

# When Men Murder Women

An Analysis of 2023 Homicide Data



**Violence Policy Center**

SEPTEMBER 2025

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Violence Policy Center (VPC) is a national nonprofit educational organization that conducts research and public education on violence in America and provides information and analysis to policymakers, journalists, advocates, and the general public.

This study was authored by VPC Public Health Analyst Terra Wiens, MPH.

*When Men Murder Women* was supported in part by a generous gift from Ellen Berman.

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# Introduction

Intimate partner violence against women is all too common and takes many forms. The most serious is homicide by a current or former intimate partner. Guns can easily turn domestic violence into domestic homicide. It has been well established that abuser access to a gun is one of the strongest risk factors of intimate partner violence (IPV)-related homicide.<sup>1,2</sup>

Studies show that female intimate partners are more likely to be murdered with a firearm compared to other weapons, demonstrating “the importance of reducing access to firearms in households affected by IPV.”<sup>3,4</sup> An analysis of female victims of homicides perpetrated by men between 2018 and 2021 found that firearms were the most commonly used weapon and were more commonly used in IPV-related homicides compared to non-IPV related homicides (65 percent compared to 57 percent).<sup>4</sup>

Guns are also often used in non-fatal domestic violence.<sup>5-7</sup> A study by Harvard School of Public Health researchers analyzed gun use at home and concluded that “hostile gun displays against family members may be more common than gun use in self-defense, and that hostile gun displays are often acts of domestic violence directed against women.”<sup>5</sup>

A woman must consider the risks of having a gun in her home, whether she has an abusive partner or not. While two thirds of women who own guns acquired them “primarily for protection against crime,” the results of a California analysis show that “purchasing a handgun provides no protection against homicide among women and is associated with an increase in their risk for intimate partner homicide.”<sup>8</sup> Multiple studies have found that the presence of a firearm in the home increases one’s risk for homicide.<sup>9-12</sup> Indeed, IPV-related homicides of female victims perpetrated by males are more likely to occur in the home compared to non-IPV related homicides (80 percent compared to 60 percent).<sup>4</sup>

While this study does not focus solely on domestic violence homicide or guns, it provides a stark reminder that domestic violence and guns make a deadly combination. According to reports submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), firearms are rarely used to kill criminals or stop crimes.<sup>13</sup> Instead, they are all too often used to inflict harm on the very people they were intended to protect.

This study uses 2023 crime data available from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)<sup>14</sup> as well as data from previous years<sup>15</sup> and examines instances involving one female homicide victim and one male offender. This is the exact scenario — the lone male attacker and the vulnerable woman — that is often used by the firearms industry and gun lobby to promote gun ownership among women.

# An Important Note About the Data

Since 1998, the Violence Policy Center (VPC) has published the annual report *When Men Murder Women*. The goal of the study is to present the reality of homicides committed by males against females in single victim/single offender incidents and reveal the role played by firearms in these deaths. A key element of the study throughout its 28-year history has been its ranking of the states with the 10 highest rates of females killed by males in single victim/single offender incidents and offering additional homicide victimization information for each of these states.

Unfortunately, in January of 2021, the FBI changed the way crime data are collected and reported, which has impacted the reliability of subsequent data.<sup>16</sup> That year, the FBI retired the Supplementary Homicide Reporting system (SHR) system and replaced it with the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). While it is expected that NIBRS will eventually provide crime data that is more comprehensive compared to the SHR, transitioning law enforcement agencies to this new data collection and reporting system has been slow and burdensome. As a result, beginning with 2021 data, the VPC has not been able to rank the states or offer state-level information for all 50 states.

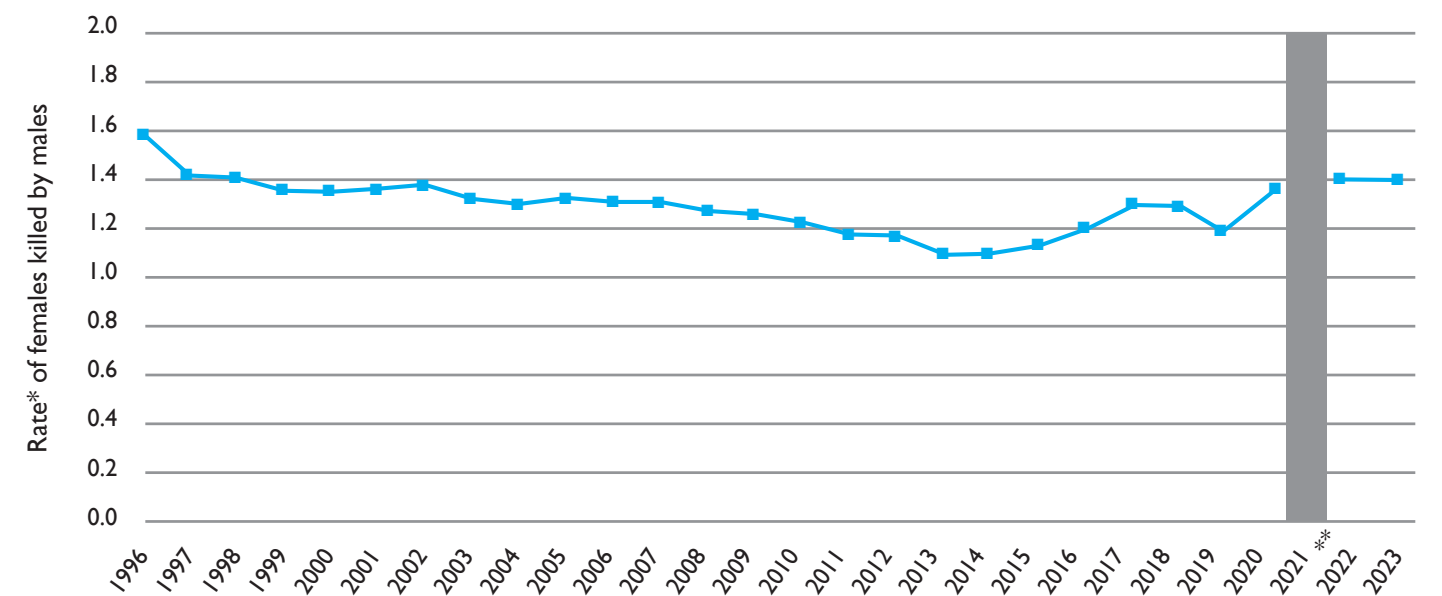
The Violence Policy Center hopes that at some point in the near future FBI crime data will once again be sufficiently robust to allow for a more complete analysis of the data, including state rankings

## SECTION ONE: NATIONAL DATA

In 2023, 2,412 females were killed by males in single victim/single offender incidents.

The rate of women murdered by men in single victim/single offender incidents dropped between 1996 and 2014 (Figure 1). The rate then increased from 1.2 per 100,000 in 2019 to 1.4 in 2022. The rate remained stable in 2023 at 1.4 per 100,000.

**Figure 1.** National rates\* of females killed by males, 1996 — 2023<sup>14-15</sup>



\* Rates are per 100,000 and not adjusted for age

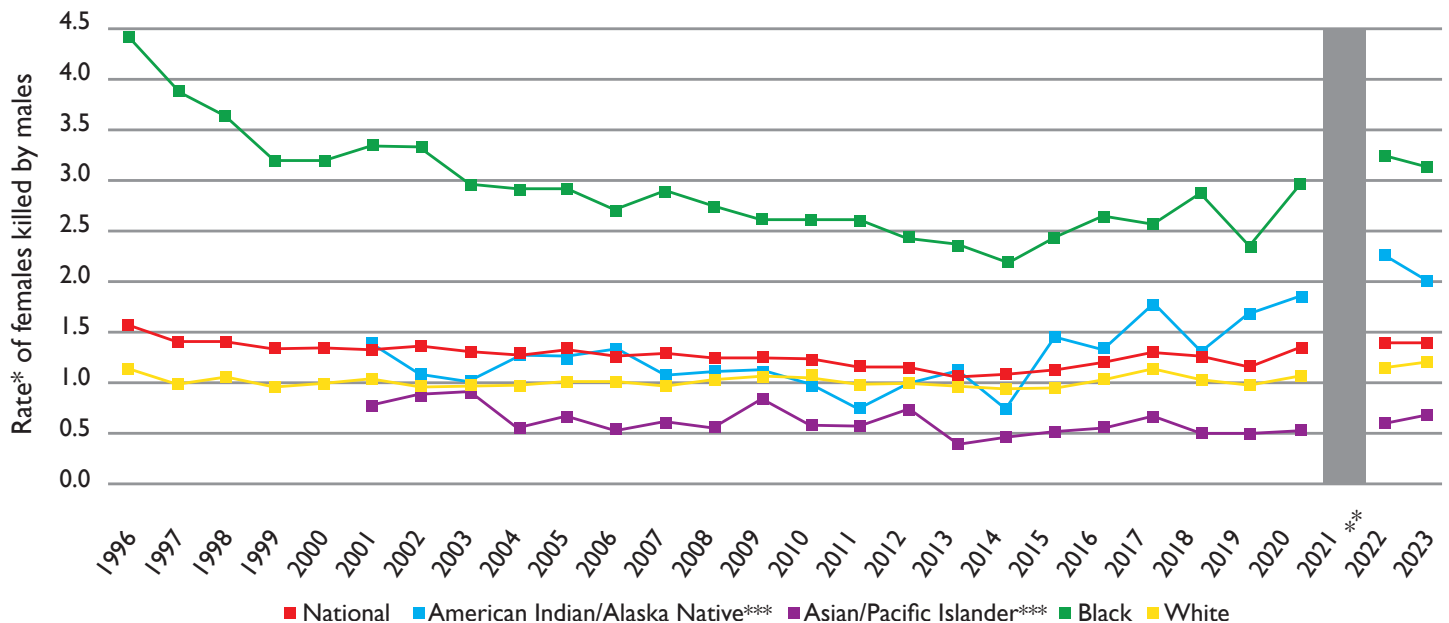
\*\* FBI crime data are not shown for 2021 due to unreliability of data caused by the initial transition between FBI crime data reporting systems (depicted by grey area of graph)

## Age and Race of Female Homicide Victims

In 2023, for single female victim/single male offender homicides where the age of the victim was reported (2,369 homicides), 5.4 percent of the victims were younger than 18 years old (127 victims) and 12.3 percent were 65 years of age or older (292 victims). The average age of female homicide victims was 41.3 years old. Homicides in which race was identified (2,331 victims) included: 45 American Indian or Alaskan Native females; 79 Asian or Pacific Islander females; 733 Black females; and 1,474 white females.

Overall, Black females were murdered by males at a rate (3.1 per 100,000) two and a half times as high as white females (1.2 per 100,000, Figure 2). American Indian and Alaskan Native females (2.0 per 100,000) were murdered by male offenders at a higher rate than white females, while Asian and Pacific Islander females were the least likely (0.7 per 100,000) females of any race to be murdered by a male offender. Nationally, the female homicide victimization rate was 1.4 per 100,000. Unfortunately, Hispanic ethnicity could not be determined on a national level because of the inadequacy of reporting and data collection.

**Figure 2. National rates\* of females killed by males by race, 1996 — 2023<sup>14-15</sup>**



\* Rates are per 100,000 and not adjusted for age

\*\* FBI crime data are not shown for 2021 due to unreliability of data caused by the initial transition between FBI crime data reporting systems (depicted by grey area of graph)

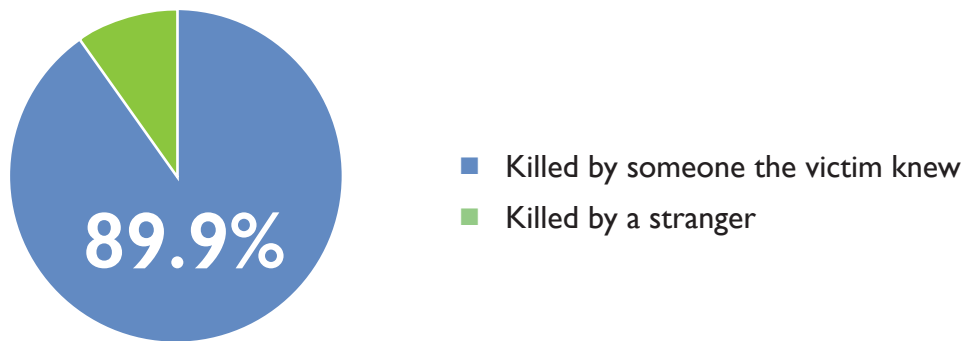
\*\*\* Race data for American Indian/Alaska Native and Asian/Pacific Islander populations were not reported in VPC's annual *When Men Murder Women* reports until 2001. Ethnicity data are unavailable on a national level due to the inadequacy of data collection and reporting.

## Victim to Offender Relationship

The relationship of victim to offender differs significantly between male and female victims of homicide. Compared to a man, a woman is far more likely to be killed by her spouse, an intimate acquaintance, or a family member than by a stranger.<sup>17</sup>

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 89.9 percent of female victims (1,861 out of 2,070) were murdered by someone they knew (Figure 3). Nearly nine times as many females were murdered by a male they knew (1,861 victims) than were killed by male strangers (209 victims) in single victim/single offender incidents in 2023. Of victims who knew their offenders, 57.1 percent (1,062 out of 1,861) were wives, common-law wives, ex-wives, or girlfriends of the offenders. (Ex-girlfriends cannot be included in the intimate acquaintance analysis because there is not a separate designation for ex-boyfriends or ex-girlfriends in the relationship category in the crime data.)

**Figure 3. Percentage of female homicide victims killed by a male they knew, 2023<sup>14</sup>**

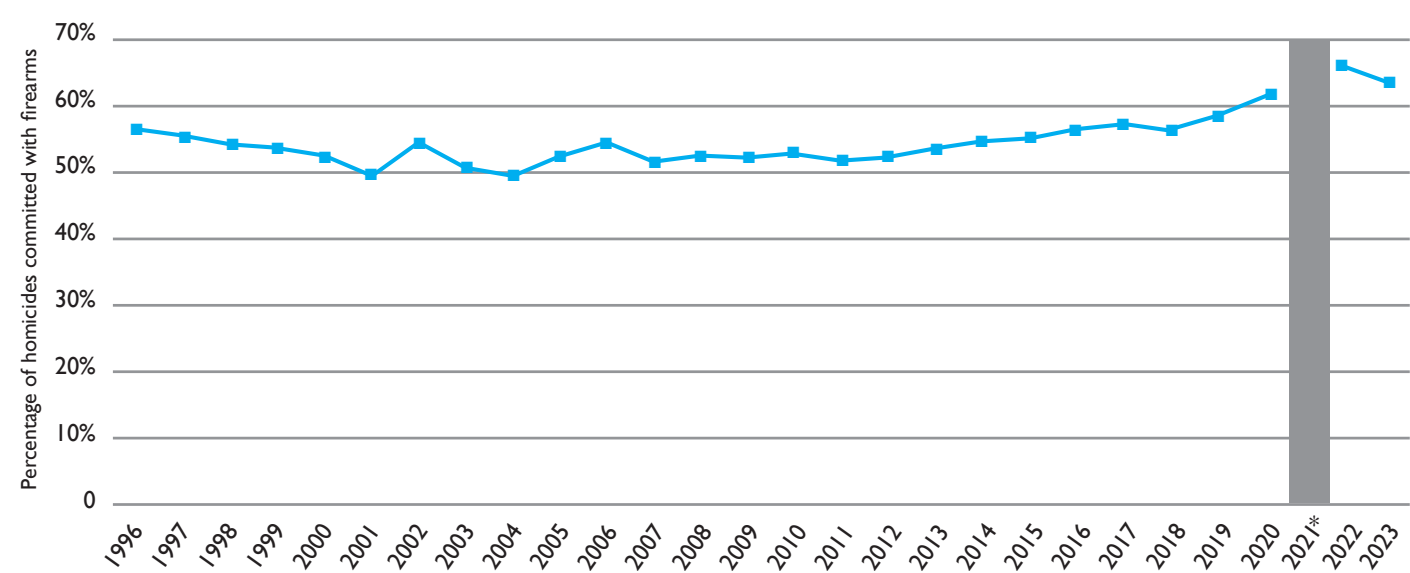


## Female Homicide Victims and Weapons

Firearms were the weapon most commonly used by males to murder females in 2023. For homicides in which the weapon could be identified, 64.9 percent of female victims (1,291 out of 1,990) were killed with a gun. The percentage of females killed by males with a firearm has increased substantially from 51.0 percent in 2011 to 66.0 percent in 2022 before dropping slightly to 64.9 percent in 2023 (Figure 4).

Of the female victims killed with a firearm, 51.7 percent were murdered by male intimates. The number of females shot and killed by their husband or intimate acquaintance (667 victims) was more than three times higher than the total number murdered by male strangers using all weapons combined (209 victims) in single victim/single offender incidents in 2023. In homicides where males used firearms to kill females, handguns were clearly the weapon of choice over rifles and shotguns. In 2023, 64.3 percent of female firearm homicide victims (830 out of 1,291) were killed with handguns.

Figure 4. Percentage of females killed by males with a firearm, 1996 — 2023<sup>14-15</sup>

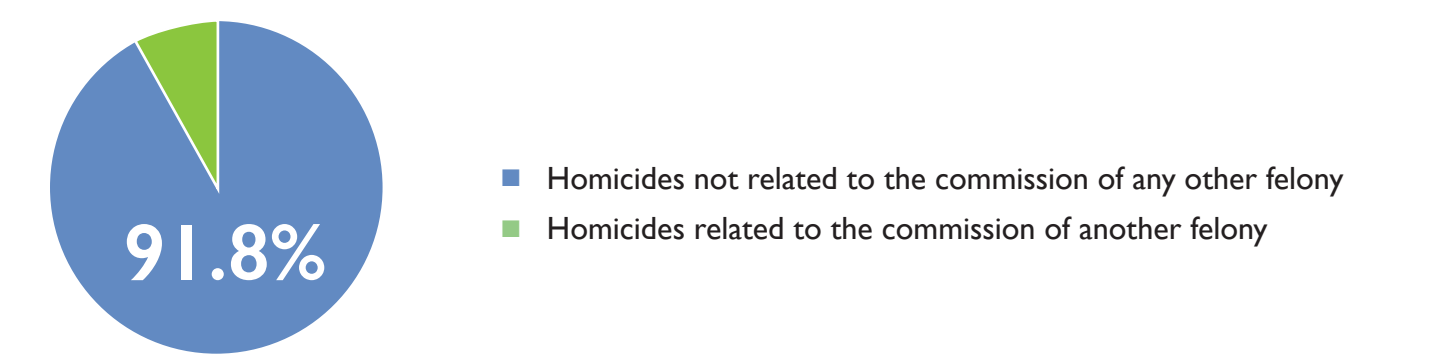


\* FBI crime data are not shown for 2021 due to unreliability of data caused by the initial transition between FBI crime data reporting systems (depicted by grey area of graph)

## Female Homicide Victims and Circumstance

The overwhelming majority of homicides of females by male offenders in single victim/single offender incidents in 2023 were not related to any other felony crime. Most often, females were killed by males in the course of an argument — most frequently with a firearm. In 2023 there were 1,794 incidents in which the circumstances of the homicide between the female victim and male offender in single victim/single offender incidents could be identified. Of these, 91.8 percent (1,646 out of 1,794) were not related to the commission of any other felony (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Percentage of female homicides that were not related to the commission of any other felony, 2023<sup>14</sup>



Of the homicides not related to the commission of another felony, 58.4 percent (962 out of 1,646) involved arguments between the female victim and male offender. Of homicides stemming from an argument, 63.3 percent (609 out of 962) were committed with guns. In 2023 there were 407 women shot and killed by their husbands or intimate acquaintances in single victim/single offender incidents during the course of an argument.

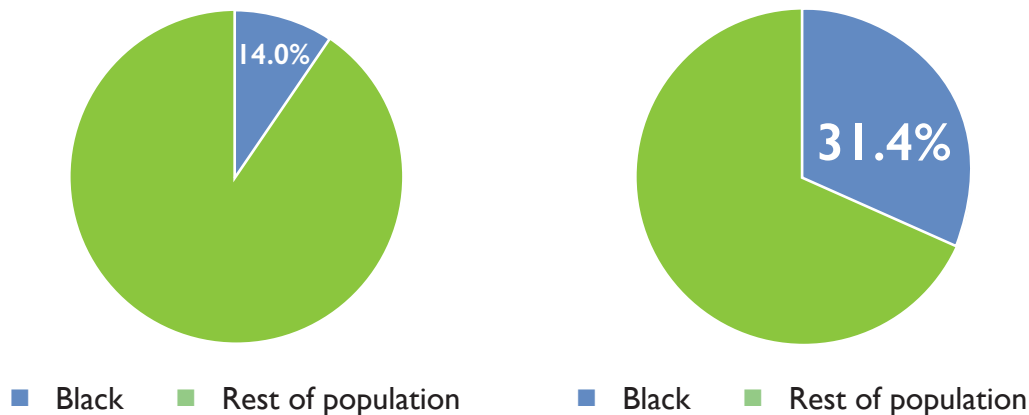
## SECTION TWO: BLACK FEMALES

The disproportionate burden of fatal and nonfatal violence borne by Black females has almost always been overshadowed by the toll lethal violence exacts on Black males. In fact, research has shown that Black women experience a disproportionate burden of homicide compared to their white female counterparts.<sup>17-19</sup> While white females are more likely to be victims of *IPV-related* homicides compared to Black females,<sup>4,18</sup> Black females have a substantially higher overall risk of homicide compared to females of other races.<sup>17-19</sup>

Research published in 2017 by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found, “Homicides occur in women of all ages and among all races/ethnicities, but young, racial/ethnic minority women are disproportionately affected.”<sup>18</sup> The article concluded, “Racial/ ethnic differences in female homicide underscore the importance of targeting prevention and intervention efforts to populations at disproportionately high risk. Addressing violence will require an integrated response that considers the influence of larger community and societal factors that make violence more likely to occur.”<sup>18</sup>

In 2023, 733 Black females were killed by males in single victim/single offender homicides. Black females were murdered by males at a rate two and a half times higher than white females: 3.1 per 100,000 versus 1.2 per 100,000. In 2023, Black females accounted for 14.0 percent of the female population in the United States,<sup>20</sup> while 31.4 percent of the females killed by males in single victim/single offender incidents where the race of the victim was known were Black (Figure 6).<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 6. Black percentage of United States female population<sup>20</sup> (left figure); Black percentage of female homicide victims killed by males<sup>14</sup> (right figure), 2023**



### Age of Black Female Homicide Victims

In 2023, for single female victim/single male offender homicides with Black victims where the age of the victim was reported (719 homicides), 7.5 percent of Black female victims were less than 18 years old (54 victims) and 6.7 percent were 65 years of age or older (48 victims). The average age of Black female homicide victims was 36.4 years old.

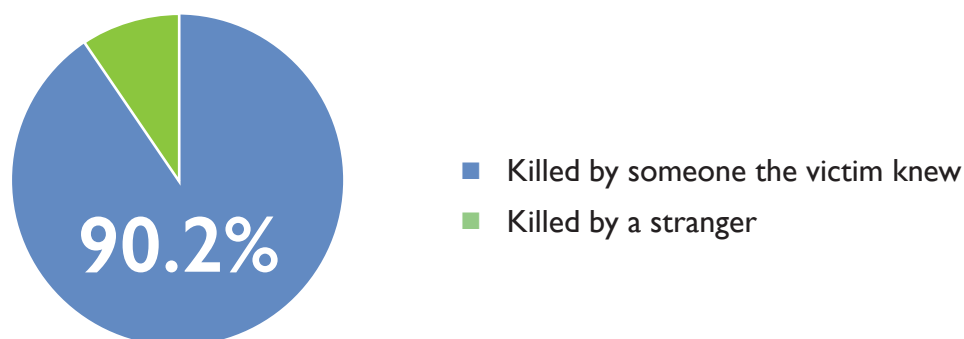
### Victim to Offender Relationship

Compared to a Black male, a Black female is far more likely to be killed by her spouse, an intimate acquaintance, or a family member than by a stranger. Where the relationship could be determined, 90.2 percent of Black females killed by males in single victim/single offender incidents knew their killers (531 out of 589, Figure 7). More than nine times



as many Black females were murdered by a male they knew (531 victims) than were killed by male strangers (58 victims) in single victim/single offender incidents in 2023. Of Black victims who knew their offenders, 54.2 percent (288 out of 531) were wives, common-law wives, ex-wives, or girlfriends of the offenders.

**Figure 7. Percentage of Black female homicide victims killed by a male they knew, 2023<sup>14</sup>**

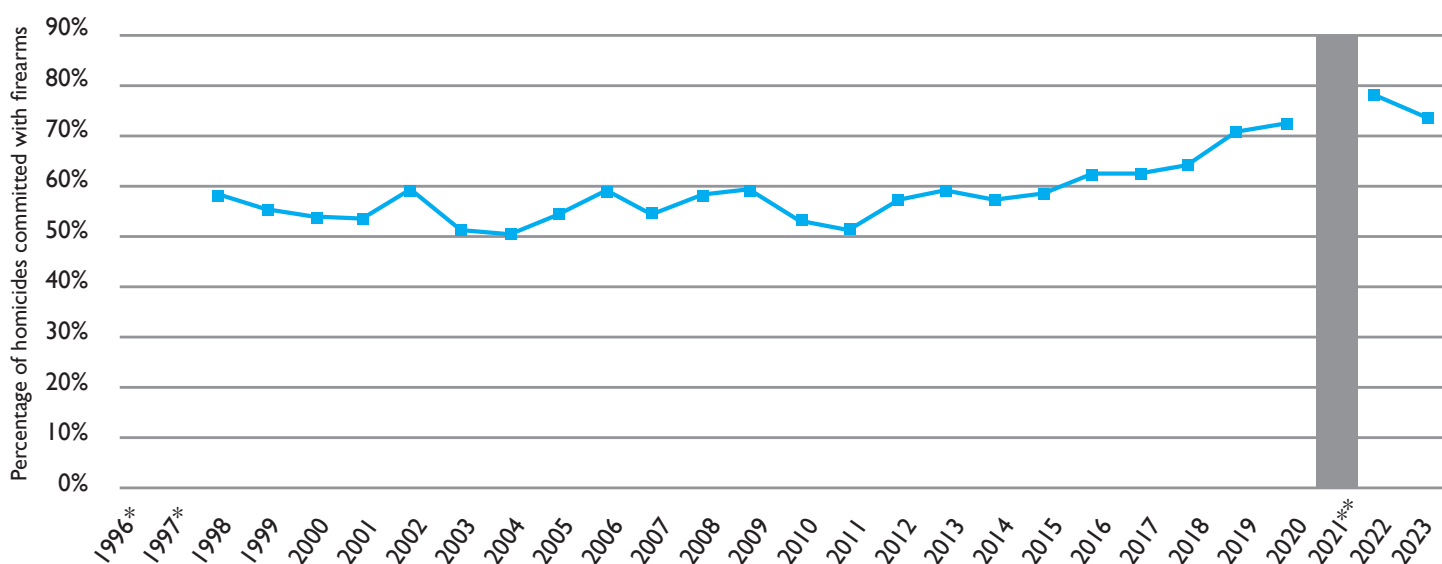


## Black Female Homicide Victims and Weapons

As with female homicide victims in general, firearms were the weapon most commonly used by males to murder Black females in 2023. Of the 651 homicides for which the murder weapon could be identified, 74.7 percent of Black female victims (486 victims) were shot and killed with guns. The percentage of Black females killed by males with a firearm has increased substantially from 51.0 percent in 2011 to 78.1 percent in 2022 before decreasing to 74.7 percent in 2023 (Figure 8).

Of these gun homicides, 61.5 percent involved handguns (299 victims). The number of Black females shot and killed by their husband or intimate acquaintance (214 victims) was more than three and a half times as high as the total number murdered by male strangers using all weapons combined (58 victims) in single victim/single offender incidents in 2023.

**Figure 8. Percentage of Black females killed by males with a firearm, 1996 — 2023<sup>14-15</sup>**



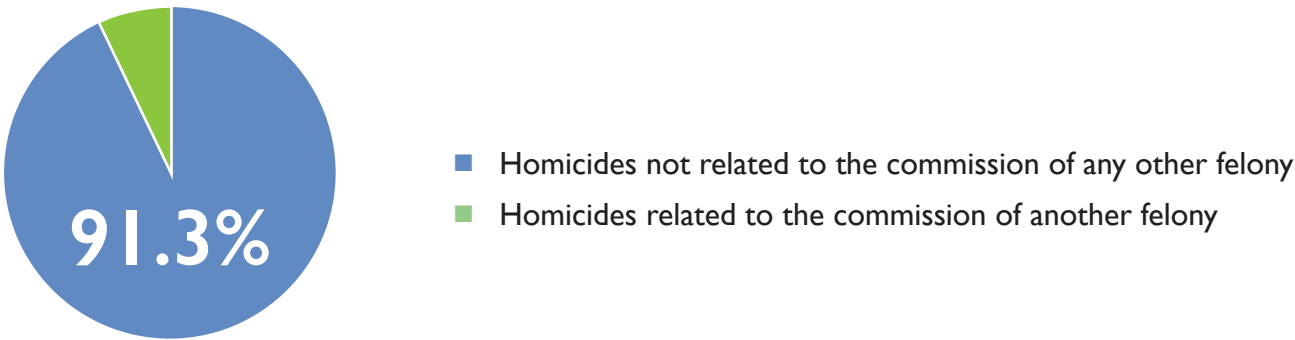
\* These data were not reported for Black victims in VPC's annual *When Men Murder Women* reports until 1998

\*\* FBI crime data are not shown for 2021 due to unreliability of data caused by the initial transition between FBI crime data reporting systems (depicted by grey area of graph)

# Black Female Homicide Victims and Circumstance

The overwhelming majority of homicides of Black females by male offenders in single victim/single offender incidents in 2023 were not related to any other felony crime. Most often, Black females were killed by males in the course of an argument — most commonly with a firearm. In 2023, for the 508 homicides in which the circumstances between the Black female victim and male offender could be identified, 91.3 percent (464 out of 508) were not related to the commission of any other felony (Figure 9).

**Figure 9. Percentage of Black female homicides that were not related to the commission of any other felony, 2023<sup>14</sup>**



Two-thirds of non-felony related homicides (313 out of 464) involved arguments between the Black female victim and male offender and 69.3 percent (217 victims) were shot and killed with guns during those arguments.

## SECTION THREE: LAWS THAT HELP PROTECT WOMEN FROM ABUSERS

The data presented over the years in *When Men Murder Women* coincide with the initial passage and implementation of the federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) as well as the enactment of federal laws restricting firearms possession by persons with misdemeanor convictions for domestic violence or who are subject to certain protective orders for domestic violence.

Since the passage of these laws, domestic violence has increasingly been treated as the serious issue that it is. States have also reformed their laws to better protect victims of domestic abuse and remove firearms from persons with histories of domestic violence.

In the 1990s, two major provisions were added to federal law to prevent domestic abusers from obtaining firearms. In 1993, the late Senator Paul Wellstone (D-MN) attached an amendment to the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act to prohibit individuals who are the subject of a protective order involving domestic violence from buying or possessing firearms. The Wellstone amendment became law in 1994.<sup>21</sup> (On June 21, 2024, the Supreme Court upheld this longstanding prohibition on the possession of firearms by people subject to domestic violence protective orders in *United States v. Rahimi*.)

In 1996, the late Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) sponsored a provision prohibiting individuals with misdemeanor domestic violence convictions from purchasing or possessing firearms (those with felony domestic violence convictions were already precluded from firearms possession under a general provision prohibiting firearms possession by felons).<sup>22</sup>

The Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Act of 2022 was passed by Congress as part of the Omnibus appropriations package and signed into law by President Joe Biden in March 2022. The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which also took effect in 2022, expanded the prohibition on gun possession by domestic violence misdemeanants to include those in a dating relationship. This prohibition expires after five years if the person is not convicted of another offense. The bill, however, did not extend the prohibited category of persons subject to a final domestic violence protective order to those in a dating relationship.

These laws are enforced in part by the Brady Law background checks performed on firearm transactions conducted through Federal Firearms License (FFL) holders. From November 30, 1998 to August 31, 2025, these two domestic violence prohibited categories accounted for 12 percent of rejected federal firearm transfers.<sup>23</sup> However, not all states make the records of domestic violence protective orders and misdemeanors available to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), the computer system used to conduct the Brady Law background checks. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Justice has in the past identified several common impediments to thorough checks of domestic violence records: incomplete automation; incomplete records; and, the inability to distinguish domestic violence misdemeanors from other misdemeanors. Moreover, to enhance enforcement of these life-saving measures it is important for states to adopt laws that mirror the federal laws and ensure that guns are surrendered by, or removed from the possession of, abusers.

## CONCLUSION

Many women — those in abusive relationships, those who have left such relationships, those who fear, in general, for their safety — have considered bringing a gun into their home as a measure of protection. Yet, gun ownership contains clear risks that should deeply concern women.

A 2002 study from researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health found that although the United States represented only 32 percent of the female population among 25 high-income countries, it accounted for 84 percent of all female firearm homicides.<sup>24</sup> The study's lead author, Dr. David Hemenway, concluded that “the difference in female homicide victimization rates between the U.S. and these other industrialized nations is very large and is closely tied to levels of gun ownership. The relationship cannot be explained by differences in urbanization or income inequality.”

The picture that emerges each and every year from *When Men Murder Women* is that women face the greatest threat from someone they know, most often a spouse or other intimate acquaintance, who is armed with a gun. For women in America, guns are not used to save lives, but to take them.

## APPENDIX ONE: DATA FOR FIGURES IN THE REPORT

**Figure 1. National rates\* of females killed by males, 1996 — 2023<sup>14-15</sup>**

	National rates* of females killed by males
1996	1.6
1997	1.4
1998	1.4
1999	1.4
2000	1.3
2001	1.4
2002	1.4
2003	1.3
2004	1.3
2005	1.3
2006	1.3
2007	1.3
2008	1.3
2009	1.3
2010	1.2
2011	1.2
2012	1.2
2013	1.1
2014	1.1
2015	1.1
2016	1.2
2017	1.3
2018	1.3
2019	1.2
2020	1.3
2021**	N/A
2022	1.4
2023	1.4

\* Rates are per 100,000 and not adjusted for age

\*\* FBI crime data are not shown for 2021 due to unreliability of data caused by the initial transition between FBI crime data reporting systems.

**Figure 2. National rates\* of females killed by males by race, 1996 — 2023<sup>14-15</sup>**

	National rates	American Indian/ Alaska Native**	Asian/Pacific Islander**	Black	White
1996	1.6	N/A	N/A	4.4	1.1
1997	1.4	N/A	N/A	3.9	1.0
1998	1.4	N/A	N/A	3.6	1.1
1999	1.4	N/A	N/A	3.2	1.0
2000	1.3	N/A	N/A	3.2	1.0
2001	1.4	1.4	0.8	3.3	1.1
2002	1.4	1.1	0.9	3.3	1.0
2003	1.3	1.0	0.9	3.0	1.0
2004	1.3	1.3	0.6	2.9	1.0
2005	1.3	1.3	0.7	2.9	1.0
2006	1.3	1.3	0.5	2.7	1.0
2007	1.3	1.1	0.6	2.9	1.0
2008	1.3	1.1	0.6	2.7	1.0
2009	1.3	1.1	0.8	2.6	1.1
2010	1.2	1.0	0.6	2.6	1.1
2011	1.2	0.8	0.6	2.6	1.0
2012	1.2	1.0	0.7	2.5	1.0
2013	1.1	1.1	0.4	2.4	1.0
2014	1.1	0.7	0.5	2.2	1.0
2015	1.1	1.5	0.5	2.4	1.0
2016	1.2	1.3	0.6	2.6	1.0
2017	1.3	1.8	0.7	2.6	1.1
2018	1.3	1.3	0.5	2.9	1.0
2019	1.2	1.7	0.5	2.3	1.0
2020	1.3	1.9	0.5	3.0	1.1
2021***	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2022	1.4	2.3	0.6	3.2	1.2
2023	1.4	2.0	0.7	3.1	1.2

\* Rates are per 100,000 and not adjusted for age

\*\* Race data for American Indian/Alaska Native and Asian/Pacific Islander populations were not reported in VPC's annual *When Men Murder Women* reports until 2001. Ethnicity data are unavailable on a national level due to the inadequacy of data collection and reporting.

\*\*\* FBI crime data are not shown for 2021 due to unreliability of data caused by the initial transition between FBI crime data reporting systems.

**Figure 4. Percentage of females killed by males with a firearm, 1996 — 2023<sup>14-15</sup>**

	Percentage of victims killed with a gun
<b>1996</b>	56%
<b>1997</b>	55%
<b>1998</b>	54%
<b>1999</b>	53%
<b>2000</b>	52%
<b>2001</b>	49%
<b>2002</b>	54%
<b>2003</b>	50%
<b>2004</b>	49%
<b>2005</b>	52%
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<b>2013</b>	53%
<b>2014</b>	54%
<b>2015</b>	55%
<b>2016</b>	56%
<b>2017</b>	57%
<b>2018</b>	56%
<b>2019</b>	58%
<b>2020</b>	61%
<b>2021*</b>	N/A
<b>2022</b>	66%
<b>2023</b>	65%

\* FBI crime data are not shown for 2021 due to unreliability of data caused by the initial transition between FBI crime data reporting systems.

**Figure 8. Percentage of Black females killed by males with a firearm, 1996 — 2023<sup>14-15</sup>**

	Percentage of victims killed with a gun
<b>1996*</b>	N/A
<b>1997*</b>	N/A
<b>1998</b>	58%
<b>1999</b>	55%
<b>2000</b>	53%
<b>2001</b>	53%
<b>2002</b>	59%
<b>2003</b>	51%
<b>2004</b>	50%
<b>2005</b>	54%
<b>2006</b>	59%
<b>2007</b>	54%
<b>2008</b>	58%
<b>2009</b>	59%
<b>2010</b>	53%
<b>2011</b>	51%
<b>2012</b>	57%
<b>2013</b>	59%
<b>2014</b>	57%
<b>2015</b>	58%
<b>2016</b>	62%
<b>2017</b>	62%
<b>2018</b>	64%
<b>2019</b>	70%
<b>2020</b>	72%
<b>2021**</b>	N/A
<b>2022</b>	78%
<b>2023</b>	75%

\* These data were not reported for Black victims in VPC's annual *When Men Murder Women* reports until 1998.

\*\* FBI crime data are not shown for 2021 due to unreliability of data caused by the initial transition between FBI crime data reporting systems.



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