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Black Homicide Victimization in the United States

An Analysis of 2009 Homicide Data

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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 study was funded with the support of the David Bohnett Foundation and The Joyce Foundation. Past studies released by the VPC include:

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- *A Deadly Myth: Women, Handguns, and Self-Defense* (January 2001)
- *Handgun Licensing and Registration: What it Can and Cannot Do* (September 2000)
- *Pocket Rockets: The Gun Industry’s Sale of Increased Killing Power* (July 2000)
- *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)

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Introduction

America faces a continuing epidemic of homicide among young black males.

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This study examines the problem of black homicide victimization at the state level by analyzing unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) data for black homicide victimization submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).¹ The information used for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 2009 and is the most recent data available. This is the first analysis of the 2009 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 homicides.

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

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 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.

² In 2009 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. In addition, according to the FBI's *Uniform Crime Reports*, limited SHR data was received from Illinois for 2009.

National Data

According to the FBI SHR data, in 2009 there were 6,505 black homicide victims in the United States. The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 17.90 per 100,000. For that year, the overall national homicide rate was 4.76 per 100,000. For whites, the national homicide rate was 2.92 per 100,000. Additional information contained in the FBI SHR data on black homicide includes the following.

Gender

Of the 6,505 black homicide victims, 5,576 (86 percent) were male, and 928 (14 percent) were female. In one case, the gender of the victim was unknown. The homicide rate for black male victims was 32.14 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for male homicide victims was 7.57 per 100,000. For white male homicide victims it was 4.26 per 100,000. The homicide rate for female black victims was 4.89 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for female homicide victims was 2.01 per 100,000. For white female homicide victims it was 1.61 per 100,000.

Age

Five hundred sixty-one black homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 129 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 (5,065 out of 6,156) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 74 percent (3,723 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 587 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 238 victims killed by bodily force, and 170 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 72 percent of black victims (2,271 out of 3,134) were murdered by someone they knew. Eight hundred sixty-three victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 71 percent (2,812 out of 3,937) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 54

percent (1,524 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender. Thirteen percent (355 homicides) were reported to be gang-related. Forty-nine percent of gang-related homicides (175 homicides) were in California, which may be in part due to more comprehensive reporting. In California, 60 percent of non-felony related homicides were reported to be gang-related.

State Rankings

In 2009, the national black homicide victimization rate was 17.90 per 100,000. For that year, Missouri ranked first as the state with the highest black homicide victimization rate. Its rate of 34.72 per 100,000 was nearly double the national average for black homicide victims. The remaining states that comprise the top 10 are listed in the chart below. Additional information for each of these 10 states can be found in Appendix One, including: age and gender of victims; most common weapons used; relationship of victim to offender; and, the circumstances of the murders. According to the SHR data, 15 states had a black homicide victimization rate higher than the national per capita rate of 17.90 per 100,000. For an alphabetical listing 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 2009, Ranked by Rate

Ranking	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
1	Missouri	239	34.72
2	Michigan	427	30.21
3	Pennsylvania	388	28.30
4	Oklahoma	83	27.96
5	Louisiana	380	26.33
6	Indiana	152	25.84
7	Tennessee	244	23.01
8	Wisconsin	79	22.71
9	California	548	22.33
10	Nevada	46	21.06

Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2009

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicide Victims	Homicide Rate per 100,000
16	Alabama	210	16.93
44	Alaska	2	6.80
18	Arizona	49	16.87
22	Arkansas	74	16.25
9	California	548	22.33
36	Colorado	28	12.62
29	Connecticut	50	13.65
24	Delaware	28	14.96
	Florida	NA	NA
38	Georgia	350	11.78
46 (tie)	Hawaii	0	0.00
35	Idaho	2	12.64
15	Illinois	360	18.69
6	Indiana	152	25.84
32 (tie)	Iowa	11	13.09
12	Kansas	35	20.04
21	Kentucky	56	16.50
5	Louisiana	380	26.33
46 (tie)	Maine	0	0.00
14	Maryland	331	19.57
25	Massachusetts	69	14.72
2	Michigan	427	30.21
37	Minnesota	30	12.00
41	Mississippi	108	9.84
1	Missouri	239	34.72
46 (tie)	Montana	0	0.00

Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2009

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicide Victims	Homicide Rate per 100,000
11	Nebraska	17	20.38
10	Nevada	46	21.06
45	New Hampshire	1	5.52
19	New Jersey	211	16.75
26	New Mexico	9	14.34
31	New York	439	13.10
34	North Carolina	263	12.97
46 (tie)	North Dakota	0	0.00
13	Ohio	279	19.99
4	Oklahoma	83	27.96
43	Oregon	6	7.66
3	Pennsylvania	388	28.30
30	Rhode Island	9	13.31
27	South Carolina	180	13.98
40	South Dakota	1	10.00
7	Tennessee	244	23.01
23	Texas	450	15.11
42	Utah	3	7.86
17	Vermont	1	16.90
28	Virginia	215	13.66
39	Washington	30	11.60
20	West Virginia	11	16.56
8	Wisconsin	79	22.71
32 (tie)	Wyoming	1	13.09
U.S. Total		6,505	17.90

Conclusion

Blacks in the United States are disproportionately affected by homicide. For the year 2009, blacks represented 13 percent of the nation's population, yet accounted for 47 percent of all homicide victims.³

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, like America's homicide toll as a whole, must put a focus on reducing access and exposure to firearms.

³ FBI Supplementary Homicide Report 2009, U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

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

Missouri

There were 239 black homicide victims in Missouri in 2009

*The homicide rate among black victims in Missouri was
34.72 per 100,000 in 2009*

Ranked 1st in the United States

Age

Thirty-eight homicide victims (16 percent) were less than 18 years old and 5 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 28 years old.

Gender

Out of 239 homicide victims, 206 were male and 33 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (200 out of 229) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 65 percent (129 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 63 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 12 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 5 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, 76 percent of victims (63 out of 83) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 64 percent (59 out of 92) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 80 percent (47 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Michigan

There were 427 black homicide victims in Michigan in 2009

*The homicide rate among black victims in Michigan was
30.21 per 100,000 in 2009*

Ranked 2nd in the United States

Age

Thirty-eight homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 16 victims (4 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 32 years old.

Gender

Out of 427 homicide victims, 372 were male and 54 were female. In 1 case, the gender of the victim was unknown.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (339 out of 390) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 54 percent (182 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 126 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 21 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 9 victims killed by bodily force, and 13 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 (103 out of 138) were murdered by someone they knew. Thirty-five victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 85 percent (153 out of 180) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 54 percent (82 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Pennsylvania

There were 388 black homicide victims in Pennsylvania in 2009

*The homicide rate among black victims in Pennsylvania was
28.30 per 100,000 in 2009*

Ranked 3rd in the United States

Age

Twenty-eight homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 5 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 29 years old.

Gender

Out of 388 homicide victims, 335 were male and 53 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 85 percent of victims (317 out of 375) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 84 percent (266 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 39 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 30 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 10 victims killed by bodily force, and 15 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 (159 out of 191) were murdered by someone they knew. Thirty-two victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 60 percent (166 out of 278) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 92 percent (152 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Oklahoma

There were 83 black homicide victims in Oklahoma in 2009

*The homicide rate among black victims in Oklahoma was
27.96 per 100,000 in 2009*

Ranked 4th in the United States

Age

Thirteen homicide victims (17 percent) were less than 18 years old and 2 victims (3 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.

Gender

Out of 83 homicide victims, 76 were male and 7 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 73 percent of victims (60 out of 82) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 90 percent (54 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 5 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 9 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, 69 percent of victims (45 out of 65) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 67 percent (51 out of 76) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 43 percent (22 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Louisiana

There were 380 black homicide victims in Louisiana in 2009

*The homicide rate among black victims in Louisiana was
26.33 per 100,000 in 2009*

Ranked 5th in the United States

Age

Forty-two homicide victims (11 percent) were less than 18 years old and 7 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 380 homicide victims, 335 were male and 45 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 89 percent of victims (330 out of 369) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 84 percent (278 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 32 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 20 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 5 victims killed by bodily force, and 11 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 (135 out of 160) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty-five victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 64 percent (119 out of 187) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 66 percent (79 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Indiana

There were 152 black homicide victims in Indiana in 2009

*The homicide rate among black victims in Indiana was
25.84 per 100,000 in 2009*

Ranked 6th in the United States

Age

Eleven homicide victims (7 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.

Gender

Out of 152 homicide victims, 138 were male and 14 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 88 percent of victims (125 out of 142) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 62 percent (77 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 36 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 8 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, 85 percent of victims (50 out of 59) were murdered by someone they knew. Nine victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 52 percent (43 out of 82) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 51 percent (22 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Tennessee

There were 244 black homicide victims in Tennessee in 2009

*The homicide rate among black victims in Tennessee was
23.01 per 100,000 in 2009*

Ranked 7th in the United States

Age

Twenty-five homicide victims (11 percent) were less than 18 years old and 6 victims (3 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 244 homicide victims, 211 were male and 33 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 79 percent of victims (169 out of 215) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 80 percent (135 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 27 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 17 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 16 victims killed by bodily force, and 10 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 (123 out of 167) were murdered by someone they knew. Forty-four victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 81 percent (116 out of 144) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 64 percent (74 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Wisconsin

There were 79 black homicide victims in Wisconsin in 2009

*The homicide rate among black victims in Wisconsin was
22.71 per 100,000 in 2009*

Ranked 8th in the United States

Age

Six homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 1 victim (1 percent) was 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 79 homicide victims, 66 were male and 13 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 78 percent of victims (59 out of 76) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 81 percent (48 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 9 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 10 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 6 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, 60 percent of victims (32 out of 53) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty-one victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 61 percent (36 out of 59) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 61 percent (22 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

California

There were 548 black homicide victims in California in 2009

*The homicide rate among black victims in California was
22.33 per 100,000 in 2009*

Ranked 9th in the United States

Age

Fifty-four homicide victims (10 percent) were less than 18 years old and 11 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 548 homicide victims, 486 were male and 62 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 84 percent of victims (450 out of 537) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 80 percent (361 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 67 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 43 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 22 victims killed by bodily force, and 17 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 53 percent of victims (139 out of 260) were murdered by someone they knew. One hundred twenty-one victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 74 percent (291 out of 391) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 31 percent (90 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Nevada

There were 46 black homicide victims in Nevada in 2009

*The homicide rate among black victims in Nevada was
21.06 per 100,000 in 2009*

Ranked 10th in the United States

Age

Nine homicide victims (20 percent) were less than 18 years old and 1 victim (2 percent) was 65 years of age or older. The average age was 26 years old.

Gender

Out of 46 homicide victims, 35 were male and 11 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 76 percent of victims (31 out of 41) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 71 percent (22 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 7 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 5 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, and 5 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 62 percent of victims (18 out of 29) were murdered by someone they knew. Eleven victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 50 percent (14 out of 28) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 21 percent (3 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

United States

There were 6,505 black homicide victims in the United States in 2009

*The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was
17.90 per 100,000 in 2009*

Age

Five hundred sixty-one homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 129 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 6,505 homicide victims, 5,576 were male and 928 were female. In 1 case, the gender of the victim was unknown.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 82 percent of victims (5,065 out of 6,156) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 74 percent (3,723 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 1,024 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 587 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 238 victims killed by bodily force, and 170 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 (2,271 out of 3,134) were murdered by someone they knew. Eight hundred sixty-three victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 71 percent (2,812 out of 3,937) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 54 percent (1,524 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.