicide victims, 124 were male and 20 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 91 percent of victims (128 out of 140) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 75 percent (96 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 27 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 9 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, and 1 victim killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 66 percent of victims (45 out of 68) were killed by someone they knew. Twenty-three victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 71 percent (53 out of 75) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 70 percent (37 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

West Virginia

There were 24 black homicide victims in West Virginia in 2016.

The homicide rate among black victims in West Virginia was 36.86 per 100,000 in 2016.

Ranked 3rd in the United States

Age	Two homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 26 years old.
Sex	Out of 24 homicide victims, 21 were male and 3 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 100 percent of victims (20 out of 20) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 65 percent (13 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 7 victims killed with firearms, type not stated.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 67 percent of victims (6 out of 9) were killed by someone they knew. Three victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 100 percent (12 out of 12) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 33 percent (4 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Illinois

There were 685 black homicide victims in Illinois in 2016.

The homicide rate among black victims in Illinois was 36.40 per 100,000 in 2016.

Prior to 2016, Chicago and Rockford were the sole reporting jurisdictions that submitted homicide data for inclusion in the FBI Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR). Beginning in 2016, all Illinois law enforcement agencies were required by state law to submit homicide data for inclusion in the SHR.

Ranked 4th in the United States

Age	Sixty-three homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 5 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 28 years old.
Sex	Out of 685 homicide victims, 626 were male and 59 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 93 percent of victims (625 out of 670) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 93 percent (583 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 38 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 27 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 9 victims killed by bodily force, and 4 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 70 percent of victims (89 out of 127) were killed by someone they knew. Thirty-eight victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 88 percent (450 out of 514) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 11 percent (51 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Indiana

There were 205 black homicide victims in Indiana in 2016.

The homicide rate among black victims in Indiana was 31.93 per 100,000 in 2016.

Ranked 5th in the United States

Age	Nine homicide victims (4 percent) were less than 18 years old and 3 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.
Sex	Out of 205 homicide victims, 184 were male and 21 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 93 percent of victims (186 out of 201) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 58 percent (107 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 70 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 8 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 2 victims killed by bodily force, and 2 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 94 percent of victims (62 out of 66) were killed by someone they knew. Four victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 56 percent (57 out of 102) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 53 percent (30 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Kentucky

There were 106 black homicide victims in Kentucky in 2016.

The homicide rate among black victims in Kentucky was 28.85 per 100,000 in 2016.

Ranked 6th in the United States

Age	Six homicide victims (6 percent) were less than 18 years old and 1 victim (1 percent) was 65 years of age or older. The average age was 32 years old.
Sex	Out of 106 homicide victims, 88 were male and 18 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 88 percent of victims (90 out of 102) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 62 percent (56 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 29 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 7 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 2 victims killed by bodily force, and 3 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 73 percent of victims (45 out of 62) were killed by someone they knew. Seventeen victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 61 percent (35 out of 57) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 43 percent (15 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Michigan

There were 402 black homicide victims in Michigan in 2016.

The homicide rate among black victims in Michigan was 28.55 per 100,000 in 2016.

Ranked 7th in the United States

Age	Thirty-one homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 3 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Sex	Out of 402 homicide victims, 343 were male and 59 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 91 percent of victims (336 out of 371) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 41 percent (139 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 183 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 23 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 8 victims killed by bodily force, and 2 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 83 percent of victims (85 out of 102) were killed by someone they knew. Seventeen victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 78 percent (100 out of 128) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 60 percent (60 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Tennessee

There were 323 black homicide victims in Tennessee in 2016.

The homicide rate among black victims in Tennessee was 28.41 per 100,000 in 2016.

Ranked 8th in the United States

Age	Twenty homicide victims (6 percent) were less than 18 years old and 6 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Sex	Out of 323 homicide victims, 276 were male and 47 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (254 out of 291) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 48 percent (122 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 122 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 23 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 7 victims killed by bodily force, and 6 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 74 percent of victims (139 out of 188) were killed by someone they knew. Forty-nine victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 75 percent (114 out of 151) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 60 percent (68 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Louisiana

There were 423 black homicide victims in Louisiana in 2016.

The homicide rate among black victims in Louisiana was 27.72 per 100,000 in 2016.

Ranked 9th in the United States

Age	Thirty-seven homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 10 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Sex	Out of 423 homicide victims, 369 were male, 53 were female, and 1 was of unknown sex.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 92 percent of victims (379 out of 410) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 52 percent (196 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 159 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 17 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 6 victims killed by bodily force, and 2 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 91 percent of victims (162 out of 178) were killed by someone they knew. Sixteen victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 65 percent (158 out of 243) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 51 percent (80 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Pennsylvania

There were 415 black homicide victims in Pennsylvania in 2016.

The homicide rate among black victims in Pennsylvania was 27.50 per 100,000 in 2016.

Ranked 10th in the United States

Age	Nineteen homicide victims (5 percent) were less than 18 years old and 4 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.
Sex	Out of 415 homicide victims, 381 were male and 34 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 88 percent of victims (343 out of 392) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 85 percent (290 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 43 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 36 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 10 victims killed by bodily force, and 1 victim killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 84 percent of victims (107 out of 127) were killed by someone they knew. Twenty victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 45 percent (138 out of 306) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 71 percent (98 homicides) involved an argument between the victim and the offender.

United States

There were 7,756 black homicide victims in the United States in 2016.

The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 20.44 per 100,000 in 2016.

Age	Five hundred one homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 146 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Sex	Out of 7,756 homicide victims, 6,748 were male, 1,003 were female, and 5 were of unknown sex.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (6,505 out of 7,442) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 66 percent (4,319 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 1,866 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 540 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 193 victims killed by bodily force, and 117 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 75 percent of victims (2,297 out of 3,054) were killed by someone they knew. Seven hundred fifty-seven victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 71 percent (3,051 out of 4,315) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 48 percent (1,470 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Appendix Two: Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2016

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
	Alabama	N/A	N/A
*	Alaska	10	36.28
24	Arizona	54	15.95
12	Arkansas	117	24.95
15	California	574	22.59
29	Colorado	33	13.25
35	Connecticut	39	9.27
19	Delaware	43	19.93
	Florida	N/A	N/A
26	Georgia	514	15.56
*	Hawaii	4	12.97
*	Idaho	2	13.98
4	Illinois	685	36.40
5	Indiana	205	31.93
20	Iowa	23	19.86
22 (tie)	Kansas	29	16.14
6	Kentucky	106	28.85
9	Louisiana	423	27.72
*	Maine	0	0.00
16	Maryland	398	21.55
33	Massachusetts	61	10.32
7	Michigan	402	28.55
30	Minnesota	40	11.40
32	Mississippi	119	10.57
1	Missouri	333	46.21
*	Montana	0	0.00
27	Nebraska	14	14.59
14	Nevada	68	24.12
*	New Hampshire	2	9.81
18	New Jersey	267	19.95
17	New Mexico	11	21.11
31	New York	386	11.02

* In order to ensure rankings contain stable rates, states with 10 or fewer black homicide victims were not included in the state rankings for 2016. These victims are included in the U.S. total and rate.

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
28	North Carolina	325	14.43
*	North Dakota	2	8.91
13	Ohio	362	24.27
11	Oklahoma	81	26.61
*	Oregon	7	8.02
10	Pennsylvania	415	27.50
*	Rhode Island	9	10.52
22 (tie)	South Carolina	220	16.14
*	South Dakota	0	0.00
8	Tennessee	323	28.41
25	Texas	552	15.69
*	Utah	1	2.42
*	Vermont	0	0.00
21	Virginia	298	17.89
34	Washington	28	9.30
3	West Virginia	24	36.86
2	Wisconsin	144	37.57
*	Wyoming	3	40.43
U.S. Total		7,756	20.44

* In order to ensure rankings contain stable rates, states with 10 or fewer black homicide victims were not included in the state rankings for 2016. These victims are included in the U.S. total and rate.



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