

JUNE 2020



Violence Policy Center

Black Homicide Victimization in the United States

An Analysis of 2017 Homicide Data

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This study was funded with the support of The Joyce Foundation.

This study was also supported by generous gifts from David and Ellen Berman, Nicole Fealey, Michael and Chris Feves, Olivia Hartsell and Justin Lehmann.

This study was authored by VPC Senior Policy Analyst Marty Langley and VPC Executive Director Josh Sugarman.

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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This study examines the problem of black homicide victimization at the state level by analyzing unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) data for black homicide victimization submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).¹ The information used for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 2017 and is the most recent data available. This is the first analysis of the 2017 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 homicide victims.

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 2017 there were 7,809 black homicide victims in the United States. The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 20.42 per 100,000. For that year, the overall national homicide rate was 5.20 per 100,000. For whites, the national homicide rate was 3.06 per 100,000. Additional information contained in the FBI SHR data on black homicide victimization is below.

SEX

Of the 7,809 black homicide victims, 6,839 (88 percent) were male, 969 (12 percent) were female, and one was of unknown sex (less than one percent). The homicide rate for black male victims was 37.32 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for male homicide victims was 8.41 per 100,000. For white male homicide victims it was 4.45 per 100,000. The homicide rate for female black victims was 4.87 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for female homicide victims was 2.06 per 100,000. For white female homicide victims it was 1.68 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 homicides. 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 2017, as in years past, the state of Florida did not submit any data to the FBI Supplementary Homicide Report. Also in 2017, 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.

AGE

Five hundred sixty-five black homicide victims (seven percent) were less than 18 years old and 260 black homicide victims (three percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.

MOST COMMON WEAPONS

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of black victims (6,506 out of 7,491) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 66 percent (4,314 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 545 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 229 victims killed by bodily force, and 124 victims killed by a blunt object. In comparison, 67 percent of white victims and 77 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, 76 percent of black victims (2,370 out of 3,116) were killed by someone they knew. Seven hundred forty-six victims were killed by strangers.

CIRCUMSTANCE

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 68 percent (3,038 out of 4,444) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 48 percent (1,473 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender, and 12 percent (377 homicides) were reported to be gang-related.

There were 120 incidents reported as justifiable homicides of black victims killed by law enforcement in 2017. The SHR does not specifically identify killings by law enforcement that are not ruled justifiable. In the wake of controversial incidents of black citizens killed by law enforcement, media reports have focused on the lack of reliable statistics on lethal incidents involving law enforcement. In December 2015, the FBI announced that it would dramatically expand its data collection on violent police encounters by 2017.³ In October 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice outlined a plan to improve the collection of law enforcement use of force data.⁴

STATE RANKINGS

In 2017, the national black homicide victimization rate was 20.42 per 100,000. For that year, Missouri ranked first as the state with the highest black homicide victimization rate. Its rate of 57.30 per 100,000 was nearly triple the national average for black homicide victimization. The 10 states with the highest black homicide victimization rates are listed in the following chart. In order to ensure rankings contain stable rates, states with 10 or fewer black homicide victims were not included in the state rankings for 2017. These victims are included in the U.S. total and rate. While not ranked, the number of deaths and corresponding black homicide victimization rate for these states are included in Appendix Two.

Additional information for each of these states can be found in Appendix One, including: age and sex of victims; most common weapons used; relationship of victim to offender; and, the circumstances of the homicides. According to the SHR data, for states with more than 10 victims, 17 states had a black homicide victimization rate higher than the national per capita rate of 20.42 per 100,000.

For an alphabetical listing of all states that submitted data to the FBI, please see Appendix Two.

³ "FBI to sharply expand system for tracking fatal police shootings," *The Washington Post*, December 8, 2015.

⁴ "Justice Department Outlines Plan to Enable Nationwide Collection of Use of Force Data," Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, October 13, 2016 (<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-outlines-plan-enable-nationwide-collection-use-force-data>).

SPOTLIGHT ON MISSOURI

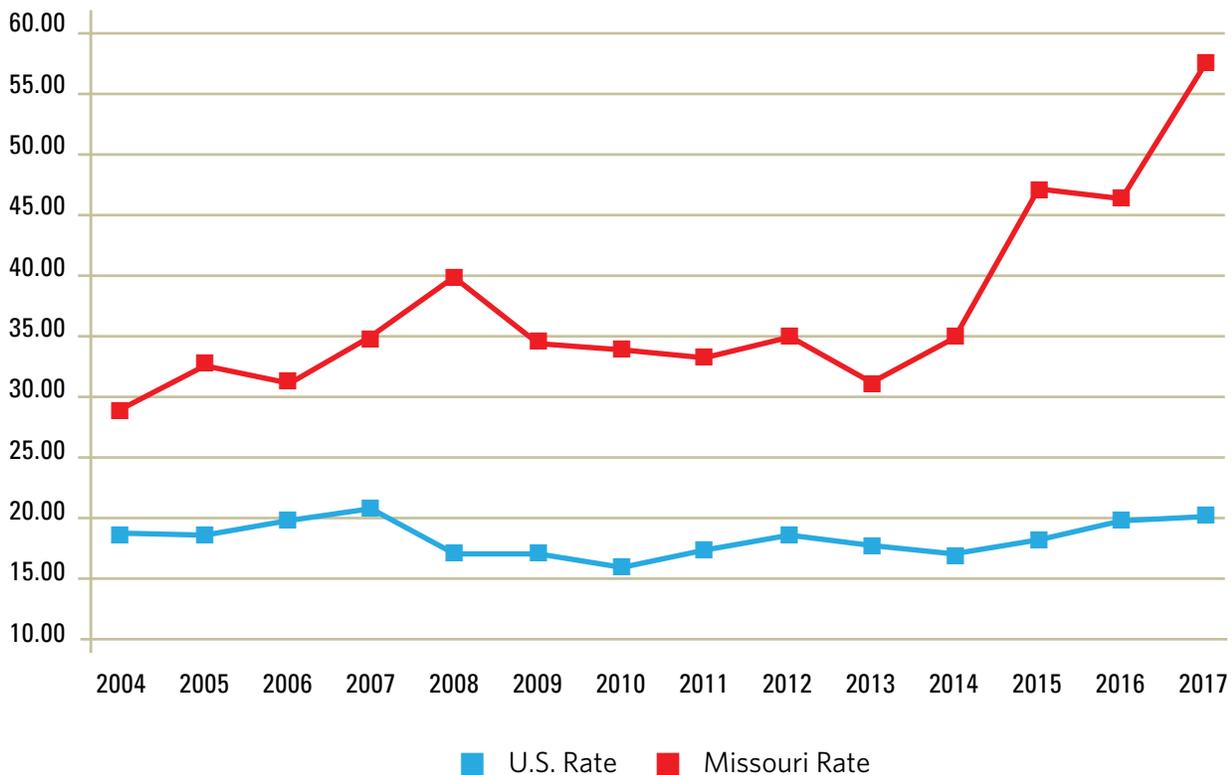
Missouri is experiencing a prolonged, and worsening, epidemic of black homicide victimization.

In 2017, Missouri had the highest black homicide victimization rate in the nation for the fourth year in a row. Missouri has ranked either first or second in the nation for black homicide victimization 11 years in a row.

Even those grim statistics do not reveal the true scope of the problem in Missouri. Despite already having the highest black homicide victimization rate in the country in 2014, *from 2014 to 2017 the black homicide victimization rate in Missouri increased by 64 percent.* Missouri's 2017 black homicide victimization rate of 57.30 is nearly three times the national black homicide victimization rate, and more than 18 times the national homicide victimization rate for white victims.

Missouri's black homicide victimization rates in 2015, 2016, and 2017 are the three highest rates in the 14-year history of this study. Missouri's 2017 rate of 57.30 is *55 percent higher than the highest rate recorded by any state other than Missouri in the 14-year history of this study.*

Black Homicide Victimization Rate in Missouri and the United States 2004 - 2017



The epidemic of black homicide victimization in Missouri is a crisis that should be a top priority for lawmakers in the state.

NUMBER OF BLACK HOMICIDE VICTIMS AND RATES BY STATE IN 2017, RANKED BY RATE

Ranking	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
1	Missouri	414	57.30
2	Iowa	43	35.56
3	Indiana	227	34.91
4	Wisconsin	132	34.11
5	Oklahoma	98	32.06
6	Illinois	572	30.62
7	Pennsylvania	459	30.19
8	Kentucky	110	29.55
9	Tennessee	336	29.29
10	Louisiana	442	28.95

CONCLUSION

Blacks in the United States are disproportionately affected by homicide. For the year 2017, blacks represented 13 percent of the nation's population, yet accounted for 50 percent of all homicide victims.⁵

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

In addition, individuals living in communities where violence is prevalent are at increased risk for a broad range of negative health and behavior outcomes. An increased understanding of how trauma resulting from community violence influences development, health, and behavior can lead to improvements in the way many social services are delivered as well as policy changes at the local and federal levels.⁶

For black victims of homicide, 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.

5 FBI Supplementary Homicide Report 2017, U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

6 For more information on trauma and community violence, see the July 2017 Violence Policy Center study *The Relationship Between Community Violence and Trauma: How Violence Affects Learning, Health, and Behavior* (<http://www.vpc.org/studies/trauma17.pdf>).

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

Missouri

There were 414 black homicide victims in Missouri in 2017.

The homicide rate among black victims in Missouri was 57.30 per 100,000 in 2017.

Ranked 1st in the United States

Age Twenty-four homicide victims (6 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.

Sex Out of 414 homicide victims, 366 were male and 48 were female.

Most Common Weapons For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 95 percent of victims (380 out of 399) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 43 percent (165 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 165 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 11 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 3 victims killed by a blunt object, and 1 victim killed by bodily force.

Victim/Offender Relationship For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 78 percent of victims (95 out of 122) were killed by someone they knew. Twenty-seven victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 59 percent (84 out of 143) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 73 percent (61 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Iowa

There were 43 black homicide victims in Iowa in 2017.

The homicide rate among black victims in Iowa was 35.56 per 100,000 in 2017.

Ranked 2nd in the United States

Age	Two homicide victims (5 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 29 years old.
Sex	Out of 43 homicide victims, 40 were male and 3 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 81 percent of victims (34 out of 42) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 62 percent (21 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 13 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 6 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, 81 percent of victims (13 out of 16) were killed by someone they knew. Three victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 79 percent (15 out of 19) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 53 percent (8 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Indiana

There were 227 black homicide victims in Indiana in 2017.

The homicide rate among black victims in Indiana was 34.91 per 100,000 in 2017.

Ranked 3rd in the United States

Age	Twenty homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 9 victims (4 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Sex	Out of 227 homicide victims, 195 were male and 32 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 92 percent of victims (202 out of 220) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 50 percent (100 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 89 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 10 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 4 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, 83 percent of victims (70 out of 84) were killed by someone they knew. Fourteen victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 53 percent (69 out of 131) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 41 percent (28 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Wisconsin

There were 132 black homicide victims in Wisconsin in 2017.

The homicide rate among black victims in Wisconsin was 34.11 per 100,000 in 2017.

Ranked 4th in the United States

Age	Ten 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.
Sex	Out of 132 homicide victims, 113 were male and 19 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 88 percent of victims (114 out of 130) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 75 percent (85 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 24 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 7 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments and 7 victims killed by bodily force.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 70 percent of victims (40 out of 57) were killed by someone they knew. Seventeen victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 72 percent (57 out of 79) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 56 percent (32 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Oklahoma

There were 98 black homicide victims in Oklahoma in 2017.

The homicide rate among black victims in Oklahoma was 32.06 per 100,000 in 2017.

Ranked 5th in the United States

Age	Eight 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 31 years old.
Sex	Out of 98 homicide victims, 90 were male and 8 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 76 percent of victims (71 out of 94) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 89 percent (63 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 6 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 9 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, 80 percent of victims (55 out of 69) were killed by someone they knew. Fourteen victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 65 percent (50 out of 77) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 52 percent (26 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Illinois

There were 572 black homicide victims in Illinois in 2017.

The homicide rate among black victims in Illinois was 30.62 per 100,000 in 2017.

Ranked 6th in the United States

Age	Forty-four homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 7 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 29 years old.
Sex	Out of 572 homicide victims, 518 were male and 54 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 92 percent of victims (520 out of 565) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 88 percent (458 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 50 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 25 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 9 victims killed by bodily force, and 6 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 (84 out of 117) were killed by someone they knew. Thirty-three victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 87 percent (350 out of 402) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 18 percent (64 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Pennsylvania

There were 459 black homicide victims in Pennsylvania in 2017.

The homicide rate among black victims in Pennsylvania was 30.19 per 100,000 in 2017.

Ranked 7th in the United States

Age	Forty-six homicide victims (10 percent) were less than 18 years old and 10 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.
Sex	Out of 459 homicide victims, 414 were male and 45 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 86 percent of victims (389 out of 450) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 86 percent (333 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 46 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 30 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 21 victims killed by bodily force, and 4 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 (124 out of 147) were killed by someone they knew. Twenty-three victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 49 percent (189 out of 389) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 71 percent (134 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Kentucky

There were 110 black homicide victims in Kentucky in 2017.

The homicide rate among black victims in Kentucky was 29.55 per 100,000 in 2017.

Ranked 8th in the United States

Age	Eight homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 2 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.
Sex	Out of 110 homicide victims, 101 were male and 9 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 93 percent of victims (99 out of 107) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 63 percent (62 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 33 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 4 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 3 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, 72 percent of victims (42 out of 58) were killed by someone they knew. Sixteen victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 58 percent (29 out of 50) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 48 percent (14 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Tennessee

There were 336 black homicide victims in Tennessee in 2017.

The homicide rate among black victims in Tennessee was 29.29 per 100,000 in 2017.

Ranked 9th in the United States

Age	Thirty-one homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 5 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.
Sex	Out of 336 homicide victims, 296 were male and 40 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 92 percent of victims (288 out of 314) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 71 percent (205 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 71 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 17 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, and 7 victims killed by bodily force.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 72 percent of victims (147 out of 205) were killed by someone they knew. Fifty-eight victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 73 percent (119 out of 164) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 61 percent (73 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Louisiana

There were 442 black homicide victims in Louisiana in 2017.

The homicide rate among black victims in Louisiana was 28.95 per 100,000 in 2017.

Ranked 10th in the United States

Age	Thirty-five homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 8 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Sex	Out of 442 homicide victims, 385 were male and 57 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 89 percent of victims (377 out of 425) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 49 percent (186 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 165 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 29 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 11 victims killed by bodily force, and 4 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 (151 out of 180) were killed by someone they knew. Twenty-nine victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 65 percent (152 out of 235) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 63 percent (96 homicides) involved an argument between the victim and the offender.

United States

There were 7,809 black homicide victims in the United States in 2017.

The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 20.42 per 100,000 in 2017.

Age Five hundred sixty-five homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 260 victims (3 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.

Sex Out of 7,809 homicide victims, 6,839 were male, 969 were female, and 1 was of unknown sex.

Most Common Weapons For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (6,506 out of 7,491) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 66 percent (4,314 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 1,867 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 545 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 229 victims killed by bodily force, and 124 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 (2,370 out of 3,116) were killed by someone they knew. Seven hundred forty-six victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 68 percent (3,038 out of 4,444) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 48 percent (1,473 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Appendix Two: Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2017

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
	Alabama	N/A	N/A
*	Alaska	10	35.93
20	Arizona	63	17.91
14	Arkansas	129	27.39
18	California	504	19.79
19	Colorado	47	18.47
30	Connecticut	60	14.16
17	Delaware	46	21.07
	Florida	N/A	N/A
27	Georgia	501	14.92
*	Hawaii	5	16.09
*	Idaho	0	0.00
6	Illinois	572	30.62
3	Indiana	227	34.91
2	Iowa	43	35.56
26	Kansas	27	15.09
8	Kentucky	110	29.55
10	Louisiana	442	28.95
*	Maine	3	14.05
16	Maryland	407	21.93
32	Massachusetts	75	12.41
12	Michigan	391	27.75
28	Minnesota	54	14.70
33	Mississippi	111	9.83
1	Missouri	414	57.30
*	Montana	2	32.47
25	Nebraska	15	15.42
11	Nevada	85	28.93
*	New Hampshire	0	0.00
21	New Jersey	226	16.99
*	New Mexico	7	13.24
34	New York	313	9.07

* In order to ensure rankings contain stable rates, states with 10 or fewer black homicide victims were not included in the state rankings for 2017. These victims are included in the U.S. total and rate.

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
29	North Carolina	330	14.46
*	North Dakota	3	12.64
13	Ohio	414	27.48
5	Oklahoma	98	32.06
*	Oregon	9	9.98
7	Pennsylvania	459	30.19
*	Rhode Island	9	10.37
22	South Carolina	231	16.85
*	South Dakota	0	0.00
9	Tennessee	336	29.29
24	Texas	567	15.76
*	Utah	2	4.57
*	Vermont	2	23.79
23	Virginia	272	16.21
31	Washington	39	12.46
15	West Virginia	17	26.12
4	Wisconsin	132	34.11
*	Wyoming	0	0.00
U.S. Total		7,809	20.42

* In order to ensure rankings contain stable rates, states with 10 or fewer black homicide victims were not included in the state rankings for 2017. These victims are included in the U.S. total and rate.



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