

Defensive Strategies



*By Lyn Bates,
Contributing Editor*

Regular readers of this column know that I like nothing better than actual facts, backed up by good, multi-year data, regardless of whether it fits preconceptions or not. That's why the AWARE website featured a blog about how the rate of rape has fallen very significantly in the last few years. Of course, rapes are still occurring, but in 1995, five women out of every 1,000 experienced this heinous crime, while in 2010 that had dropped to a whisker over two out of every 1,000. That's an amazing decrease, and truly good news. The bad news is that for the women who were raped, they were more likely to be facing an armed attacker, and were much more likely to be injured.

So, what about homicide?

The Bureau of Justice Statistics in the US Department of Justice tracks things like that, and also tracks homicides. Last December they published a summary of homicide in the US from 1960 to 2011. That's right, over 50 years of data went into some parts of this report, though much data was

Homicide: What is Your Risk?

available only for the last 10 years (NCJ 243035, for those who want ALL the details).

This report deals exclusively with homicides known and reported by law enforcement. That includes only murder and manslaughter—one person willfully killing another. It does not include suicide, accidental or negligent deaths by firearms. This makes it exactly the kind of study that will provide the most useful information to those of us who want it.

For the remainder of this article, I will talk only about the rate of various things, not the number of people or crimes committed. For example, the number of people killed in 1960 can't be meaningfully compared to the number killed last year, because our population has grown a lot in 50 years. Examining the rate of murders per 100,000 people allows a direct and easy way to see whether things are going up or down, getting better or getting worse.

The rate of homicide was about 5 (per 100,000) in 1960. It rose fairly steadily to a peak of 9.3 in 1980, dipped a bit and rose to just over 9 in 1990; since then it decreased steadily to about 5 in 2000, and has been mostly steady since then, until another little dip in the last few years has brought us back to 4.7, almost the same rate as in 1960. That's right, the murder rate peaked in 1980 and 1990, and has now fallen to virtually the 1960 level.

Here are some other highlights. In the last 10 years, while the murder rate was steady or falling slightly, the homicide rate for males was 3.6 times higher than

that for females. The average homicide rate for blacks was 6.3 times that for whites. Good news if you are a white woman, not so good if you are a black male.

The rate of homicide involving a firearm from the second peak in 1992 to 2011 decreased by 49%. The percentage of murder victims killed by a firearm (67%) was stable throughout that period.

In the last 10 years, 95% of homicides involved a single victim. (Yes, shooting sprees and mass murders get a lot of press, but the overwhelming number of murders aren't that type, and have just one victim.)

At what age are males at most risk to be the victim of a homicide? If you said anywhere from early teens to 40s, peaking at about 20, you would be right. But the peak rate for white males is under 10, while that for black males is about 100. Yes, the peak homicide victimization rate for black males was nearly 9 times higher than the peak rate for white males.

What about females? At what age are they at especially high risk? If you said: under 1 year, you would be right. Yes, female babies are being murdered at a rate higher than the rate for either white or black females of any other age. Again, the peak rate for white homicide victims was about 3 at age 20 while the rate for black female victims peaked at about 11 at the same age.

The rate of homicides involving a firearm decreased by half from 1992 to 2011, though firearms were still the leading weapon of

choice by murders. Murder by means of a knife or blunt object continued to fall, while the rate by personal weapons (fists, feet, strangling, etc.) and non-personal weapons (poison, explosives, fire, etc.) remained low, steady and virtually equal to one another.

The percentage of victims killed by a handgun changed little over the last 10 years. For male victims, 50-60% were killed with a handgun. For female victims, 30-40% were killed with a handgun. For all victims, 10-20% were killed by other kinds of firearms. This shows that the percentage of homicides involving a firearm has been stable for all victim types.

What do you think has happened to the homicide rate recently in big cities compared to, say, rural areas, suburban areas, or small cities? If you think large cities have been becoming more dangerous in this regard, you would be completely wrong. Yes, you would be wrong. In the biggest cities (over 500,000 people), the homicide rate in 1992 was nearly 30; in 2011, it was down to nearly 10. That is an enormous drop.

Big, but not huge, cities (100,000 to 500,000 people) experienced a similar drop in their murder rate, from a high of 19 to about 8. That's another tremendous drop.

The murder rate in suburban areas also dropped, though not as dramatically, from nearly 10 to about five

Small cities and rural areas continue to compete for the lowest murder rates, and have stayed nearly constant.

These numbers certainly signal that large cities are now much safer, at least when it comes to homicide risk.

What about all the news about incidents in which more than one
March-April 2014

person is murdered? Tragic incidents like Sandy Hook and many others spring instantly to mind. Are they becoming more prevalent, or just more newsworthy? The BJS report clearly states that "Since 2002, the percentage of homicide incidents involving two or more victims has remained relatively stable." That might not be what you, or some of your friends expected, or what the media leads the public to believe. It is clear, however, that the more victims a killer intends to have, the more likely he is to use a gun: only 67% of single victim homicides involved a gun, 77% of 2 victims homicides, 82% of 3 victims homicides, and over 90% of homicides with 4 or more victims.

So, what's the takeaway from all these mind-numbing numbers? Homicide risk for blacks,

especially young black men is still appallingly high. If you are lucky enough to be an over-30 white woman living in a small city, suburb or rural area, your risk is among the lowest.

If you have reason to fear that a particular person, such as a stalker or a violent ex, might have lethal intentions toward you, your own personal risk has just risen to the level where you should be taking serious safety precautions. There are still many women being murdered by men like this. National averages mean nothing when you have a good reason to know you might be in danger. But the overall risk of being murdered by another person is quite low, and likely to stay that way, or even go lower.

W&G

Maybe it should have been called the ~~BR~~-30

Powder charges with bench rest precision for your varmint rifle.

The BR-30 powder measure has been a fixture in the highly competitive world of bench rest shooting for a generation. Its ability to throw incredibly consistent charges between 10 & 50 grains is the stuff of records and legend. Today's long range Varmint cartridges operate in the same "sweet spot" of charge weights between 20 & 40 grains as the bench rest cartridges this measure was designed for. Your varmint arsenal deserves a BR-30.

REDDING
RELOADING EQUIPMENT
Always Made in America

An optional 17 and 20 cal drop tube adapter is available.

1089 Starr Road, Cortland, NY 13045
(607) 753-3331 • www.redding-reloading.com