Opening Address

Are We Becoming More or Less Violent?

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8th Annual Fall Trauma Conference
The Roots and Causes of the Perpetration of Violence
October 15, 2021
Crime Over A Very Long Time

- Homicide rate examples show significant decline over the long term.
- Overall, homicide in the US has been going down.
- Comparatively, violent crime in the US is at the medium-to-low level.
Long-Term Homicide Rates: Western Europe

Number of homicides per 100,000 individuals in a given population, 1300 to 2016

Source: Eisner (2003) & IHME as reported by Our World in Data
Recent Homicide Rates, 1990–2017

Number of homicides per 100,000 people in the world’s most economically productive countries

Source: IHME, Global Burden of Disease as reported by Our World in Data
Crime in the United States: The Broadest Picture

- In the US, the homicide rate, the violent crime rate and victim reports have all gone down.
- The 2016 bump in violent crime is due to a definitional change.
- Rape is the only violent crime not declining (and not increasing).
Estimates show that homicide rose sharply in 2020 but is still down almost 40% from its peak in 1980.

Long-Term Homicide Counts: United States

Total Number of Homicides, 1960–2019

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, disastercenter.com reporting
Recent Violent Deaths Counts: United States

Total Number of Murders and Nonnegligent Manslaughters, 2000–2019

Source: UCR data from FBI 2019 Crime in the United States report
Long-Term Violent Crime Rates: United States

Number of Violent Crimes per 100,000 People, 1960–2020

Long-Term Violent Crime Counts: United States

Total Number of Violent Crimes, 1960–2019

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, disastercenter.com reporting
Recent Violent Crime Counts: United States

Total Number of Violent Crimes, 2000–2019

UCR data from FBI 2019 Crime in the United States report
Counts: Recent Homicides vs. Violent Crimes

UCR data from FBI 2019 Crime in the United States report
In 2013, the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program redefined rape:
- incorporating the concept of consent
- removing “forcible”
- specifying the type of acts involved

The FBI estimated how many cases had gone uncounted in the UCR official FBI statistics until 2014.

Their conclusion: **an estimated 40% of rapes, including rapes of men, rape with an object, and non-vaginal rape, had been left out.**
Long-Term Rape Rates: United States

Number of Rapes per 100,000 People, 1960–2020

Long-Term Rape Counts: United States

Total Number of Rapes, 1960–2019

Crime Victimization (not via police reports)

Percentages of US residents age 12 or older who were victims of violent crime excluding simple assault, 1993–2019

Violent Victimization Rates by Race: US

Number of violent victimizations (inc. assault, rape, robbery) per 1,000 persons age 12 or older

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Violent Victimization by Race or Ethnicity, 2005–2019 report
The Pandemic Effect

- Violent crime is up somewhat, mainly due to homicide rate increases.
- Homicides are up worryingly.
- Firearm deaths are dramatically increasing.
The FBI data shows almost **5,000 more murders** in 2020 than in 2019, for a total of around 21,500.

Despite increases in 2020, the national rate—murders per 100,000—still remains about **one-third below** the rate in the early 1990s.

Even with the rise in murders and a roughly 5% increase in violent crime, the new data shows that **overall major crimes fell** about 4%–5% in 2020.

Yet, **lethal firearm use has increased**: approximately 77% of reported murders in 2020 were committed with a firearm, the highest share ever reported, up from 67% a decade ago.

FBI (2021)
Violent Crime Counts vs. Homicide Counts: US

Number of homicides in the US

- 25% increase from 2019

Number of violent crimes in the US

- 3% increase from 2019

Note: 2020 figures are estimates based on the FBI’s preliminary report from March 2021.

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program as reported by CNN
Selected Causes of Deaths Counts: California

Total Number of Deaths, 2017–2020

- Ischemic heart disease
- COVID-19
- Alzheimer’s disease
- Heart disease
- COPD
- Lung Cancer
- Drug overdose
- Diabetes mellitus
- Suicide/Self-harm
- Road injury
- Homicide

Source: California Department of Public Health, Fusion Center, 2021
Suicide and Homicide Counts: California

Total Number of Deaths, 2017–2020

Source: California Department of Public Health, Fusion Center, 2021
Firearms and Lethality

- The use of a firearm in the commission of any crime of violence, including homicide and suicide, is more lethal.
- It is firearm deaths, and not violence, that are increasing.
Lethal Firearm Use Has Increased

Approximately 77% of reported murders in 2020 were committed with a firearm, the highest share ever reported, up from 67% a decade ago.

FBI (2021)
Recent Gun-Related Death Rates: United States

Number of Deaths per 100,000 People, Age Adjusted, 1999–2019

- **Death by Firearm All Types**
- **Suicide (Intentional Self-Harm by Firearm)**
- **Homicide (Assault by Firearm)**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC Wonder, Underlying Cause of Death
Firearms: International Context

- The US is an outlier.
Firearms and Lethal Violence

A preference for crimes of personal force and the willingness and ability to use guns in robbery make similar levels of property crime **fifty-four times as deadly** in New York City as in London.

Franklin Zimring and Gordon Hawkins (1997)
*Crime Is Not the Problem: Lethal Violence in America*
Brazil and Mexico have low gun ownership rates.
Homicides from Firearms, Age-Adjusted Rates, 2017

Number of homicides from firearms per 100,000 people in economically advanced countries

Source: IHME, Global Burden of Disease as reported by Our World in Data
Gun-Related Homicide Rates vs. Gun Ownership Rates

Rates per 100,000 people in 25 economically advanced countries

Homicides Source: IHME, Global Burden of Disease as reported by Our World in Data;
Gun Ownership Source: World Population Review
Murder Clearance Rate

- Another US outlier is the rate of homicides being solved, compared to nations with low homicide rates.
- This could become a Catch-22 whereby more deaths require more solving and more deaths go unsolved.
- However, closer analysis shows that cleared homicides are partly predicted by the race of the victim; specifically, Black murder victims have the lowest murder clearance rates.
Homicide Crimes and Clearances Counts: US

Total Numbers of Murders and Clearances, 1965–2019

Source: Uniform Crime Report (UCR) as reported by Thomas Hargrove, Murder Accountability Program, on Tableau
Homicide Clearances Percentages: US

Percentages of Homicides Cleared by Law Enforcement, 1965–2019

Source: Uniform Crime Report (UCR) as reported by Thomas Hargrove, Murder Accountability Program, on Tableau
Homicide Clearances Percentages: Japan and US

Percentages of Homicides Cleared by Law Enforcement, 1994–2004

Source: Aki, 2008, Homicide Studies
Homicides Clearances Percentages: Western Europe

Percentages of Homicides Cleared by Law Enforcement, 2009–2014

Source: Liem et al., 2019, European Journal of Criminology
Homicide Clearances Percentages by Victim Race: US

Percentages of Homicides Cleared by Law Enforcement, 1976–2017

Source: FBI data reported by Murder Accountability Project
Changes by Race/Ethnicity Since 2007: US

Violent Victimization Rates by Race: US

Homicide Clearances Percentages by Victim Race: US

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Violent Victimization by Race or Ethnicity, 2005–2019 report

Source: FBI data reported by Murder Accountability Project
Conclusions

- The US is **not** becoming more violent. It is more armed.
- Great strides documented in reducing homicides, violent crimes in general and rates of victimization, across all races.
- One important exception is rape.
- While a definitional change increased the rape category by 40%, **rapes in fact are the only violent crime not to go down**. But they did not go up, either.
- The pandemic has seen a worrisome increase in homicides, but **crime overall is down**, including suicide. Only a 3% rise in violent crime.
- The presence of a **firearm increases the likelihood** that any crime will end in death or near-death. The US would be less violent without firearms, but that is not the full solution.
- The **US murder clearance rate compares poorly** with other wealthy countries’ murder clearance rates, across the board.
- The disproportionate and lowering murder clearance rate for Black homicide victims may **contribute to Black victimization and murder**.
- More research is needed.
Thank You!
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References


Table 1. Rate of violent victimizations, by victim race or ethnicity, 2005-2019.

Data Brief: 2020 Increases in Deaths in California

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The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) IHME, Global Burden of Disease as reported by Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/homicide-rate

IHME, Global Burden of Disease as reported by Our World in Data, https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/homicide-rates-from-firearms


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