



J. Robert Flores, Administrator

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## JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN

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# Trends in the Murder of Juveniles: 1980–2000

**Paul D. Harms and Howard N. Snyder**

An estimated 1,610 juveniles were murdered in the United States in 2000.<sup>1</sup> This was the smallest number in 15 years and was substantially less than the peak of 2,880 in 1993. In fact, adjusting for variations in the size of the juvenile population, the murder rate for juveniles in 2000 (2.3 murders per 100,000 juveniles) was less than in any of the preceding 20 years. In 1980, 8% of all murder victims were younger than 18. By 1993, one in eight persons (12%) murdered in the United States was a juvenile. That proportion remained stable through 1999, and then dropped to 10% in 2000.

These findings are derived from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) Uniform Crime Reporting Program, through which the FBI requests a detailed supplementary homicide report (SHR) on each murder from local law enforcement agencies. The SHR data, which are available for 91% of the homicides committed in the United States between 1980 and 2000, provide information on the demographics of victims and known offenders, the relationship between them, and the weapon used.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this Bulletin, the term "juvenile" refers to persons younger than 18 years old. The terms "murder" and "homicide" are used synonymously to represent "murder and nonnegligent manslaughter" from the supplementary homicide report.

National estimates developed from SHR data yield the following statistics on murdered juveniles:

- ◆ Juveniles younger than 12 comprised 42% of juvenile murder victims between 1980 and 2000.
- ◆ Between 1980 and 2000, the murder rate for children younger than 1 was greater than the rate for any age from 1 to 15.
- ◆ Males accounted for 67% of all juvenile murder victims between 1980 and 2000 and 77% of murder victims ages 12–17.
- ◆ The murder rate for female juveniles remained largely unchanged between 1980 and 1998, and then dropped to a 21-year low in 2000. In contrast, the murder rate for male juveniles increased 117% between 1984 and 1993 and then dropped, leaving the 2000 rate only 8% above its lowest level in the 21-year period.
- ◆ Between 1980 and 1993, the murder rate for juveniles ages 12–17 increased 163% for blacks and 49% for whites. Between 1993 and 2000, the murder rate for this age group decreased 64% for black juveniles and 51% for white juveniles.
- ◆ In 1980, 41% of murdered juveniles were killed with a firearm. By 1993, the proportion had increased to 61%; by 2000, it had dropped back to 47%.

### A Message From OJJDP

Homicides are always tragic, but the killing of a child is especially so. This Bulletin draws on statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting Program—in particular, supplementary homicide report data—to analyze trends in the murder of youth between 1980 and 2000.

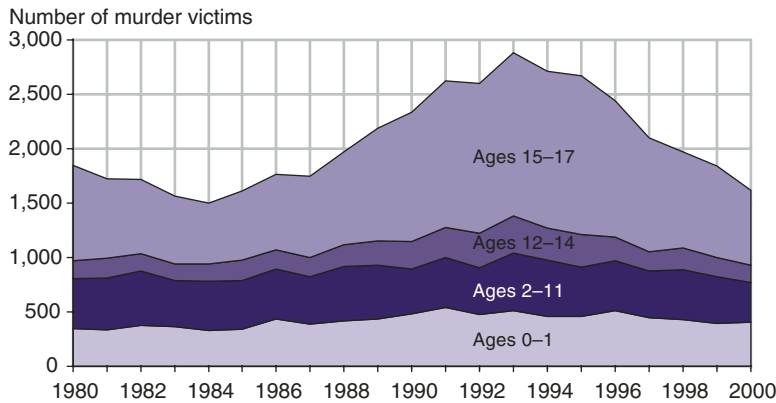
Between 1980 and 2000, approximately 434,000 persons were murdered in the United States. About 1 in 10 of these victims were juveniles. Fortunately, the number of youth murdered in 2000 (1,610) was considerably below the number of youth murdered in 1993 (2,880)—the peak year in the period covered by this Bulletin.

In fact, the 2000 murder rate for juvenile victims was lower than in any of the preceding 20 years. Moreover, the murder rate for youth dropped 47% in just 7 years.

Despite the decrease, there is small comfort in numbers when they represent the violent deaths of more than 1,600 children each year. While the findings reported in these pages show marked improvement, there is still reason for concern. For example, the murder rate for children younger than age 1 was higher than the rate for all youth ages 1–15.

While the trend over the past several years has been positive, there is work to be done.

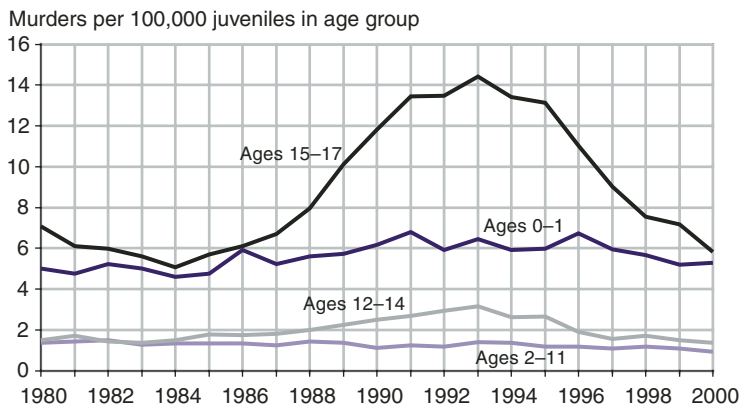
**In 2000, the annual number of all juvenile homicides fell to its lowest level in 15 years**



- ◆ Fewer juveniles were murdered in 1984 (1,500) than in any other year between 1980 and 2000; the greatest number of juveniles were murdered in 1993 (2,880).
- ◆ From 1984 to 1993, the number of murder victims ages 15–17 increased from 560 to 1,500, while the number of murders in the other juvenile age groups remained relatively constant.
- ◆ The proportion of 15- to 17-year-old victims increased from 37% in 1984 to 52% in 1993. By 2000, this proportion had dropped to 43% of all juvenile murder victims.

Data source: Analysis of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980–2000 [machine-readable data files].

**Both the large increase in the juvenile homicide rate between 1984 and 1993 and the subsequent decrease were attributable mainly to changes in the homicide rates of juveniles ages 12–17**



- ◆ Between the low year of 1984 and the peak year of 1993, the murder rate increased 183% for 15- to 17-year-olds, 111% for 12- to 14-year-olds, 4% for 2- to 11-year-olds, and 40% for juveniles younger than 2 years old.

Data source: Analysis of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980–2000 [machine-readable data files] and population data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. [See data source note on page 8 for detail.]

**The murder rate for juvenile victims reached a 21-year low in 2000**

Between 1980 and 2000, an estimated 433,820 people were murdered in the United States. Of all the people murdered during this period, 43,370 (10%) were juveniles. The total number of persons murdered in the United States in 2000 (15,590) was the smallest of any year between 1980 and 2000. In 2000, an estimated 1,610 juveniles were murdered in the United States, the smallest number since 1984.

From 1993 to 2000, the murder rate dropped from 4.3 to 2.3 murders per 100,000 juveniles—a 47% decrease in the juvenile murder rate in 7 years.<sup>2</sup> The dramatic drop in the rate at which juveniles were murdered from 1993 to 2000 was good news. This decrease, however, followed a disturbing increase during the 9 years preceding 1993.

In 1984, the rate at which juveniles were murdered was 2.4 murders per 100,000 juveniles. Between 1984 and 1993, the rate increased 79%. The large decrease from 1993 to 2000 brought the murder rate for juveniles in 2000 to a point 4% below the previous low in 1984, making 2000 the least lethal year for juveniles in the 1980 to 2000 period.

The large increase and subsequent decrease in the murder of juveniles between 1980 and 2000 were not reflected in the murder trends for all types of juveniles. The overall pattern described above was due to the large changes in the murder of juveniles ages 12–17 over this period. These older juveniles were 58% of all juvenile murder victims between 1980 and 2000. Murder rates of younger juveniles were relatively constant over this period.

In addition, the large increase in the number of juveniles murdered between 1980 and 1993 resulted more from male than female homicides. Over this period, the juvenile male homicide rate increased 117% while the juvenile female rate increased 23%. Further, the increase in the murder rate for black juveniles (92%) was far greater than the increase for white juveniles (20%). Between 1993 and 2000, these large increases were followed by large decreases for both male (50%) and female (38%) juveniles and for both white (37%) and black (54%) juveniles.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this Bulletin, murder rates represent the number of victims per 100,000 persons in the age group.

## Trends in murder rates were similar for older juvenile victims and young adult victims

The substantial growth and then decline in the murder rate for juveniles ages 12–17 between the low year of 1984 and 2000 is paralleled in the murder trends for adult victims ages 18–30. However, the increase and subsequent decrease in the murder rate was proportionally smaller as the victim's age approached 30 years.

Murder rates at least doubled between 1984 and 1993 for each age from 13 to 20. The largest murder rate increase between 1984 and 1993 for any juvenile or adult victim age group was the 202% increase experienced by 17-year-olds. Murders of victims ages 21–24 grew by 62% between 1984 and 1993, while the rate for victims ages 25–30 grew by 24%. Between 1993 and 2000, murder rates decreased more for victims ages 12–17 (58%) than for victims ages 18–20 (46%), 21–24 (34%), and 25–30 (33%).

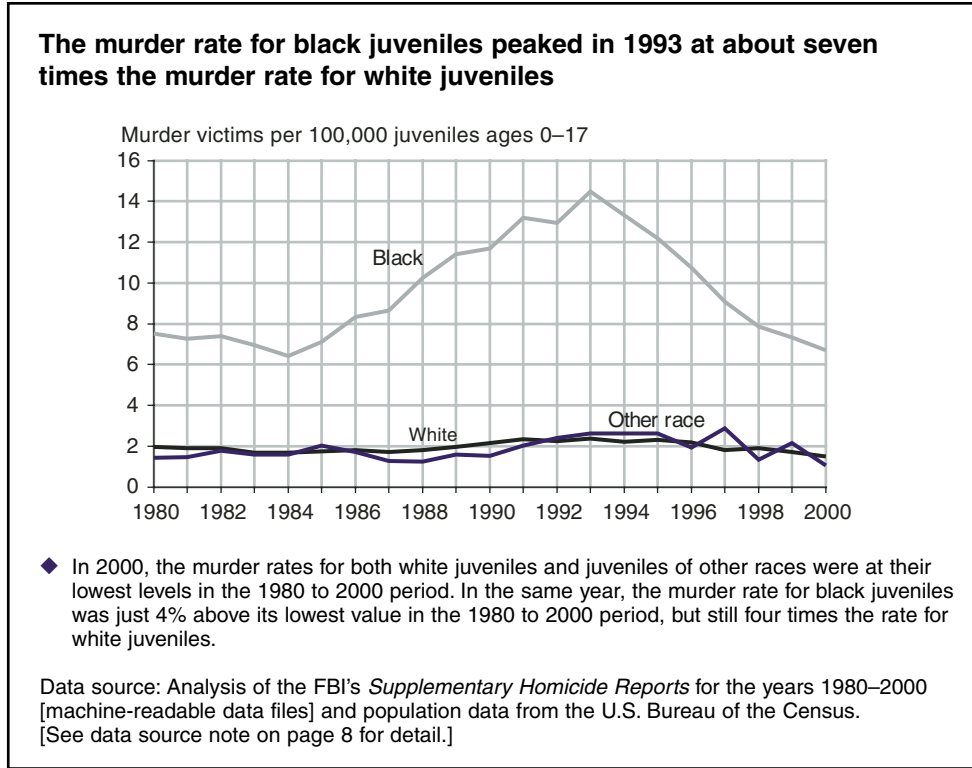
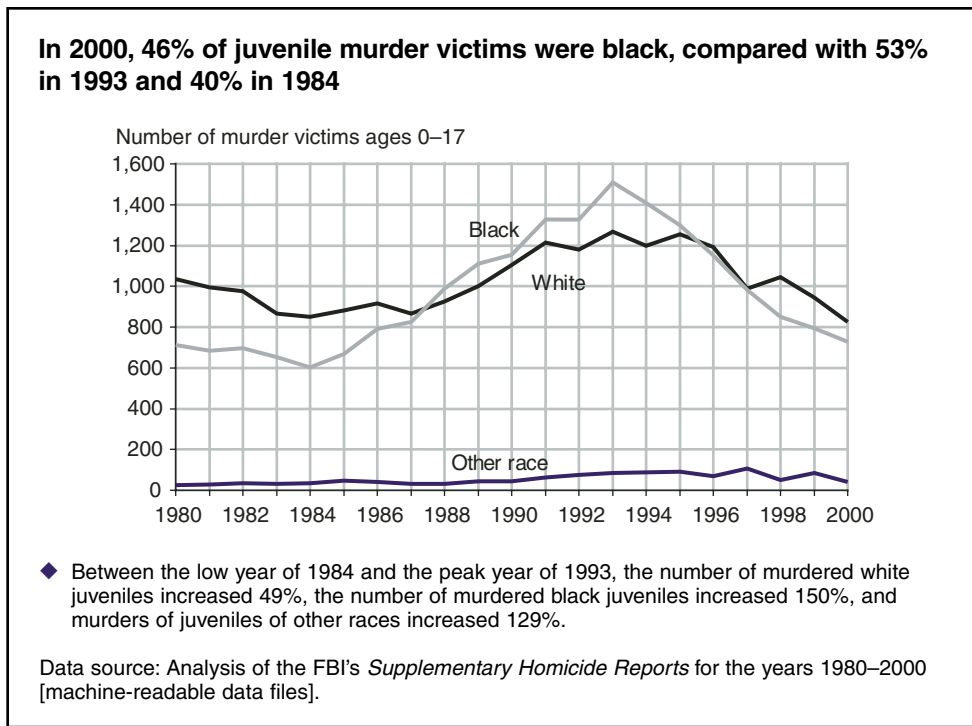
## Juveniles most likely to be murdered were younger than 1 and those ages 16 and 17

Between 1980 and 2000, the murder rate for children younger than 1 averaged 7.1. The average rate dropped consistently with age for children between ages 1 and 5 (from 4.1 to 1.1, respectively). The murder rate stabilized for children ages 6–11 (at about 0.8). Between 1980 and 2000, the murder rate for juveniles younger than 1 was nearly twice that of 1-year-olds and more than five times the rate for juveniles ages 2–11.

Between 1980 and 2000, the average murder rate increased with age for juvenile victims older than 11. Over this period, the murder rate averaged 1.1 for 12-year-olds and grew to 12.3 for 17-year-olds.

## In 2000, the murder rate for male victims ages 12–17 was more than three times the female rate

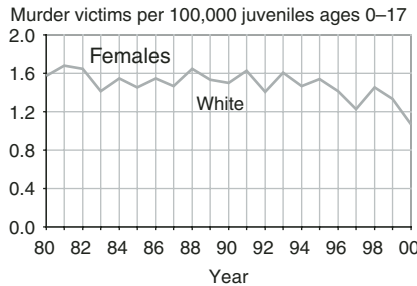
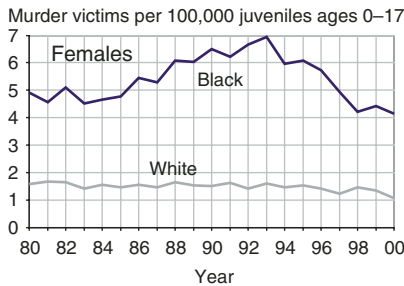
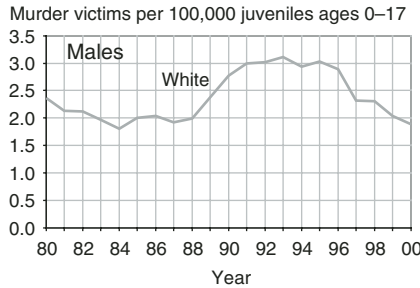
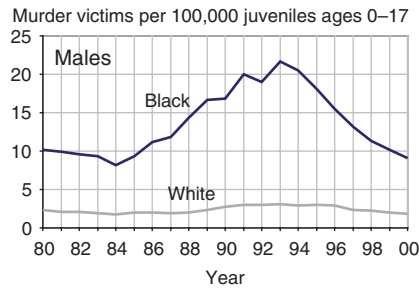
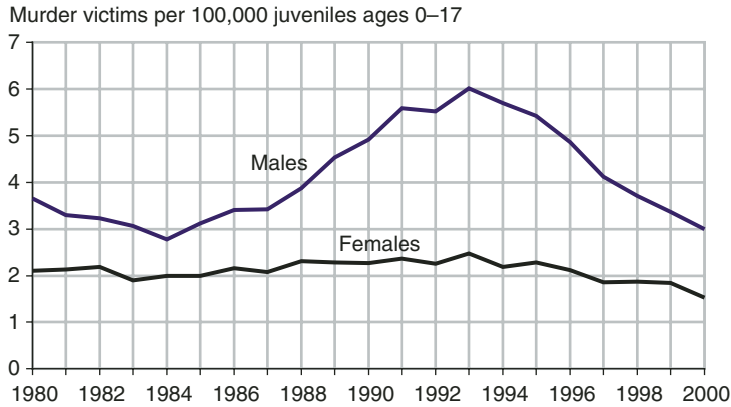
Between 1980 and 2000, an estimated 24,950 juveniles ages 12–17 were murdered; 77% were male. The murder rate for female victims ages 12–17 increased 29% between 1980 and 1993, while the corresponding male rate increased 118%. Both rates peaked in 1993, when the murder rate for male victims ages 12–17 (13.6) was four times the female rate (3.4).



The murder rates for both males and females within this age group fell similarly after 1993. Between 1993 and 2000, the murder rate for males ages 12–17 decreased 60% and the corresponding female

rate decreased 52%. The murder rate for females ages 12–17 in 2000 was at its lowest level in the 1980 to 2000 period, while the corresponding male rate was still 29% above its lowest level of the period.

**The increase and subsequent decrease in the murders of juveniles between 1980 and 2000 were attributable mostly to changes in the murder rate for males**



- ◆ Variations in the substantially smaller victimization rate for white juveniles are masked when placed on a graph displaying the corresponding black rate. So that readers can see the relative variations within the white and black rates, the white rates are presented separately using a magnified scale on the y axis.
- ◆ Between the low year of 1984 and the peak year of 1993, the juvenile murder rate increased 117% for males and 23% for females. By 2000, the male rate had fallen to a level 9% higher than the 1984 rate and the female rate had fallen to a level 23% lower than the 1984 rate.
- ◆ Between 1984 and 1993, murder rates increased 167% for black males, 72% for white males, 50% for black females, and 4% for white females. By 2000, the rates for both white females and black females had fallen below their 1984 levels (31% and 11% lower, respectively). In contrast, in 2000, murder rates for both white males and black males were still higher than their 1984 levels (5% and 12% higher, respectively).

Data source: Analysis of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980–2000 [machine-readable data files] and population data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. [See data source note on page 8 for detail.]

**Most murder victims ages 12–17 were black**

Of the 24,950 juveniles ages 12–17 who were murdered between 1980 and 2000, 12,880 (52%) were black and 11,270 (46%) were white. The remaining 620 murder victims were American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian, or Pacific Islander.<sup>3</sup>

The large change in the overall murder rates for juvenile victims ages 12–17 between 1980 and 2000 is reflected in the rate for black juveniles. The murder rate for black juveniles ages 12–17 increased 163% between 1980 and 1993, reaching a peak rate of 31.6 murders for every 100,000 blacks in this age group. In comparison, the murder rate for white victims in the 12–17 age group increased 49% during the same time period, to peak at 4.4 murders per 100,000 in 1993.

The murder rate for black victims decreased more than the rate for whites between 1993 and 2000 (64% versus 51%). Even with the greater decline, the 2000 murder rate for black victims ages 12–17 (11.4) was still more than five times greater than that for white victims in the same age group (2.2). The 2000 murder rate for white victims ages 12–17 was lower than the rate in any year during the 1980s and 1990s, while the black rate was substantially above its lowest level in the period (9.4 in 1984).

**Murder rates for victims ages 2–11 reached a 21-year low in 2000**

Children ages 2–11 accounted for 22% (or 9,590) of the juvenile murder victims between 1980 and 2000. The average annual murder rates for 2-year-olds (3.3) and 3-year-olds (2.1) were above the rates for children ages 4–11 (which averaged about 0.9) over this period. In general, the murder rate for children ages 2–11 decreased by 32% between 1980 and 2000.

The age-specific murder rates for male and female victims in the 2–11 age group were essentially equal from 1980 to 2000. The average murder rate for male victims ages 2–11 was 1.3, compared with 1.2 for female victims. The murder rates for both male and female juveniles ages 2–11 decreased between 1980 and 2000 (31% and 33%, respectively), reaching 21-year lows in 2000 (1.0 and 0.9, respectively).

<sup>3</sup> Total based on unrounded numbers. The race was unknown for 190 victims.

Between 1980 and 2000, the murder rate for black children in the 2–11 age group averaged 3.3, nearly four times the average murder rate of 0.9 for white children in this age group. The murder rate for white juveniles ages 2–11 decreased 33% between 1980 and 2000 (to end at 0.7), while the rate for black juveniles in this age group decreased 27% over this period (reaching 2.3 in 2000); both fell to their lowest levels of the 1980s and 1990s.

### Murder rates for victims younger than age 2 were greater for males than females and blacks than whites

Juveniles younger than age 2 accounted for 20% (8,830) of the juvenile murder victims between 1980 and 2000, although they made up only 11% of the juvenile population. Victimization was somewhat more prevalent among males (54%) than females (46%).

During the 1980s, the average murder rate for males younger than age 2 was similar to that for young females (5.4 and 5.0, respectively). Increases in the rates for young males and females during the 1980s and 1990s (20% and 14%, respectively) maintained this similarity in murder rates; the average rates in the 1990s were 6.5 for males younger than age 2 and 5.6 for young females.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1980s, the murder rate for blacks younger than age 2 was nearly four times that for whites (13.7 versus 3.6). Similar increases in the rates for blacks and whites between the 1980s and 1990s (19% and 15%, respectively) maintained this disparity in murder rates for young black (16.3) and white (4.2) children in the 1990s.

### Most murders of juveniles ages 12–17 involved firearms

Although the annual number of non-firearm murders of juveniles remained fairly steady between 1980 and 1993 (averaging 1,040), the number of juveniles murdered by firearms increased 133% (from 750 in 1980 to 1,750 in 1993). The proportion of murders of juveniles that involved a firearm increased from 41% to 61% between 1980 and 1993. From 1993 to 2000, the number of juveniles murdered

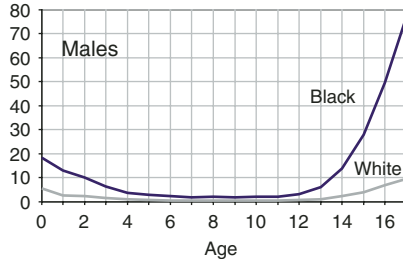
<sup>4</sup> Large yearly fluctuations necessitated comparisons of multiyear periods.

### Between 1980 and 2000, murder rates were about equal for boys and girls until they reached their teenage years

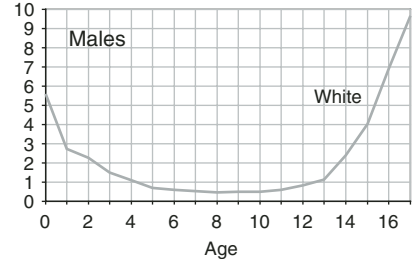
Murder victims per 100,000 juveniles in age group, 1980–2000



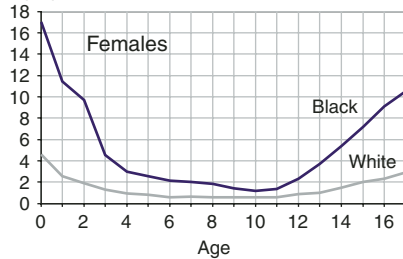
Murder victims per 100,000 juveniles in age group, 1980–2000



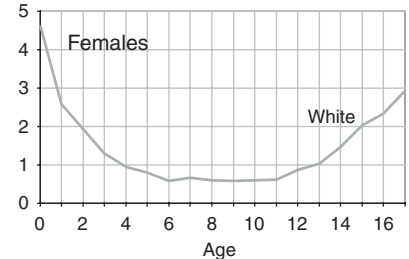
Murder victims per 100,000 juveniles in age group, 1980–2000



Murder victims per 100,000 juveniles in age group, 1980–2000



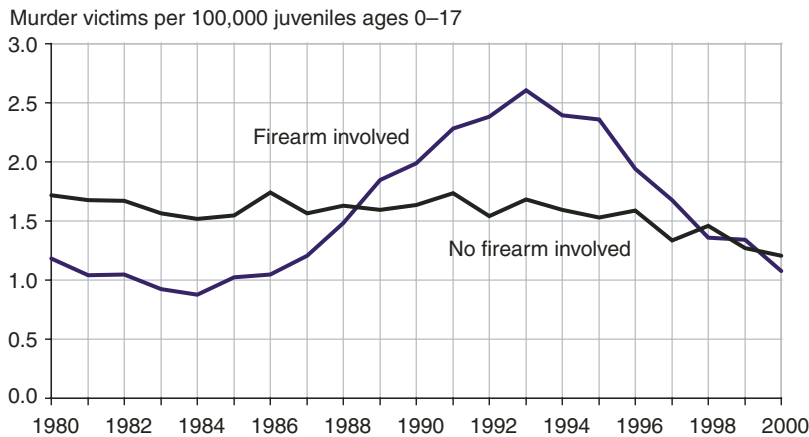
Murder victims per 100,000 juveniles in age group, 1980–2000



- ◆ Variations in the substantially smaller victimization rate for white juveniles are masked when placed on a graph displaying the corresponding black rate. So that readers can see the relative variations within the white and black rates, the white rates are presented separately using a magnified scale on the y axis.
- ◆ Between 1980 and 2000, black males were four times as likely to be murdered as white males up to age 12. After age 12, the murder rate for black males increased faster than that for white males. By age 17, black males were eight times as likely to be murdered as white males.
- ◆ Over the same period, the murder rate for black female juveniles averaged 3.5 times that for white female juveniles.
- ◆ Both black females and white females were more likely to be murdered before their first birthday than at any other time in their juvenile years.

Data source: Analysis of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980–2000 [machine-readable data files] and population data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. [See data source note on page 8 for detail.]

### The large increase in murder rates for juvenile victims between 1984 and 1993 was almost entirely in firearm murders



- ◆ By 2000, the firearm murder rate for juvenile victims was within 23% of its 21-year low in 1984. The steady decline in the nonfirearm murder rate for juvenile victims brought it to a 21-year low in 2000.

Data source: Analysis of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980–2000 [machine-readable data files] and population data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. [See data source note on page 8 for detail.]

with a firearm decreased from 1,750 to 760 (nearly equal to the number in 1980), while the number of nonfirearm murders decreased from 1,130 to 850 (a 21-year low). As a result, by 2000, less than half (47%) of all juvenile homicides involved firearms.<sup>5</sup>

Of all juveniles murdered with firearms between 1980 and 2000, 86% were ages 12–17. During this period, 76% of the murder victims in the 12–17 age group were killed with firearms, and 15% were murdered with a knife or blunt object. Within the 12–17 age group, the proportion of murders involving firearms increased from 60% in 1980 to 85% in 1994, then dropped to 78% by 2000.

The proportion of murders involving firearms increased for males and females and for blacks and whites in the 12–17 age group between 1980 and 1993. This increase was followed by a large decrease between 1993 and 2000 for females and for whites, but not for males or blacks in this age group.

#### Percent of murders involving a firearm:

Ages 12–17	1980	1993	2000
Males	68%	88%	86%
Females	38	66	49
Whites	51%	78%	70%
Blacks	70	88	85

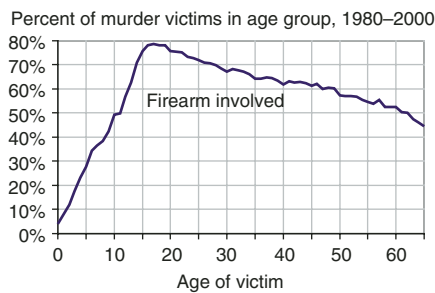
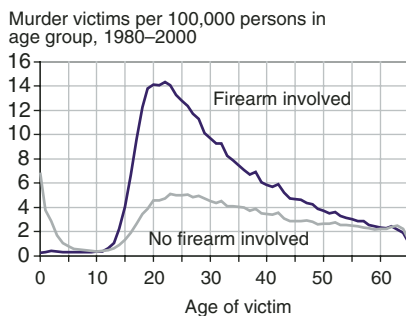
The relatively high proportions of murders of juveniles ages 12–17 involving firearms in 2000 are due in part to the steady decline in the number of nonfirearm murders, which decreased 55% between 1980 and 2000. This change was in large part because of decreases in the numbers of murders of juveniles ages 12–17 involving knives or blunt objects—between 1980 and 2000, these murders decreased by 66%.

### Most murdered children younger than age 2 were beaten to death

Between 1980 and 2000, the proportion of firearm murders of younger juveniles remained stable. Over this period, 26% of the murders of juveniles ages 2–11 and 5% of the murders of children younger than

<sup>5</sup> Percentages based on unrounded numbers.

### Between 1980 and 2000, firearms were most likely to be used in the murders of victims in their late teens and early twenties



- ◆ Between 1980 and 2000, the murder victims most likely to be killed with a firearm were those age 17—79% of the murders of 17-year-olds involved a firearm.
- ◆ More than 70% of the murders of victims in each age group from 14 to 27 were committed with a firearm.
- ◆ Firearms were used in more than half of the murders of victims ages 12–61.
- ◆ Less than 4% of murder victims younger than age 1 were killed with a firearm.

Data source: Analysis of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980–2000 [machine-readable data files] and population data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. [See data source note on page 8 for detail.]

age 2 involved firearms. These figures were similar for blacks and whites and for males and females.

Knives and blunt objects were used in 9% of the murders of juveniles younger than age 2 between 1980 and 2000. The use of “personal weapons”—blows to the body by hand or foot—was responsible for the majority (53%) of murders of juveniles younger than age 2; the remaining 32% involved other types of weapons or unknown weapons. This proportion is representative of the murders of males and females and of whites and blacks.

### Most younger juveniles were murdered by family members

Between 1980 and 2000, offenders in 26% of the murders of juveniles were unknown. In cases in which murderers of juveniles were identified by law enforcement, 38% were family members, 47% acquaintances, and 15% strangers. Adolescents were far less likely to be murdered by family members than were juveniles younger than age 12. This pattern is most pronounced for male juveniles.

Percent of offenders

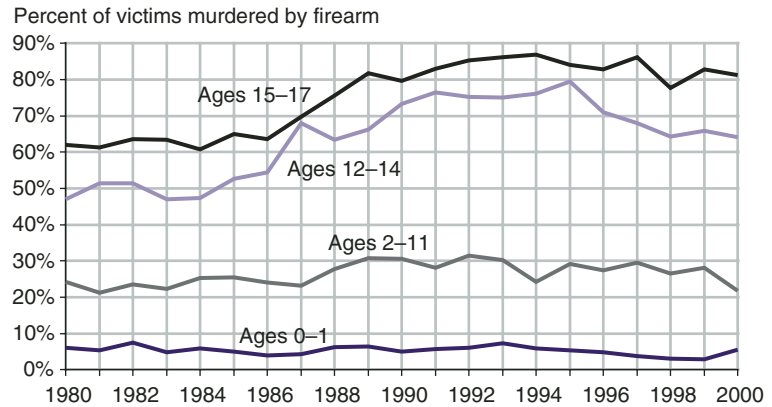
Gender and Age	Acquaintance		
	Family	Stranger	Stranger
Males	32%	51%	18%
0–11	66	29	5
12–17	8	66	26
Females	50%	40%	10%
0–11	67	28	5
12–17	19	63	18

Totals may not equal 100% because of rounding.

### Adults committed the majority of murders of juveniles

Of all juveniles murdered by known offenders between 1980 and 2000, 75% were murdered by adults, 21% by juveniles, and 4% by a group of offenders that included at least one juvenile and at least one adult—meaning that a juvenile offender was involved in 25% of all murders of juveniles. Between 1980 and 2000, juvenile offenders were involved in 9% of the murders of children younger than age 2, 11% of the murders of juveniles ages 2–11, and 39% of the murders of juveniles ages 12–17.

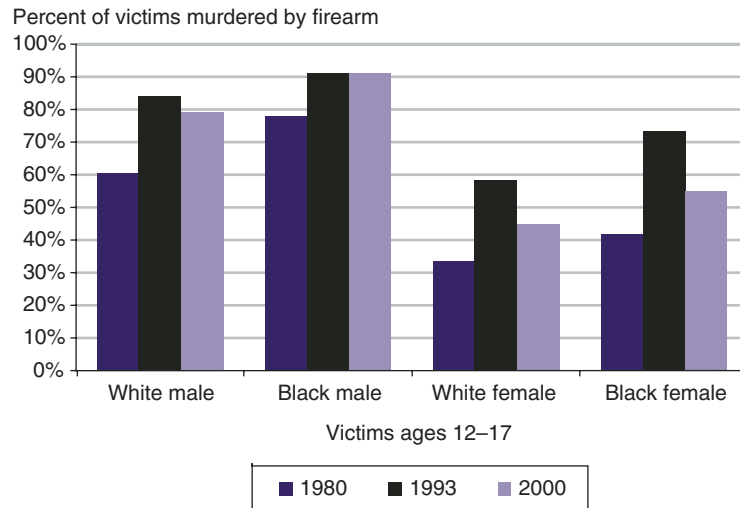
### The proportion of murders involving firearms increased more for older juvenile victims than younger victims during the late 1980s and early 1990s



- ◆ Between 1991 and 2000, about 4 of every 5 murdered juveniles ages 15–17 were killed with a firearm. In the early 1980s, this proportion was about 3 of every 5.
- ◆ In 2000, juveniles ages 15–17 accounted for 43% of all murdered juveniles; 81% of these murders were committed with a firearm. The murder of juveniles ages 15–17 accounted for 73% of all juvenile murders involving a firearm.

Data source: Analysis of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980–2000 [machine-readable data files].

### Between 1980 and 2000, the proportion of victims ages 12–17 murdered with a firearm was lowest for white females



- ◆ Annually, for juveniles ages 12–17, the murders of black juveniles were more likely to involve a firearm than the murders of white juveniles, for both males and females.
- ◆ In 2000, the proportion of murders of both black males and white males ages 12–17 that involved a firearm remained at the high levels of 1993. However, for both black females and white females in this age group, the proportion decreased between 1993 and 2000.

Data source: Analysis of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980–2000 [machine-readable data files].

### Data source note

Analysis of the FBI's *Supplementary Homicide Reports* for the years 1980–2000 [machine-readable data files], and population data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Population Estimates by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1980 to 1999 (With Short-Term Projection to Dates in 2000)* [machine-readable data files available online, released September 2000].

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