

Homicide

In 1997, the estimated number of persons murdered in the United States was 18,209. The 1997 figure was down 7 percent from 1996, and 26 percent from 1993. (*Federal Bureau of Investigation. (released November 22, 1998). Crime in the United States, Uniform Crime Reports, 1997, p. 16. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.*)

As compared to 1996 figures, reported murders in 1997 dropped 9 percent in the nation's cities, 7 percent in suburban counties, and 2 percent in rural counties. The greatest decrease -- 13 percent -- was registered in cities with populations of 250,000 to 499,999. (*Ibid.*)

All four regions of the United States showed declines in the number of murders reported from 1996-1997. The greatest drops were in the Northeast and West, which experienced a 12 percent and 11 percent decrease in reported murders, respectively. Reported murders decreased in the South by 6 percent and in the Midwest by 3 percent in 1997. (*Ibid.*)

Down 10 percent from 1996, the national murder rate in 1997 was 7 per 100,000 inhabitants, the lowest since 1985. Five- and ten-year trends show the 1997 murder rate was 28 percent lower than in 1993, and 19 percent below the 1988 rate. (*Ibid.*)

Based on supplemental data about 15,289 of the estimated 18,209 murders in 1997: 77 percent of the victims were males and 88 percent were persons 18 years of age or older. Forty-four percent were ages 20 through 34. The percentage of whites murdered was 48 percent, blacks 49 percent, and other races accounted for the remainder. (*Ibid.*)

In 1997, according to supplemental data reported for 17,272 offenders, 90 percent of the offenders for whom sex, age, and race were reported were male, and 87 percent were persons 18 of age and older. Seventy percent were ages 17-34. Of offenders for whom race was known, 53 percent were black, 45 percent were white, and the remainder were persons of other races. (*Ibid.*)

Data indicate that murder is most often intraracial among victims and offenders. In 1997, data based on incidents involving one victim and one offender show that 94 percent of the black murder victims were slain by black offenders, and 85 percent of white murder victims were killed by white offenders. (*Ibid.*)

Males were most often slain by males (88 percent in single victim/single offender situations). These same data show, however, that 9 out of 10 female victims were murdered by males. (*Ibid.*)

As in previous years, firearms were used in approximately 7 out of every 10 murders committed in the nation in 1997. (*Ibid.*, p.1)

In 1997, over 48 percent of all murder victims knew their assailants: 13 percent were related and 35 percent were acquainted. Fourteen percent of the victims were murdered by strangers, while the relationships among victims and offenders were unknown for 38 percent of the murders. (*Ibid.*, p. 17)

Sixty enforcement officers were feloniously slain in the line of duty during 1997, 10 more than in 1996. (*Ibid.*, p. 296)