



## **Black Homicide Victimization in the United States**

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**Violence Policy Center**

1730 Rhode Island Avenue, NW  
Suite 1014  
Washington, DC 20036

202.822.8200 voice  
202.822.8205 fax  
[www.vpc.org](http://www.vpc.org) web

# **Black Homicide Victimization in the United States**

**An Analysis of 2006 Homicide Data**

**January 2009**

**The Violence Policy Center** (VPC) is a national non-profit 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 report was authored by VPC Policy Analyst Marty Langley and VPC Executive Director Josh Sugarmann. This report was funded in part with the support of The Herb Block Foundation, the David Bohnett Foundation, and The Joyce Foundation. Past studies released by the VPC include:

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- *Guns For Felons: How the NRA Works to Rearm Criminals* (March 2000)
- *One Shot, One Kill: Civilian Sales of Military Sniper Rifles* (May 1999)
- *Cease Fire: A Comprehensive Strategy to Reduce Firearms Violence* (Revised, October 1997)

Violence Policy Center, 1730 Rhode Island Avenue, NW, Suite 1014, Washington, DC 20036  
202-822-8200 phone, 202-822-8205 fax, [www.vpc.org](http://www.vpc.org) web

## Introduction

America is facing an epidemic of homicides among young black males.

According to a recent study conducted by Professor James Alan Fox of Northeastern University, one of the nation's leading criminal justice researchers, from 2002 to 2007 the number of black male juvenile homicide victims rose by 31 percent. The number of young black homicide victims killed by guns rose at an even sharper rate: 54 percent.<sup>1</sup>

This study examines the growing problem of black homicide victimization at the state level.

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This study analyzes unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR)<sup>2</sup> data for black homicide submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).<sup>3</sup> The information used for this report is for the year 2006 and is the most recent data available. This is the first analysis of the 2006 data on black homicide victims to offer breakdowns of cases in the five states with the highest black homicide victimization rates, and the first to rank the states by the rate of black homicides.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Recent Surge in Homicides Involving Young Black Males and Guns: Time to Reinvest in Prevention and Crime Control," James Alan Fox, Ph.D., and Marc L. Swatt, Ph.D., Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, December 2008.

<sup>2</sup> In 2006 the state of Florida, as in prior years, did not submit any data to the FBI Supplementary Homicide Report. Data from Florida was not requested individually because the difference in collection techniques would create a bias in the study results.

<sup>3</sup> 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 murders. 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.

## **National Data**

According to the FBI SHR data, in 2006 there were 7,425 black homicide victims in the United States. The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 20.27 per 100,000. For that year, the overall national homicide rate was 5.38 per 100,000. For whites, the national homicide rate was 3.14 per 100,000. Additional information contained in the FBI SHR data on black homicide includes:

### ***Gender***

Of the 7,425 black homicide victims, 6,383 (86 percent) were male, and 1,041 (14 percent) were female. Gender was not recorded for one victim. The homicide rate for black male victims was 38.14 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for male homicide victims was 8.73 per 100,000. For white male homicide victims it was 4.71 per 100,000. The homicide rate for female black victims was 5.66 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for female homicide victims was 2.11 per 100,000. For white female homicide victims it was 1.60 per 100,000.

### ***Age***

Six hundred seventy-seven black homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 126 black homicide victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

### ***Most Common Weapons***

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 82 percent of black victims (5,722 out of 6,942) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 79 percent (4,501 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 671 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 258 victims killed by bodily force, and 175 victims killed by a blunt object.

### ***Victim/Offender Relationship***

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 74 percent of black victims (2,607 out of 3,502) were murdered by someone they knew. Eight hundred ninety-five victims were killed by strangers.

### ***Circumstance***

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 69 percent (3,081 out of 4,490) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 56 percent (1,721 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender. Twelve percent (377 homicides) were reported to be gang-related. Forty-four percent of these (167 homicides) were in California, which may be in part due to more comprehensive reporting. In California, 45 percent of non-felony related homicides were reported to be gang-related.

## State Rankings

In 2006, the national black homicide victimization rate was 20.27 per 100,000. For that year, Pennsylvania ranked first as the state with the highest black homicide victimization rate. Its rate of 36.86 per 100,000 was more than one and a half times the national average for black homicide victims. The remaining states that comprise the top five are listed in the chart below. Additional information for each of these five states can be found in Appendix One, including: age and gender of victims; types of weapons used; relationship of victim to offender; and, the circumstances of the murders. According to the SHR data, 20 states had a black homicide victimization rate higher than the national per capita rate of 20.27 per 100,000. For an alphabetical ranking of all states that submitted data to the FBI, please see the chart on pages four and five.

### Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2006, Ranked by Rate

Ranking	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
1	Pennsylvania	490	36.86
2	Michigan	483	33.40
3	Indiana	184	32.65
4	Kansas	54	32.47
5	Nevada	63	32.26

## Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2006

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicide Victims	Homicide Rate per 100,000
21	Alabama	240	19.81
24	Alaska	5	18.39
12	Arizona	61	25.74
15	Arkansas	108	24.30
8	California	744	30.48
32	Colorado	29	14.47
35	Connecticut	48	13.45
27	Delaware	29	16.46
	Florida	NA	NA
34	Georgia	382	13.72
41	Hawaii	1	2.70
43 (tie)	Idaho	0	0.00
22	Illinois	362	18.83
3	Indiana	184	32.65
37	Iowa	6	8.03
4	Kansas	54	32.47
29	Kentucky	51	15.93
10	Louisiana	377	28.17
43 (tie)	Maine	0	0.00
11	Maryland	428	26.03
18	Massachusetts	94	21.18
2	Michigan	483	33.40
13	Minnesota	56	24.75
36	Mississippi	117	10.88
7	Missouri	207	30.79
43 (tie)	Montana	0	0.00

### Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2006

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicide Victims	Homicide Rate per 100,000
42	Nebraska	1	1.29
5	Nevada	63	32.26
43 (tie)	New Hampshire	0	0.00
16	New Jersey	282	22.46
23	New Mexico	10	18.79
28	New York	551	16.44
30	North Carolina	292	15.16
6	North Dakota	2	31.61
19	Ohio	283	20.62
14	Oklahoma	69	24.52
40	Oregon	5	7.05
1	Pennsylvania	490	36.86
39	Rhode Island	5	7.52
26	South Carolina	217	17.31
43 (tie)	South Dakota	0	0.00
17	Tennessee	228	22.22
25	Texas	502	17.90
43 (tie)	Utah	0	0.00
20	Vermont	1	20.42
31	Virginia	225	14.79
33	Washington	32	13.93
38	West Virginia	5	7.98
9	Wisconsin	96	28.73
43 (tie)	Wyoming	0	0.00
	<b>U.S. Total</b>	<b>7,425</b>	<b>20.27</b>



## Conclusion

Blacks in the United States are disproportionately affected by homicide. For the year 2006, blacks represented 13 percent of the nation's population, yet accounted for 49 percent of all homicide victims.<sup>4</sup>

As noted at the beginning of this study, the devastation homicide inflicts on black teens and adults is a national crisis, yet it is all too often ignored outside of affected communities.

For blacks, 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 must put a focus on reducing access to firearms.

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<sup>4</sup> FBI Supplementary Homicide Report 2006, U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

**Appendix One:  
Additional Information for the Five States with the  
Highest Rates of Black Homicide Victims**



## **Pennsylvania**

*There were 490 black homicide victims in Pennsylvania in 2006*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Pennsylvania was  
36.86 per 100,000 in 2006*

*Ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Thirty-eight homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 6 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 28 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 490 homicide victims, 441 were male and 49 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (414 out of 475) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 90 percent (372 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 26 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 26 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 17 victims killed by bodily force, and 8 victims killed by a blunt object.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 85 percent of victims (173 out of 204) were murdered by someone they knew. Thirty-one victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 56 percent (166 out of 298) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 86 percent (143 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **Michigan**

*There were 483 black homicide victims in Michigan in 2006*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Michigan was 33.40 per 100,000 in 2006*

*Ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Forty-two homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 7 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 483 homicide victims, 416 were male and 67 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (372 out of 428) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 39 percent (146 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 186 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 27 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 7 victims killed by bodily force, and 14 victims killed by a blunt object.

### **Victim/Offender Relationship**

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 84 percent of victims (118 out of 141) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty-three victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 87 percent (146 out of 167) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 62 percent (91 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **Indiana**

*There were 184 black homicide victims in Indiana in 2006*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Indiana was 32.65 per 100,000 in 2006*

*Ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Nineteen homicide victims (10 percent) were less than 18 years old and 4 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 184 homicide victims, 156 were male and 28 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 86 percent of victims (157 out of 182) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 78 percent (122 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 20 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 12 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 4 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, 83 percent of victims (73 out of 88) were murdered by someone they knew. Fifteen victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 72 percent (73 out of 102) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 68 percent (50 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **Kansas**

*There were 54 black homicide victims in Kansas in 2006*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Kansas was 32.47 per 100,000 in 2006*

*Ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Three homicide victims (6 percent) were less than 18 years old and 2 victims (4 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 54 homicide victims, 41 were male and 13 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 75 percent of victims (36 out of 48) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 39 percent (14 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 18 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 5 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 4 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 (19 out of 23) were murdered by someone they knew. Four victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 73 percent (16 out of 22) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 44 percent (7 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

## **Nevada**

*There were 63 black homicide victims in Nevada in 2006*

*The homicide rate among black victims in Nevada was 32.26 per 100,000 in 2006*

*Ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the United States*

### **Age**

Two homicide victims (3 percent) were less than 18 years old and 1 victim (2 percent) was 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 63 homicide victims, 52 were male and 11 were female.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 80 percent of victims (49 out of 61) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 71 percent (35 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 9 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 5 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 4 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, 70 percent of victims (19 out of 27) were murdered by someone they knew. Eight victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 66 percent (27 out of 41) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 63 percent (17 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.



## **United States**

*There were 7,425 black homicide victims in the United States in 2006*

*The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was  
20.27 per 100,000 in 2006*

### **Age**

Six hundred seventy-seven homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 126 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

### **Gender**

Out of 7,425 homicide victims, 6,383 were male and 1,041 were female. Gender was not recorded for one victim.

### **Most Common Weapons**

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 82 percent of victims (5,722 out of 6,942) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 79 percent (4,501 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 827 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 671 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 258 victims killed by bodily force, and 175 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 (2,607 out of 3,502) were murdered by someone they knew. Eight hundred ninety-five victims were killed by strangers.

### **Circumstance**

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 69 percent (3,081 out of 4,490) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 56 percent (1,721 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.