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Violence Policy Center

Black Homicide Victimization in the United States

An Analysis of 2011 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This study examines the problem of black homicide victimization at the state level by analyzing unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) data for black homicide victimization submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).¹ The information used for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 2011 and is the most recent data available. This is the first analysis of the 2011 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

NATIONAL DATA

According to the FBI SHR data, in 2011 there were 6,309 black homicide victims in the United States. The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 17.51 per 100,000. For that year, the overall national homicide rate was 4.44 per 100,000. For whites, the national homicide rate was 2.64 per 100,000. Additional information contained in the FBI SHR data on black homicide includes the following.

GENDER

Of the 6,309 black homicide victims, 5,452 (86 percent) were male, and 854 (14 percent) were female. The homicide rate for black male victims was 31.67 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for male homicide victims was 7.13 per 100,000. For white male homicide victims it was 3.85 per 100,000. The homicide rate for female black victims was 4.54 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for female homicide victims was 1.81 per 100,000. For white female homicide victims it was 1.45 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 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 2011, as in years past, the state of Florida did not submit any data to the FBI Supplementary Homicide Report. Also in 2011, 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. In addition, according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, limited SHR data was received from Illinois for 2011.

AGE

Four hundred eighty-seven black homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 100 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 (4,949 out of 6,022) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 77 percent (3,824 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 644 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 221 victims killed by bodily force, and 130 victims killed by a blunt object. In comparison, 63 percent of white victims and 73 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, 73 percent of black victims (2,138 out of 2,928) were murdered by someone they knew. Seven hundred ninety victims were killed by strangers.

CIRCUMSTANCE

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 70 percent (2,540 out of 3,652) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 58 percent (1,475 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Eleven percent (282 homicides) were reported to be gang-related. Forty-one percent of gang-related homicides (115 homicides) were in California, which may be in part due to more comprehensive reporting. In California, 51 percent of non-felony related homicides were reported to be gang-related.

STATE RANKINGS

In 2011, the national black homicide victimization rate was 17.51 per 100,000. For that year, Nebraska ranked first as the state with the highest black homicide victimization rate. Its rate of 34.43 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 following. 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, 23 states had a black homicide victimization rate higher than the national per capita rate of 17.51 per 100,000. For an alphabetical listing of all states that submitted data to the FBI, please see Appendix Two.

NUMBER OF BLACK HOMICIDE VICTIMS AND RATES BY STATE IN 2011, RANKED BY RATE

Ranking	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
1	Nebraska	30	34.43
2	Missouri	235	33.38
3	Michigan	447	31.54
4	Pennsylvania	419	29.02
5	Oklahoma	74	25.51
6	Louisiana	375	25.30
7	Kansas	44	24.97
8	Wisconsin	86	23.22
9	West Virginia	15	22.79
10	North Dakota	2	21.99

CONCLUSION

Blacks in the United States are disproportionately affected by homicide. For the year 2011, blacks represented 13 percent of the nation's population, yet accounted for 50 percent of all homicide victims.³

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 gun violence epidemic will involve reducing homicides in the African-American community.

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 2011, U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

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

Nebraska

There were 30 black homicide victims in Nebraska in 2011.

The homicide rate among black victims in Nebraska was 34.43 per 100,000 in 2011.

Ranked 1st in the United States

Age	Two homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 28 years old.
Gender	Out of 30 homicide victims, 27 were male and 3 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 93 percent of victims (28 out of 30) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 89 percent (25 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 2 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 2 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 78 percent of victims (7 out of 9) were murdered by someone they knew. Two victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 94 percent (17 out of 18) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 18 percent (3 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Missouri

There were 235 black homicide victims in Missouri in 2011.

The homicide rate among black victims in Missouri was 33.38 per 100,000 in 2011.

Ranked 2nd in the United States

Age	Nineteen homicide victims (8 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 235 homicide victims, 206 were male and 29 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 92 percent of victims (207 out of 226) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 61 percent (127 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 75 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 8 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 7 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 (65 out of 89) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty-four victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 56 percent (55 out of 98) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 80 percent (44 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Michigan

There were 447 black homicide victims in Michigan in 2011.

The homicide rate among black victims in Michigan was 31.54 per 100,000 in 2011.

Ranked 3rd in the United States

Age	Thirty-three homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 5 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Gender	Out of 447 homicide victims, 392 were male and 55 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 85 percent of victims (362 out of 428) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 63 percent (227 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 105 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 30 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 17 victims killed by bodily force, and 12 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 (111 out of 158) were murdered by someone they knew. Forty-seven victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 68 percent (146 out of 214) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 59 percent (86 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Pennsylvania

There were 419 black homicide victims in Pennsylvania in 2011.

The homicide rate among black victims in Pennsylvania was 29.02 per 100,000 in 2011.

Ranked 4th in the United States

Age	Twenty homicide victims (5 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 29 years old.
Gender	Out of 419 homicide victims, 378 were male and 41 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 85 percent of victims (350 out of 410) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 86 percent (300 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 35 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 37 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 12 victims killed by bodily force, and 7 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 86 percent of victims (183 out of 214) were murdered by someone they knew. Thirty-one victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 57 percent (171 out of 299) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 82 percent (140 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Oklahoma

There were 74 black homicide victims in Oklahoma in 2011.

The homicide rate among black victims in Oklahoma was 25.51 per 100,000 in 2011.

Ranked 5th in the United States

Age	Six homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 4 victims (5 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 32 years old.
Gender	Out of 74 homicide victims, 60 were male and 14 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 86 percent of victims (63 out of 73) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 83 percent (52 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, 83 percent of victims (40 out of 48) were murdered by someone they knew. Eight victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 65 percent (41 out of 63) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 46 percent (19 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Louisiana

There were 375 black homicide victims in Louisiana in 2011.

The homicide rate among black victims in Louisiana was 25.30 per 100,000 in 2011.

Ranked 6th in the United States

Age	Thirty-three homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 6 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 29 years old.
Gender	Out of 375 homicide victims, 328 were male and 47 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 90 percent of victims (330 out of 365) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 94 percent (310 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 7 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 17 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 12 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, 81 percent of victims (112 out of 138) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty-six victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 63 percent (72 out of 114) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 88 percent (63 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Kansas

There were 44 black homicide victims in Kansas in 2011.

The homicide rate among black victims in Kansas was 24.97 per 100,000 in 2011.

Ranked 7th in the United States

Age	Two homicide victims (5 percent) were less than 18 years old and 1 victim (2 percent) was 65 years of age or older. The average age was 32 years old.
Gender	Out of 44 homicide victims, 38 were male and 6 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 80 percent of victims (33 out of 41) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 11 victims (33 percent) were killed with a handgun. There were 18 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 8 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 92 percent of victims (22 out of 24) were murdered by someone they knew. Two victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 75 percent (18 out of 24) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 67 percent (12 homicides) involved an argument between the victim and the offender.

Wisconsin

There were 86 black homicide victims in Wisconsin in 2011.

The homicide rate among black victims in Wisconsin was 23.22 per 100,000 in 2011.

Ranked 8th in the United States

Age	Twelve homicide victims (14 percent) were less than 18 years old and 2 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 29 years old.
Gender	Out of 86 homicide victims, 75 were male and 11 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 70 percent of victims (58 out of 83) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 81 percent (47 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 7 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 11 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 9 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, 65 percent of victims (37 out of 57) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 75 percent (41 out of 55) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 73 percent (30 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

West Virginia

There were 15 black homicide victims in West Virginia in 2011.

The homicide rate among black victims in West Virginia was 22.79 per 100,000 in 2011.

Ranked 9th in the United States

Age	One homicide victim (7 percent) was less than 18 years old. The average age was 29 years old.
Gender	Out of 15 homicide victims, 15 were male.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 71 percent of victims (10 out of 14) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 70 percent (7 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 2 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 3 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, and 1 victim killed by bodily force.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 80 percent of victims (8 out of 10) were murdered by someone they knew. Two victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 86 percent (6 out of 7) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 67 percent (4 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

North Dakota

There were 2 black homicide victims in North Dakota in 2011.

The homicide rate among black victims in North Dakota was 21.99 per 100,000 in 2011.

Ranked 10th in the United States

Age	The average age was 23 years old.
Gender	Out of 2 homicide victims, 2 were male.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified (2 homicides), 2 victims were killed with knives or other cutting instruments.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 100 percent of victims (1 out of 1) were murdered by someone they knew. No victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 100 percent (1 out of 1) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 100 percent (1 homicide) involved an argument between the victim and the offender.

United States

There were 6,309 black homicide victims in the United States in 2011.

The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 17.51 per 100,000 in 2011.

Age	Four hundred eighty-seven homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 100 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.
Gender	Out of 6,309 homicide victims, 5,452 were male, 854 were female, and 3 were of unknown gender.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 82 percent of victims (4,949 out of 6,022) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 77 percent (3,824 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 868 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 644 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 221 victims killed by bodily force, and 130 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 (2,138 out of 2,928) were murdered by someone they knew. Seven hundred ninety victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 70 percent (2,540 out of 3,652) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 58 percent (1,475 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Appendix Two: Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2011

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
	Alabama	N/A	N/A
36	Alaska	3	11.59
21	Arizona	53	18.27
15	Arkansas	93	20.32
16	California	503	20.08
37	Colorado	25	11.29
22	Connecticut	72	18.18
31	Delaware	27	13.59
	Florida	N/A	N/A
38	Georgia	343	11.27
46 (tie)	Hawaii	0	0.00
43	Idaho	1	8.24
20	Illinois	357	18.73
11	Indiana	134	21.95
42	Iowa	9	9.57
7	Kansas	44	24.97
28	Kentucky	51	14.58
6	Louisiana	375	25.30
23	Maine	3	17.85
19	Maryland	331	18.92
30	Massachusetts	71	13.86
3	Michigan	447	31.54
35	Minnesota	34	11.88
34	Mississippi	135	12.14
2	Missouri	235	33.38
46 (tie)	Montana	0	0.00
1	Nebraska	30	34.43
25	Nevada	40	17.10
46 (tie)	New Hampshire	0	0.00
17	New Jersey	258	20.01
13	New Mexico	11	21.22
29	New York	473	13.91
40	North Carolina	229	10.80
10	North Dakota	2	21.99
12	Ohio	305	21.28

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
5	Oklahoma	74	25.51
18	Oregon	15	19.64
4	Pennsylvania	419	29.02
41	Rhode Island	8	10.59
32	South Carolina	172	13.08
24	South Dakota	2	17.36
14	Tennessee	229	21.15
33	Texas	395	12.58
45	Utah	2	5.61
27	Vermont	1	14.67
39	Virginia	176	11.00
44	Washington	20	7.63
9	West Virginia	15	22.79
8	Wisconsin	86	23.22
26	Wyoming	1	16.60
U.S. Total		6,309	17.51



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