

Research Briefing

11 July 2023

By Grahame Allen,
Zoe Mansfield

Homicide statistics



Summary

- 1 Homicides in England and Wales
- 2 Characteristics of the victims of homicide
- 3 Method of killing
- 4 Sentencing and convictions for homicide
- 5 Scotland and Northern Ireland
- 6 International comparisons
- 7 Further reading

Number

Contributing Authors

Sally Lipscombe, Home Affairs, 5; Definition for indictment

Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing [‘Legal help: where to go and how to pay’](#) for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

Sources and subscriptions for MPs and staff

We try to use sources in our research that everyone can access, but sometimes only information that exists behind a paywall or via a subscription is available. We provide access to many online subscriptions to MPs and parliamentary staff, please contact hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk or visit commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources for more information.

Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at commonslibrary.parliament.uk. If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

Contents

Summary	5
1 Homicides in England and Wales	7
1.1 How many homicides are there each year?	7
Trends in homicide over time	7
Rates of homicide	9
Analysis of homicide trends by the Home Office	10
1.2 Homicides by region	11
1.3 Homicides by police force area	12
2 Characteristics of the victims of homicide	14
2.1 Sex	14
2.2 Age	15
Rate by age and sex	16
2.3 Relationship between the victims and suspects	17
Domestic homicides	18
Relationship to suspect, and sex	18
2.4 Ethnicity of the victims and suspects of homicide	20
Victims	20
Suspects	21
Ethnicity and relationship to victim	22
3 Method of killing	24
3.1 Method of killing by sex of the victim	25
3.2 Sharp instruments	26
Sharp instrument homicide among teens	27
3.3 Firearms	28
4 Sentencing and convictions for homicide	29
4.1 Outcomes	29

4.2	Prosecutions and convictions for homicide	29
4.3	Sentences	31
4.4	Prison population	32
4.5	Reconvictions	32
5	Scotland and Northern Ireland	33
5.1	Scotland	33
5.2	Northern Ireland	34
5.3	Comparison between UK countries	35
6	International comparisons	36
6.1	Issues with comparing homicide statistics	36
6.2	Comparison between countries	36
6.3	Europe	37
6.4	Major cities	38
7	Further reading	39

Summary

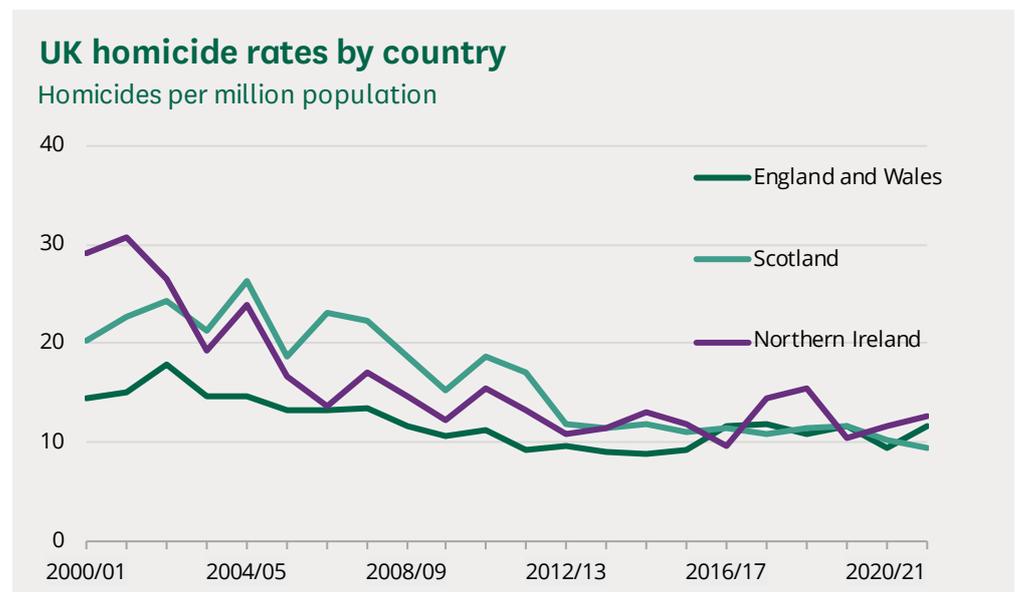
Homicide is the killing of one person by another. It accounts for a very small proportion of deaths each year in England and Wales; for the most recent five years of mortality data, [from 2017 to 2021, homicides accounted for one in every 800 deaths.](#)

Historical data on recorded homicides in England and Wales is published by the Office for National Statistics. Since records began in 1898, the number of homicides recorded has increased from around 300 a year, to over 500 a year since the 1970s. The number of offences peaked in 2003 but has since fallen.

In the last decade, the average (mean) number of homicides each year has been 607. [In the year ending March 2022, there were 696 homicide offences](#) recorded in England and Wales. There were also [52 cases of homicide recorded in Scotland](#) and [18 recorded in Northern Ireland.](#)

Homicide rates by area

The chart below shows the rate of homicide in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland since 2000. This is the number of homicides a year for every million people.



Sources: Police Service of Northern Ireland, [Police recorded crime Annual Trends 1998/99 to 2021/22](#), Tables 2.2 & 2.3; Scottish Government, [Homicide in Scotland 2020-2021: statistics](#), 25 October 2022, Table 1, Historic data table; Data for 1969-2022: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 1; ONS, [Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland](#), 21 December 2022

In 2022, of all countries in the UK, Northern Ireland had the highest rate of homicide at 12.6 offences per million population. The rate in England and Wales was 11.7, followed by Scotland which had 9.5 offences per million.

In the last three years, the rate of homicide in England and Wales has been highest in London, with an average of 15.1 offences per million population a year, followed by the West Midlands. Rates are lowest in the South East and South West of England.

Characteristics of the victims of homicide

The characteristics of the victims of homicide can vary greatly from year to year, as the overall numbers of offences is relatively low. However, there are some key patterns from the data:

- The majority of homicide victims in England and Wales are male. In the year ending March 2022, 72% of victims were male and 28% were female.
- Female victims of homicide have most commonly been killed by a partner or ex-partner, accounting for 59% of victims in the last decade where the relationship could be determined.
- Male victims of homicide have most commonly been killed by a friend or acquaintance (40% of victims where the relationship was determined).
- In the year ending March 2022, the rate of homicide was highest for Black and Black British victims and lowest for those of Mixed or multiple ethnicities.

Method of killing

In the year ending March 2022, 41% of homicides involved a sharp instrument. This was the most common method of killing, followed by hitting or kicking (without the use of a weapon).

Sentencing and convictions

As of May 2023, [charges had been made in almost two thirds](#) (63%) of homicide cases recorded in 2021/22. Just under a quarter (24%) of cases had not been assigned an outcome.

In the most recent year, the year to March 2022, [414 people were indicted for homicide](#) and 318 were convicted.

1 Homicides in England and Wales

Homicide is the killing of one person by another. In England and Wales, the main homicide offences are murder and manslaughter. Other offences include infanticide and corporate manslaughter.

Homicides account for a very small proportion of deaths in England and Wales. For example, for the most recent five years of data, 2017 to 2021, homicide was the cause of 1 in every 800 deaths.¹

1.1 How many homicides are there each year?

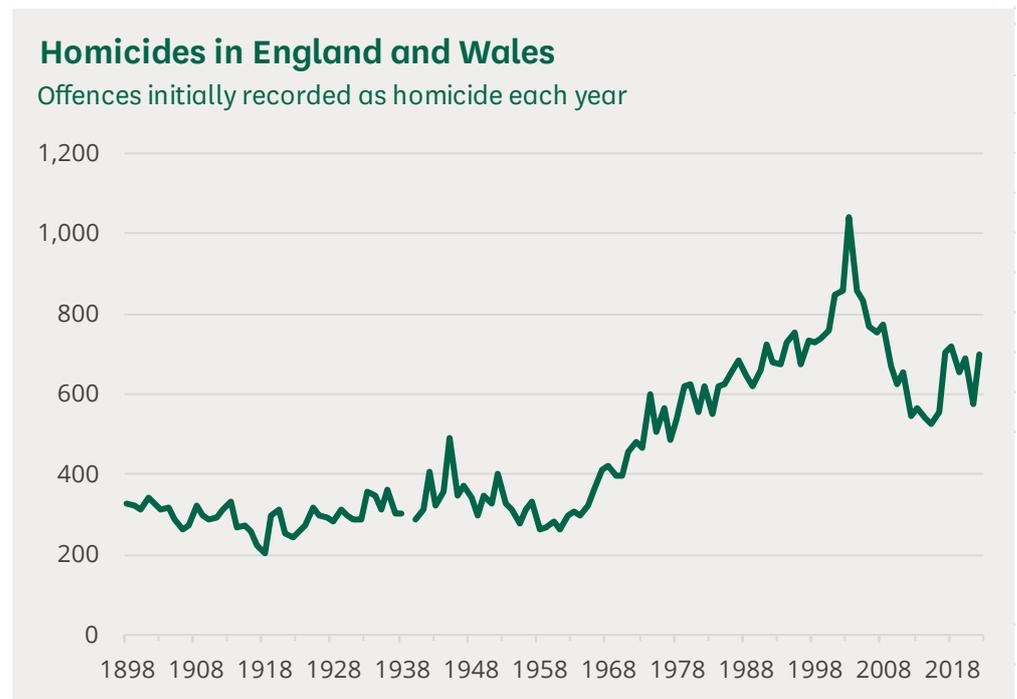
In the last decade, there have been an average (mean) of 607 homicides each year. The annual number of homicides is relatively small meaning that the number recorded in each year can vary widely.

In the most recent year of the statistics, ending 31 March 2022, there were 696 victims of homicide in England and Wales. This was 130 more than the previous year, a 23% increase, and is almost double the figure for 1967 (when this time series began). Caution should be taken when considering figures between 2020 and 2022 due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Trends in homicide over time

The chart overleaf shows recorded homicides in England and Wales since 1898.

¹ [Mortality Statistics by underlying cause, from NOMIS](#), accessed 15 May 2023



Notes: Data for 1939 is not available; year to December until 1997 and year to March thereafter.

Sources: Data for 1899-1968: Home Office, [Historical Crime Data, 1898-2002](#), 21 April 2016 (accessed January 2018); Data for 1969-2022: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 1

There were generally between 200 and 400 homicides recorded in each year between the late 1800s and the 1960s. The number of recorded homicides increased from the mid-1960s until the early 2000s. The number peaked in 2003 (this includes 173 homicides committed by Dr Harold Shipman that were recorded in 2003 (see below)). The number of homicides generally fell from the year ending March 2003 to a low of 511 in the year ending March 2015, before rising again since.

From 1967, the number of offences currently classed as homicide has been recorded alongside the number originally classed as homicide. This reflects revisions of the data as court proceedings conclude, or offences are reclassified. The number of crimes no longer recorded as homicide tends to be higher for earlier years, as more court proceedings have been able to conclude.

For the year ending 31st March 2022, 696 deaths are currently attributed to homicide (as at 6 December 2022). Figures for 2021/22 have already been revised down from 699 deaths initially recorded as homicide – a reduction of 3. The figures may also be subject to further revisions moving forwards.

Understanding homicide figures

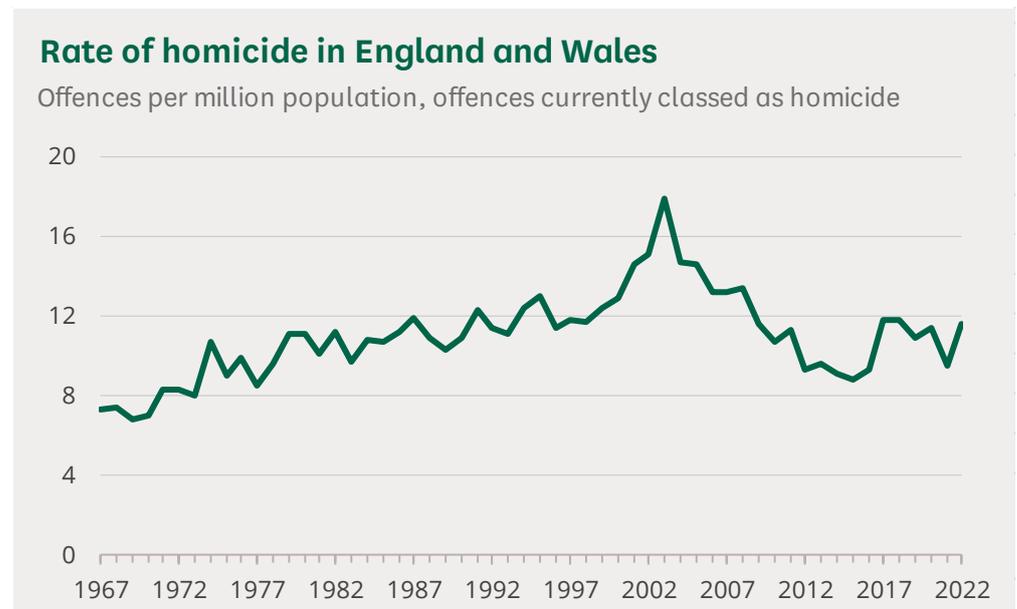
Homicide data is based in the year in which the police recorded it. This is not always the year in which the offence took place. For example, the homicides committed by Dr Harold Shipman, estimated to have taken place between 1975 and 1998, are included in the data for 2003, when these crimes were recorded.²

Rates of homicide

The rate of homicide, or homicides relative to the population, can be a useful measure to understand changes over time, and to make comparisons between different areas. Current levels (696 homicides) equate to a rate of 11.7 homicides per million population in England and Wales in 2021/22. However, this is not necessarily a predictor of risk.

The rate for 2022 is higher than the rate recorded in 2020/21 (9.5). Since 2016/17, homicides have been recorded at between 11 to 12 homicides per million population. For the full data, see table A1 of the Appendix [in the spreadsheet attached to the landing page of this briefing](#)).

The chart below shows the rate of homicides since 1967. Whilst the number of homicides relative to the population has followed a similar trend to the overall number of offences, homicides relative to the population have remained more consistent. For example, from 1967 to 2022, the number of homicides increased by 97% but the rate of homicides increased by 60%.



Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 1

² ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022](#), 9 February 2023

Analysis of homicide trends by the Home Office

In March 2020, the Home Office published a report on the [trends and drivers of homicide](#) in England and Wales up to 2017/18. The report acknowledges that the categories, or drivers, of homicide (such as alcohol or drugs) overlap, making analysis difficult. This is particularly due to the drivers of homicide being difficult to put into distinct categories to analyse.³

The report argues that there are two types of trends driving homicide: a ‘long wave’, affecting many nations during the period between 1960 to around 1990 and nation specific ‘short waves’ following this.

The long wave

The ‘long wave’ trend is believed to be partly driven by changing demographics, such as the baby boomer generation increasing the number of young people in the 1960s and 1970s. Other possible drivers for the long wave include cultural changes following a societal shift from Victorian values, the mass-marketisation of illegal drugs and the Criminal Justice System response that followed.

The short wave

‘Short wave’ homicide trends have been linked closely to illegal drug markets and gang violence. In England and Wales, homicides rose to a peak in the early 2000s and fell sharply thereafter. The report claims that at this time, economic and policing measures were “favourable”⁴, but there is evidence of destabilisation of drug-markets at the time driven mainly by male-on-male weapons cases.

A similar rise in crack-cocaine use occurred from 2014, in line with the homicide surge, which was captured more clearly by advances in data collection. The Home Office report suggests the drivers for the recent increase in homicides to 2017/18 share similar features to those in the early 2000s.⁵

Deprivation

The report also noted a strong link between homicide in England and areas of higher deprivation (as measured by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation)⁶. Since 1981 more than 50% of homicides had occurred within the 30% most deprived areas with both victims and suspects showing similar geographical trends.⁷

³ Home Office, [Trends and drivers of homicide: Main findings \(PDF\)](#), p55, 5 March 2020

⁴ [As above](#) (PDF), p53

⁵ [As above](#) (PDF), pp10-11

⁶ [As above](#) (PDF), Annex 9

⁷ [As above](#) (PDF), p20

1.2

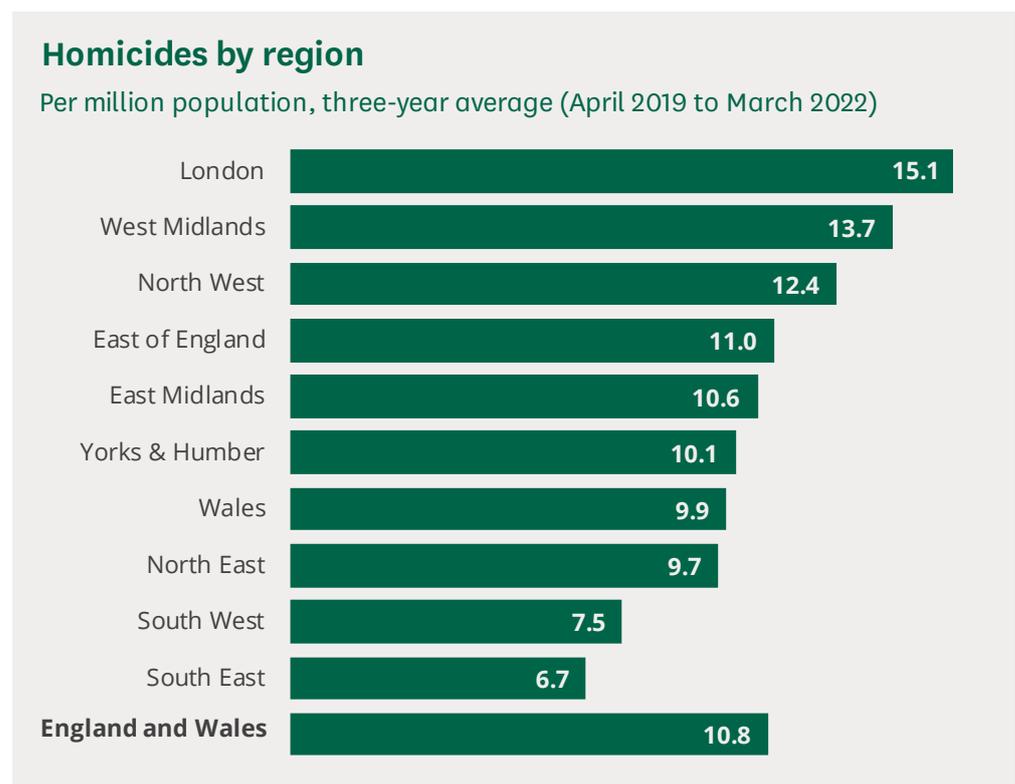
Homicides by region

In the year ending March 2022 there were 696 recorded homicides in England and Wales: a rate of 11.7 per one million population. The rate of homicide offences is a useful measure to compare areas by as it accounts for differences in population size.

In the most recent year, of all regions in England and Wales, the homicide rate was highest in the West Midlands (15.1 offences per one million population) and lowest in the South West (7.3).

As the number of homicides is relatively small each year, a three-year average can be a more reliable way of comparing regions. This shows the average number of offences per million population in each year across a three-year period.

The chart below shows the average annual number of homicide offences per one million population for regions in England and Wales.



Note: Population figures based on mid-2021 estimates

Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 22; ONS, [Estimates of the population for the UK](#), mid-2021 edition, sheet MYE2 – persons.

Across the last three years, the homicide rate has been highest in London, at 15.1 homicides per one million population per year. The West Midlands, North West and the East of England also have rates higher than the average for England and Wales. The rate was the lowest in the South East of England, at 6.7.

1.3

Homicides by police force area

The map on the next page displays the average number of homicides a year per million population for police force areas in England and Wales. A three-year average is used because the homicide rate in each police force area can be skewed by large events or cases with multiple victims in an area.

In the three years to March 2022, the police forces with the highest annual homicide rate were the West Midlands (13.6 per million), South Yorkshire (13.3) and Nottinghamshire (12.8).

Hampshire, Warwickshire and Gloucestershire had the lowest rates (4.3, 4.5 and 4.6 respectively). The Metropolitan Police force, covering the majority of London, recorded a rate of 11.8, similar to Greater Manchester (11.6).⁸

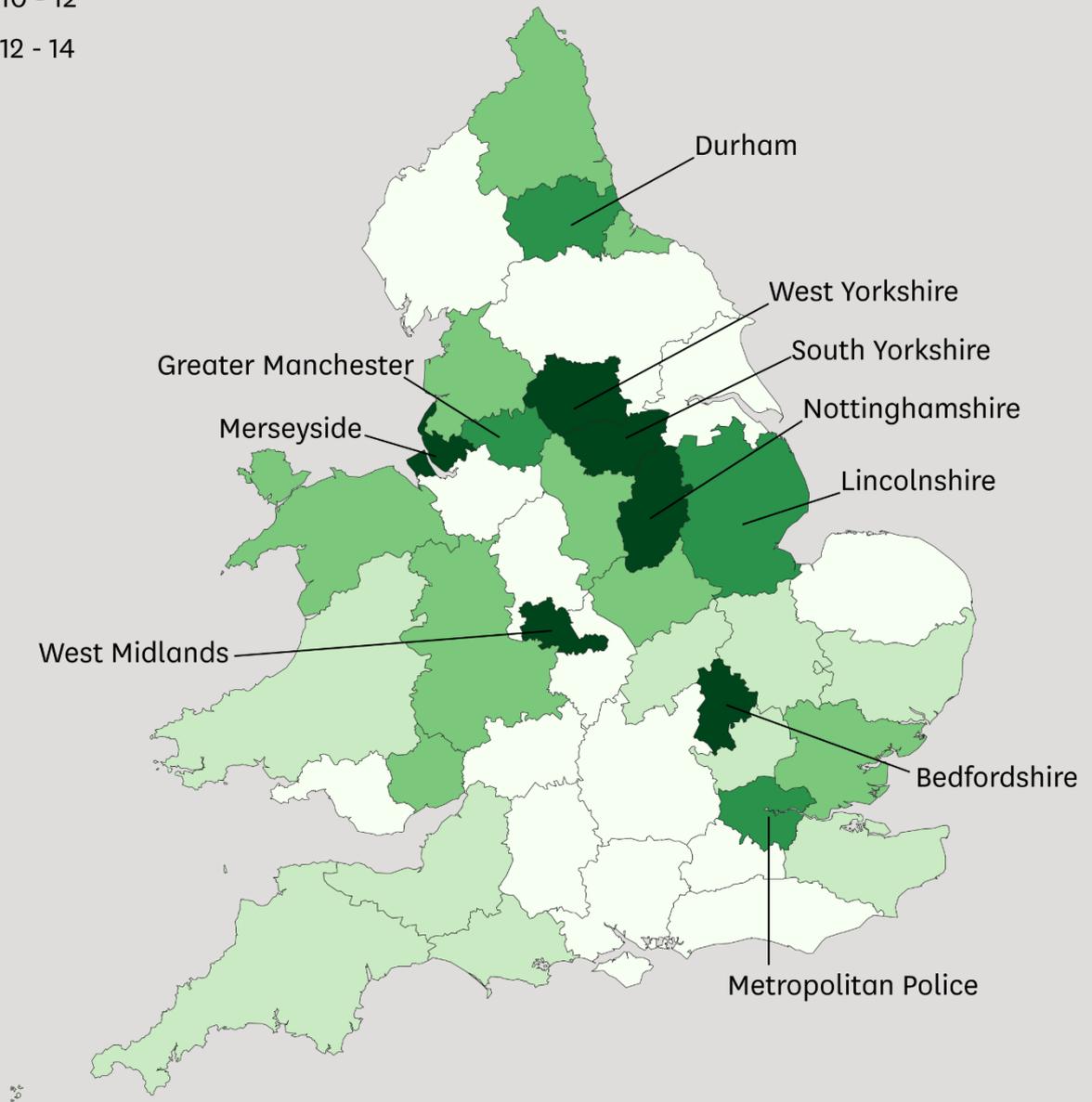
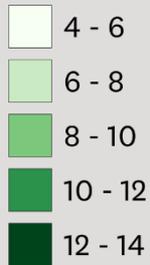
See appendix table A2 in [the spreadsheet attached to the landing page of this briefing](#) for the full dataset

⁸ More information on the number and rates of homicides by police force can be found in the [Appendix Table A2](#)

Recorded homicide rate by police force area

England and Wales, annual averages, 2020-2022

Annual homicides per million population



Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 22

2

Characteristics of the victims of homicide

As the number of homicides each year is relatively small, the characteristics of the victims can vary considerably from year to year. However, there are some key trends. These are discussed in the following sections.

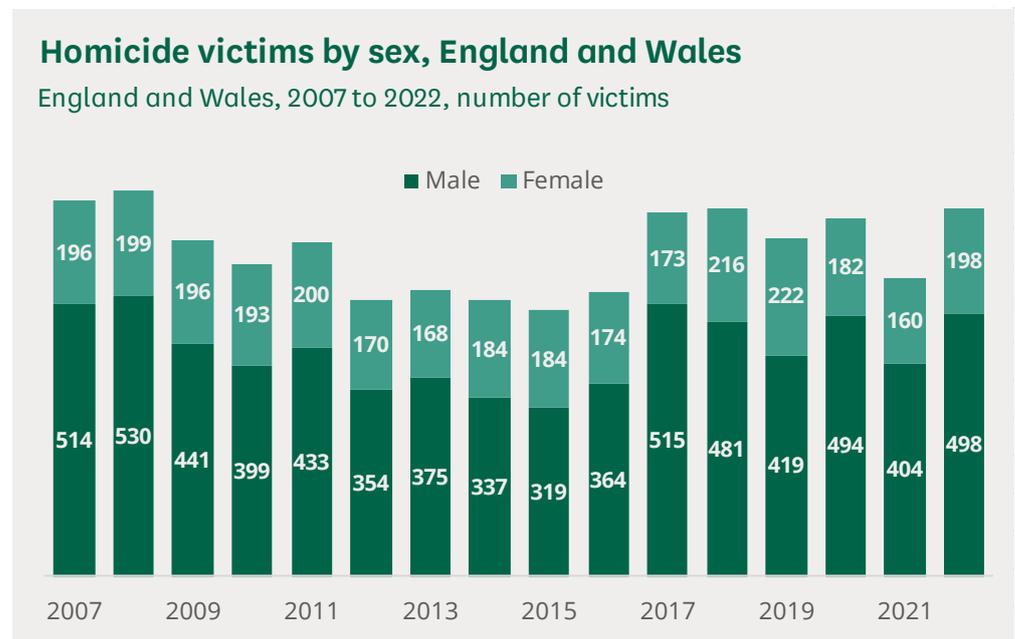
2.1

Sex

The majority of the victims of homicide are male. In 2021/22, 72% of the victims of homicide were male, and 28% were female.

The chart below shows the number of homicide victims who were male or female in each year since 2007.

From 2007 to 2022, men have accounted for between 63% and 75% of homicide victims. In the year ending March 2015, women accounted for 37% of victims, the highest proportion of female victims recorded in this period.



Notes: Years ending March; percentages of offences currently classed as homicide

Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 22.

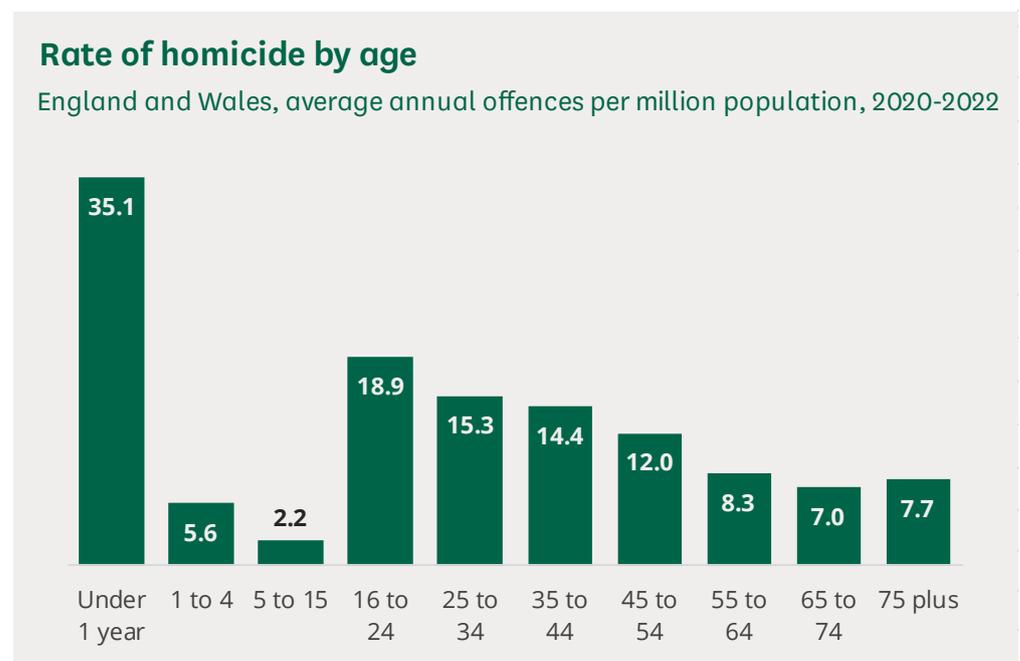
2.2

Age

In 2021/22, most homicide victims in England and Wales were between the ages of 16 and 24. However, the rate of homicides is more useful way to compare age categories as it considers differences in the size of the population in different age groups. As the number of homicides is relatively small each year, a three-year average rate can be a more reliable measure. This shows the average number of offences per million population in each year of the three-year period.

The chart below shows the average annual homicide rate in England and Wales by the age categories of victims, from the year ending March 2020 to the year ending March 2022.

In the last three years, the homicide rate has been the highest for children under the age of one, and lowest for those aged 5 to 15. The rate of homicide decreases with age after age 15, except for a slight increase in the 75 and over group.



Notes: Years ending March; there are a small number of offences which have victims with unknown age or sex.

Sources: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Worksheet 4; ONS, [Estimates of the population for the UK](#), mid-2021 edition, sheet MYE2 – persons

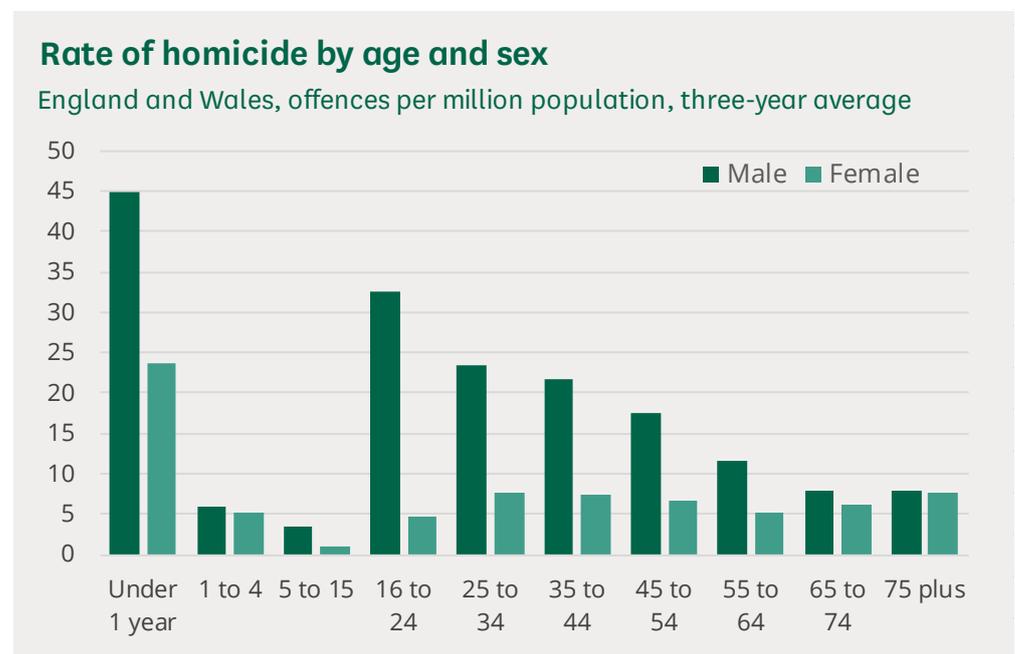
The Home Office also publishes the number victims of homicide between the ages of 13 and 19. In the year ending March 2022, there were 69 homicide victims aged 13 to 19. More information can be found in section 3.1.

Rate by age and sex

The chart below shows these rates of homicide in different age groups, with an additional breakdown by sex.

The rate of homicide was higher for men/boys victims than for women/ girls in all age categories. The largest difference in homicide rate is among those aged 16 to 24, where the male rate was seven times higher than the female rate.

Among adult male homicides, the rate decreases with age, with a very small increase after 74. Among adult female homicides, the rate does not follow this trend; it increases from the 5 to 15 age group until the 25 to 34 group. The rate then falls in each age group until 64 but then rises for those aged 65 or over.



Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Worksheet 4; ONS, [Estimates of the population for the UK](#), mid-2021 edition, sheets MYE2 - Females & Males.

2.3

Relationship between the victims and suspects

Information is recorded on the relationship of the victim of a homicide to the principal suspect. The table below shows the latest available data.⁹

Titles refer to the victims' position. For example, 'parent' in the chart means that the victim was the parent of the principal suspect. And 'son or daughter' means the victim was the child of the principal suspect.

Victims of homicide by relationship to principal suspect			
England and Wales, 2021/22, number of victims and percentage of total			
Relationship		Number of victims	% of victims
Victim acquainted with suspect	Son or daughter	18	2.6%
	Parent	36	5.2%
	Partner/ex-partner	78	11.2%
	Other family	17	2.4%
	Friend/acquaintance	105	15.1%
	Other	47	6.8%
	Total (acquainted)	301	43.2%
Victim not acquainted with suspect (stranger)		85	12.2%
Relationship not known		84	12.1%
No suspect charged		226	32.5%
Total victims of homicide		696	100.0%

Notes: Of all recorded homicides in the year;

Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Worksheet 4

In almost a third (32.5%) of homicides in the year ending March 2022, no suspect was charged meaning no information on their relationship to the victim could be recorded.

Of the cases where a suspect was charged, the relationship between the victim and the principal suspect was determined in the majority of cases (82%). This includes cases where the suspect was determined to be a stranger to the victim.

The most common relationship between suspect and victim was that the principal suspect was a friend or acquaintance of the victim. Second most common was for the suspect to be a stranger, followed by partner or ex-partner.

⁹ See appendix table A3 in [the spreadsheet attached to the landing page of this briefing](#) for previous years

Domestic homicides

Domestic homicides are a category of adult homicides which include offences where the victim was killed by a family member, or a partner or ex-partner.¹⁰ In the year ending March 2022, there were 134 domestic homicides.

In the last decade there have been an average of 129 domestic homicides each year. Over this period, domestic homicides accounted for 60% of homicides with female victims, but 9% of homicides with male victims.

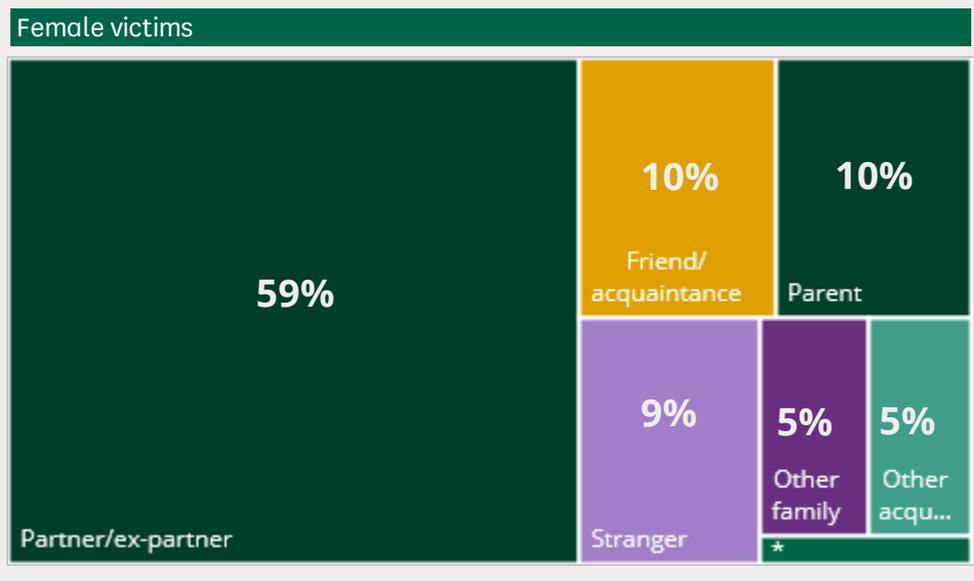
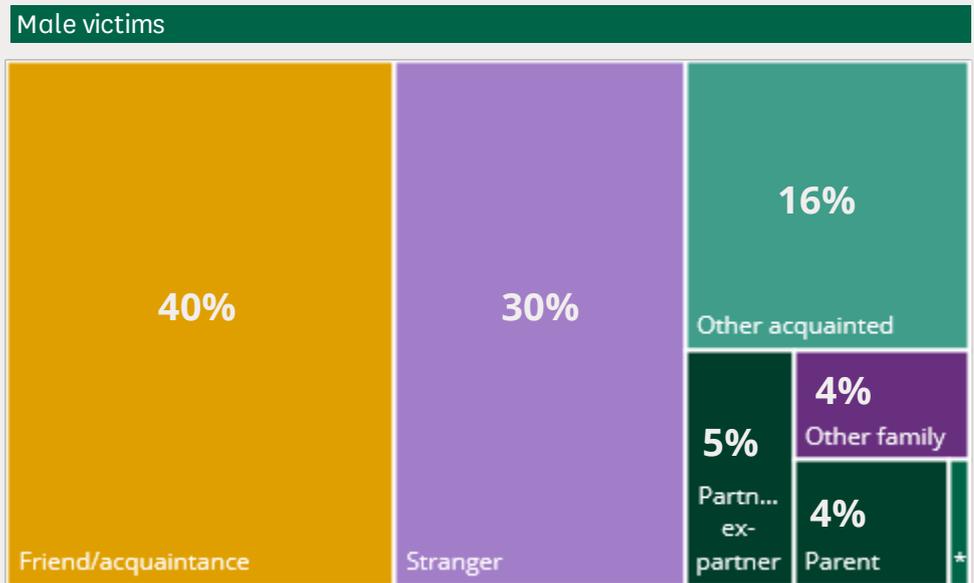
Relationship to suspect, and sex

The charts on the next page show the relationship between the victim and the principal suspect by sex in adult homicide cases over the last 10 years. The figures provided are the relationship as a percentage of all cases in which this could be determined, including when the suspect was identified as a stranger. This accounts for 65% of cases with male victims and 79% of cases with female victims.

¹⁰ Homicides are recorded as “domestic” when the relationship between a victim aged 16 years and over and the perpetrator falls into one of the following categories: spouse, common-law spouse, cohabiting partner, boyfriend or girlfriend, ex-spouse, ex-cohabiting partner or ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, adulterous relationship, son or daughter (including step and adopted relationships), parent (including step and adopted relationships), brother or sister, or other relatives.
Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022](#).

Relationship of suspect to victim in homicide cases, by sex

Adult homicide victims, 2011/12 to 2021/22, % of total offences where the relationship was known



Note: the charts show the number of homicides by relationship, of adult homicide victims from April 2011 to March 2022 where the relationship to the principal suspect was known, including where it was determined that the suspect was a stranger. This does not capture all adult homicides that occurred in the time period.

*In around 1% of cases, the victim was the daughter or son of the principal suspect.

Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Worksheet 14

As the charts show, the majority of homicides, where the relationship was determined, involve principal suspects who were known to the victim, rather than strangers. Men are more often killed by strangers (30% of offences) than women (9% of cases).

Where the relationship was determined, most male victims were killed by a friend or acquaintance (40% of offences).

Over half of female victims, where the relationship was determined, were killed by a partner or ex-partner (59%). This compares with 5% of male homicide victims.

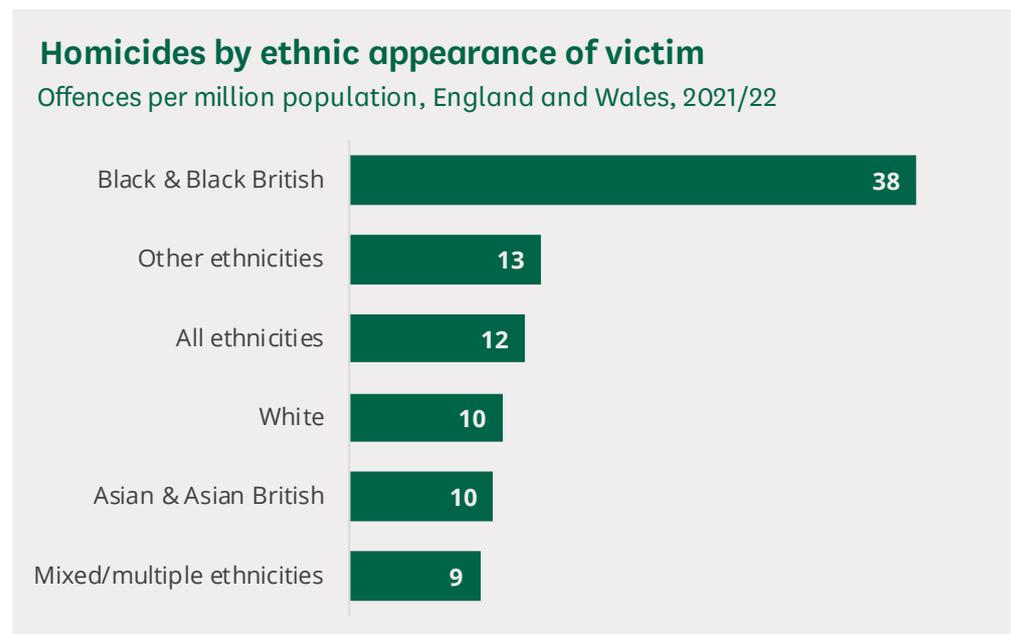
2.4

Ethnicity of the victims and suspects of homicide

Victims

Information on the ethnicity of victims and suspects of homicide is available from the Home Office's statistics. Information about ethnicity provided in this publication is based on racial and ethnic groups identified by police officers and is recorded as the individuals 'ethnic appearance', rather than their self-reported ethnicity.

The chart below shows the rate of homicides per one million population by ethnic appearance (where determined) for the year ending March 2022.

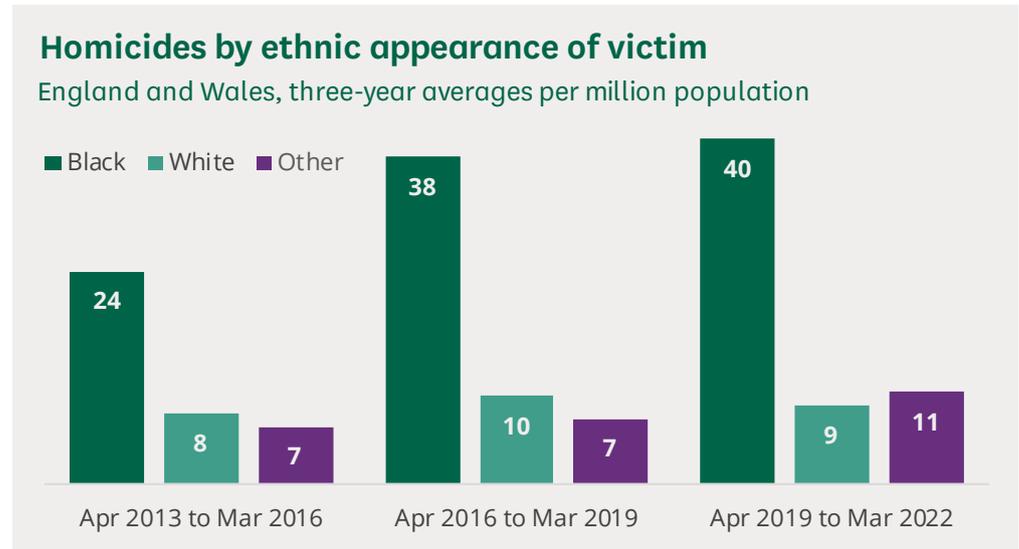


Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Worksheet 6; ONS, [2021 census population estimates from NOMIS](#), dataset 'TS021 - ethnic group'

In the year ending March 2022, the homicide rate was highest among the people the police identified as Black or Black British, with 38 victims per million population, and lowest among those with Mixed or multiple ethnicities, at 9 victims per million. The rate among both the White and Asian populations was 10 victims per million.

Trends are available as three-year averages (for example combining data from April 2019 to March 2022). These are broken down into three grouped ethnicity categories: ‘White’, ‘Black’ and ‘Other’. The category ‘Other’ includes Asian, Mixed ethnicities and any other ethnic groups.

The following chart shows the rate of currently recorded homicide offences by the victim’s ethnic appearance. The figures are given as an annual average, based on three years combined data.



Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 7

Notes: Population statistics based on mid-2021 census estimates.; refers to offences currently classed as homicide; figures have been rounded.

From 1st April 2021, ethnicity categories were changed on the Homicide Index to be consistent with ONS Census groupings. To enable a time series, 'Other' has been grouped to include Asian (Indian sub-continent), Asian, mixed/multiple ethnicities and any other ethnic group.

Between 2013 to 2016 and 2019 to 2022, there was a 62% increase in the rate of homicides involving victims from the Black ethnic background.

Suspects

The known ethnic background breakdown of victims and suspects in 866 homicides between 2019/20 to 2021/22 is shown in the chart on the next page.

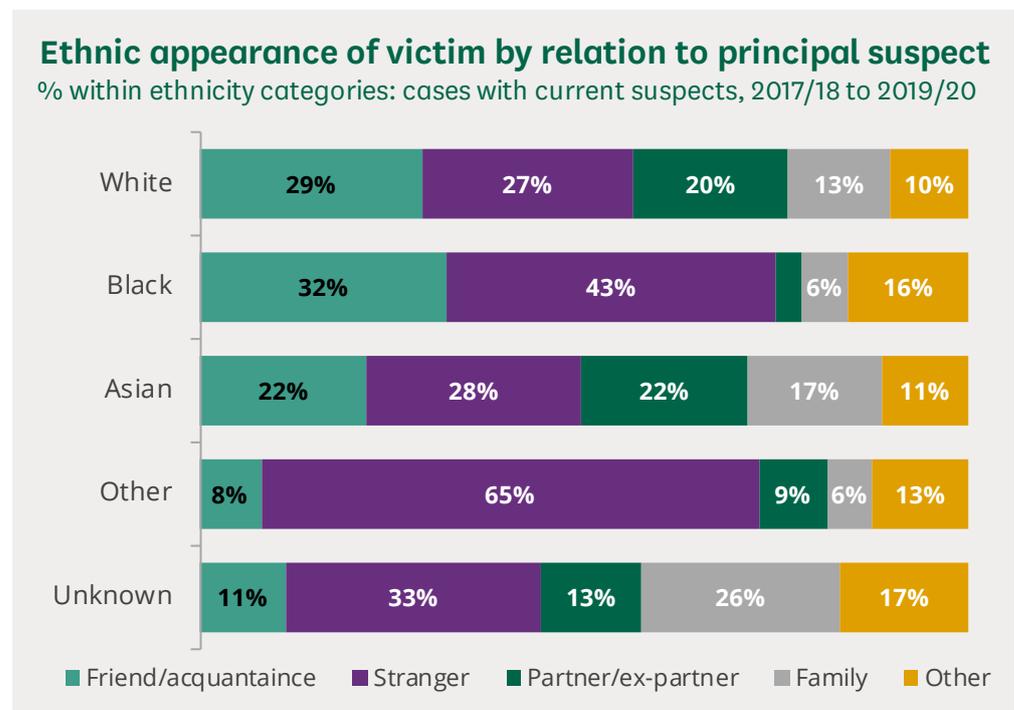
Data suggest that in most cases where the ethnicity of the principal suspect was identified, it was the same as the victim’s: In 86% of homicide cases where the appearance of the victim was recorded as White the principal suspect was recorded as White; and in 67% of homicides where the appearance of the victim was recorded as Black the principal suspect was also recorded as Black.



Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 30

Ethnicity and relationship to victim

The chart below shows three-year average data on the relationship between homicide victims and the principal suspect by broad ethnicity categories.



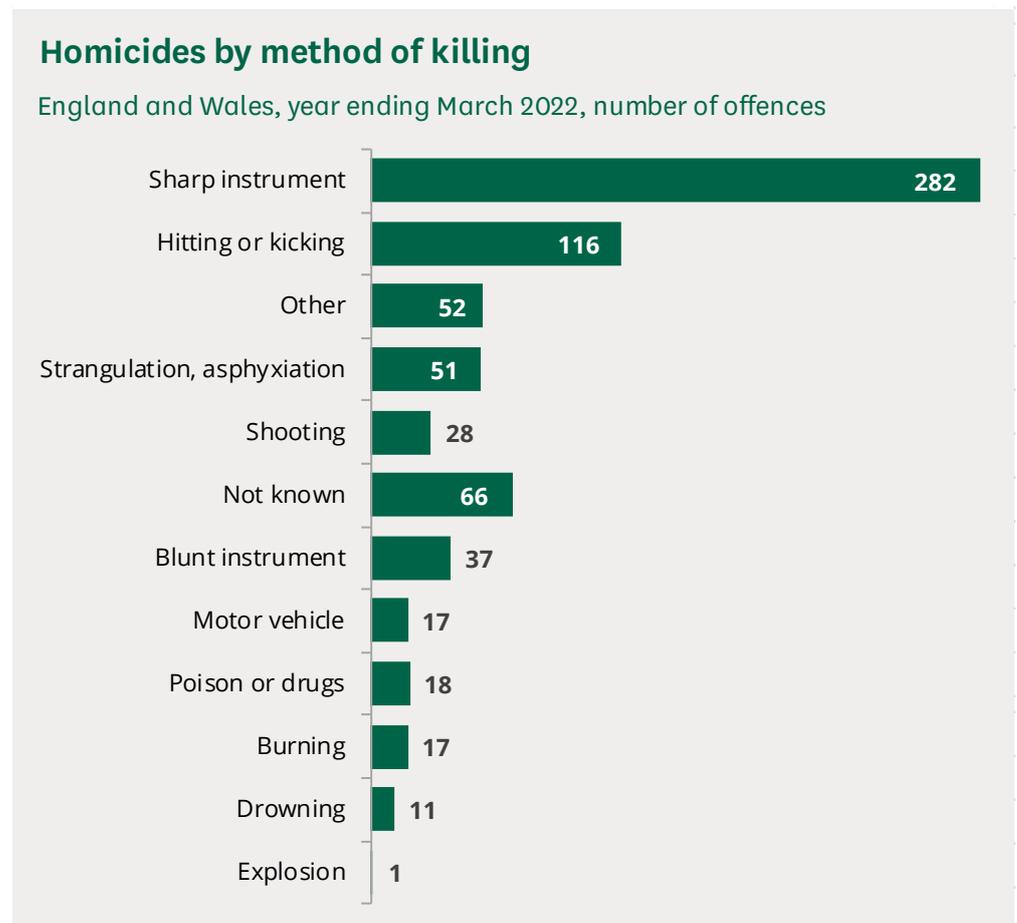
Source: Ministry of Justice, [Ethnicity and the criminal justice system statistics 2020](#), Chapter 3: Victims tables, 3_08

Victims from Asian and White ethnic backgrounds have been killed by partner/ ex-partner more frequently than other recorded groups. Victims from a Black background have been killed by a friend or acquaintance more often than other groups.

3 Method of killing

The Home Office publishes statistics on homicides by apparent method of killing. See appendix table A4 in [the spreadsheet attached to the landing page of this briefing](#) for the full dataset from 2006/07 to 2021/22.

The chart below shows a breakdown of homicides in England and Wales by method of killing and for the year ending March 2022.



Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Worksheet 8.

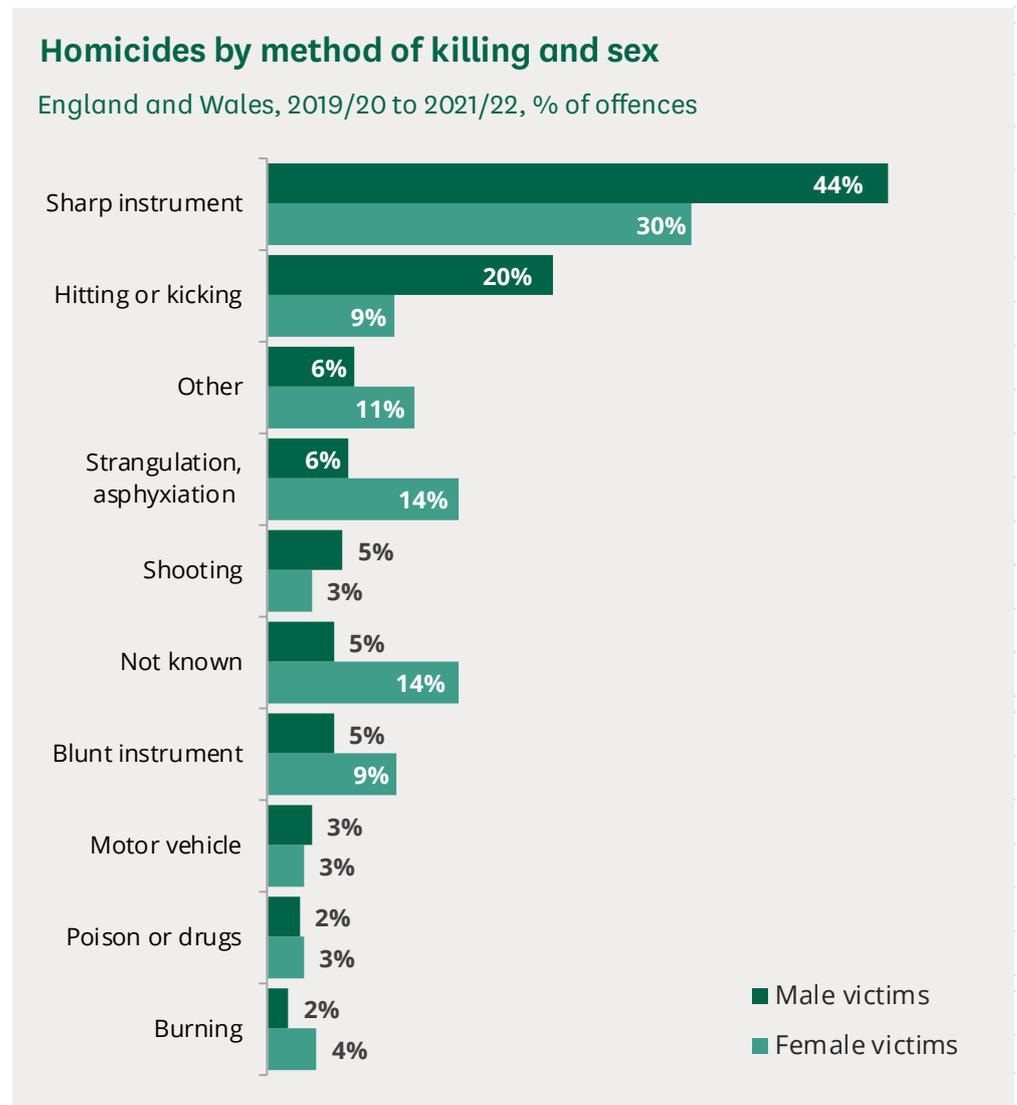
Notes: Hitting or kicking does not include methods of killing with a weapon

In the year ending March 2022, the most common method of killing was use of a sharp instrument, including knives (282 out of 696 victims, or 41%). Hitting or kicking (without the use of a weapon) was the second most common method of killing with 116 of 696 victims (17%) killed in this way.

3.1

Method of killing by sex of the victim

The most common methods of killing vary by the sex of the victim. The charts below show the number of homicides by each method of killing, for male and female victims.¹¹



Note: Percentages have been rounded in the chart labels

Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Worksheet 8

Sharp instruments are the most common method of killing for both male and female victims. A slightly higher proportion of male victims have been killed with a sharp instrument (44%) than female victims (30%). See section 3.2 for further information on sharp instruments.

¹¹ See appendix table A4 for full data.

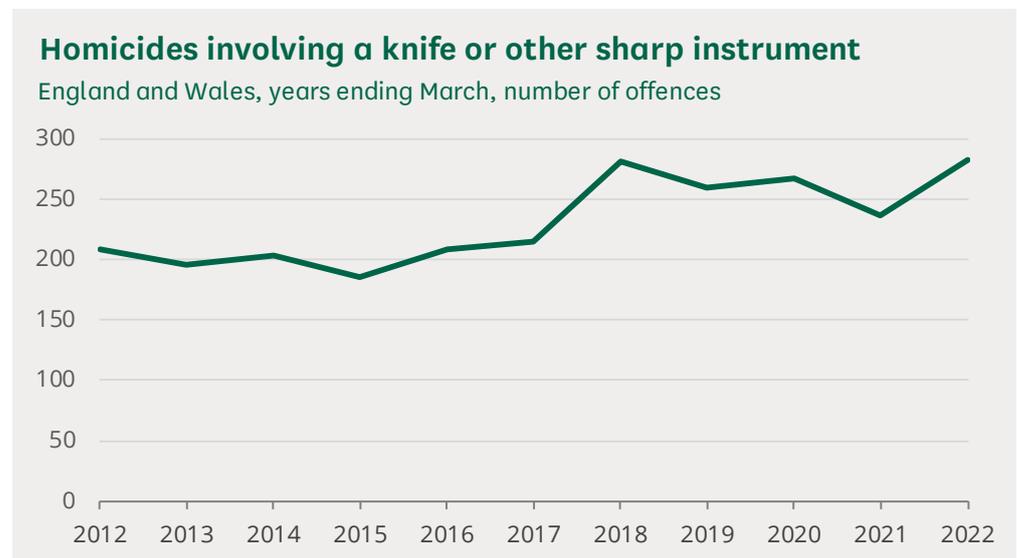
Hitting or kicking (without a weapon) was the second most common method of killing for male victims (20%), while the second most common method (where known) for female victims was strangulation or asphyxiation (14%).

3.2 Sharp instruments

Homicides involving sharp instruments is the most common method of killing in England and Wales. There are typically between 200 and 300 homicides from sharp instruments each year, accounting for 30% to 40% of all homicides.

See [the Library briefing on knife crime statistics](#) for more detail on offences involving sharp instruments.

The chart below shows the number of homicides involving a knife or other sharp instrument in England and Wales.¹²



Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Worksheet 4

Note: As the Homicide Index is routinely updated to take account of new information from the police and court decisions, figures may not match those published in the ONS quarterly crime releases.

Since 2012 there has been an increase in the number of homicides involving sharp instruments. In the year ending March 2022, there were 282 homicides where the recorded method of killing was a sharp instrument.

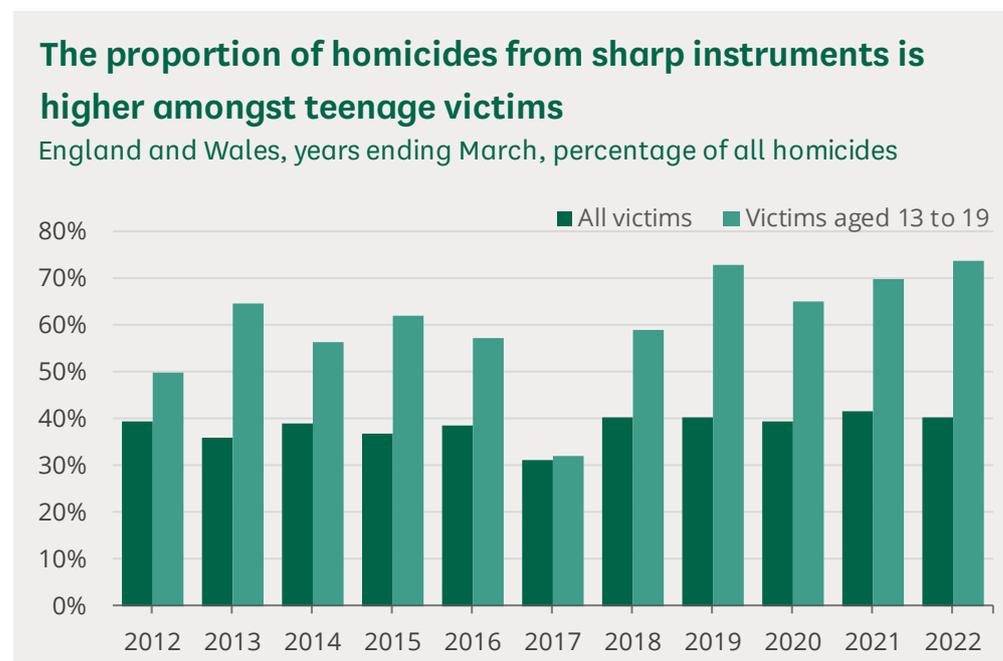
In addition to these homicides, in 2021/22 there were 441 recorded offences of attempted murder involving knives or sharp instruments, and a further 5,883 threats to kill.¹³

¹² See appendix table A4 for full data.

¹³ ONS, [Crime in England and Wales: Other related tables](#), year ending March 2022 edition, Tables F3a & F4a

Sharp instrument homicide among teens

The proportion of homicides with teenage victims (aged 13 to 19) committed with a sharp instrument varies by year. The following chart shows the proportion of homicides from sharp instruments in each year, for all victims and for victims who were aged 13 to 19.



Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Worksheet 8 and Table 9

Note: As the Homicide Index is routinely updated to take account of new information from the police and court decisions, figures may not match those published in the ONS quarterly crime releases.

The proportion of homicides from sharp instruments is higher among young, or teenage, victims. In the year ending March 2022, 41% of all homicides were caused by a sharp instrument, but of homicides with victims aged 13 to 19, 74% were caused by sharp instruments.¹⁴

Figures are available on sharp instrument homicides by the police-identified ethnic appearance of victims. This may not reflect the victims' actual ethnicity so figures should be treated with caution. In the year ending March 2022, most victims of homicide from sharp instruments were identified as White (63%, 177 victims). Just over a fifth (21%; 59 victims) were identified as Black.¹⁵ Of the homicide victims identified as Black, 42% (25 victims) were aged 16 to 24 years. Of the victims identified as White, 24% (43 victims) were aged 16 to 24.

¹⁴ See appendix tables A4 and A9 for full data

¹⁵ These are not rates so are not relative to the population

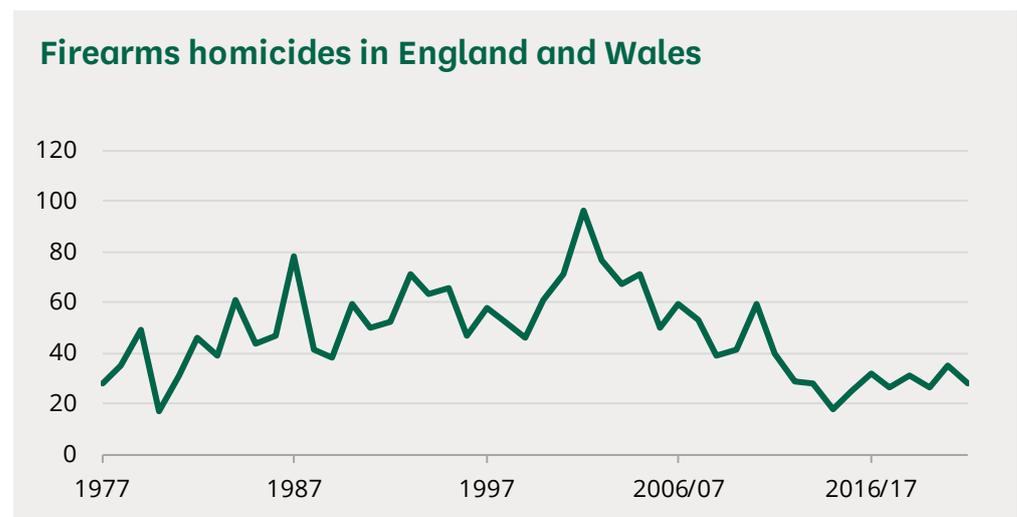
3.3

Firearms

In the last decade, around 4% to 6% of homicide victims have been killed by firearms each year. See the Library briefing on [firearm crime statistics in England and Wales](#) for more detailed statistics on offences involving firearms.

In the year ending March 2022, 4% of victims of recorded homicide (28 people) were shot.¹⁶

The chart below shows the number of homicides resulting from firearms each year in England and Wales since 1977.¹⁷



Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 12 (and various years); Home Office, Criminal Statistics England & Wales, Annual Command Papers, various years.

Following the banning of large calibre handguns from July 1997, and all handguns from 1998, the use of firearms in homicide increased, peaking at 96 in 2001/02. Since then, numbers decreased, and current statistics show some of the lowest numbers since the 1980s. The chart shows a spike in the year ending March 2011, which includes the 12 victims of the Derrick Bird shooting.

Of the firearms used to commit homicide in 2021/22, nine were licensed and 19 were unlicensed.¹⁸

¹⁶ See appendix table A4 for full data

¹⁷ See appendix table A5 for full data

¹⁸ ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 12

4 Sentencing and convictions for homicide

4.1 Outcomes

The Home Office's [police recorded crime and outcomes open data](#) provides data on charges for homicide. As of May 2023, charges had been made in almost two thirds (63%) of homicide cases in 2021/22. Just under a quarter (24%) of cases had not been assigned an outcome.

The table below shows the outcomes for homicide offences in the last two years. The [user guide for the outcome statistics](#) provides more detail on the meaning of each outcome group.

Outcomes of homicide offences				
England and Wales, years ending March				
	2020/21		2021/22	
	Number	%	Number	%
Charged/Summoned	413	72%	444	63%
Not yet assigned an outcome	82	14%	169	24%
Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports action)	51	9%	51	7%
Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest	17	3%	23	3%
Evidential difficulties (victim does not support action)	3	1%	6	1%
Investigation complete – no suspect identified	9	2%	6	1%
Out-of-court (formal)	0	0%	3	0%
Responsibility for further investigation transferred to another body	1	0%	3	0%
Total	576	100%	705	100%

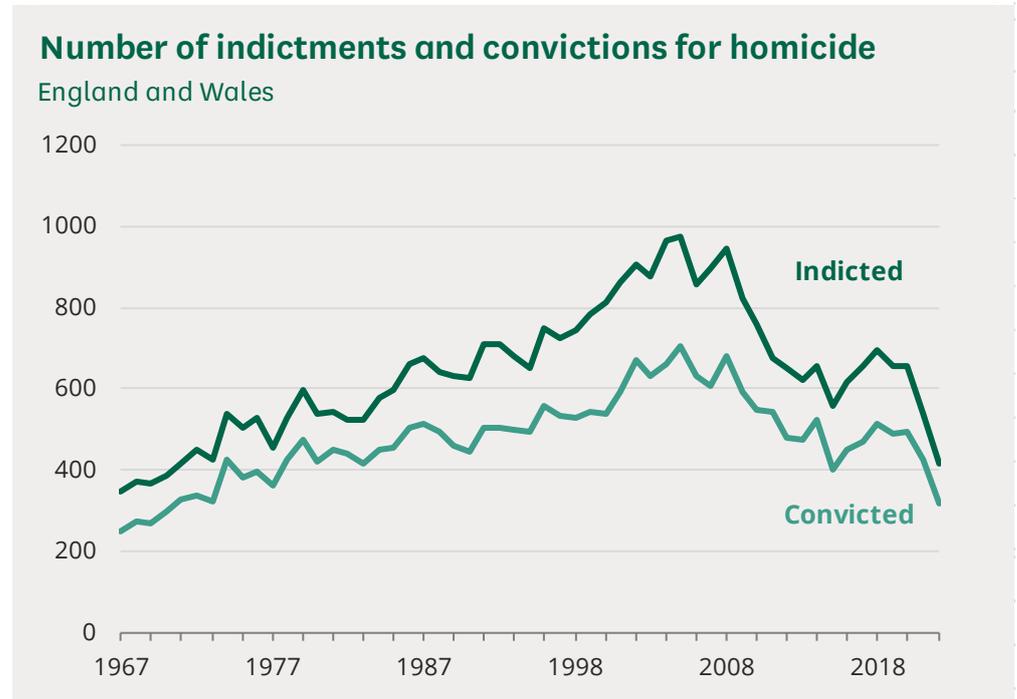
Notes: Only includes outcomes that were recorded in the two years, not all possible outcomes. The total number of recorded homicides cited previously differs to homicides in this table due to the time data was recorded.

Source: Home Office, [Police recorded crime and outcomes](#), Outcomes open data year ending March 2021 and 2022, Accessed 2 May 2023

4.2 Prosecutions and convictions for homicide

Statistics are available on the number of people found guilty or with a charge proven for murder or homicide in England and Wales each year since 1967. In the most recent year, the year to March 2022, 414 people were indicted (appeared in the crown court on murder charges) and 318 were convicted.

For the most recent years, statistics are likely to change as many cases are yet to be decided. The following chart shows the number of offences initially indicted for homicide compared with the number of convictions. The sharp fall in the year ending March 2020 may be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic and the increase in court backlogs.¹⁹



Notes: Figures as at 6 December 2022; figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and courts, or as further information become available; years ending March from 1998 onwards.

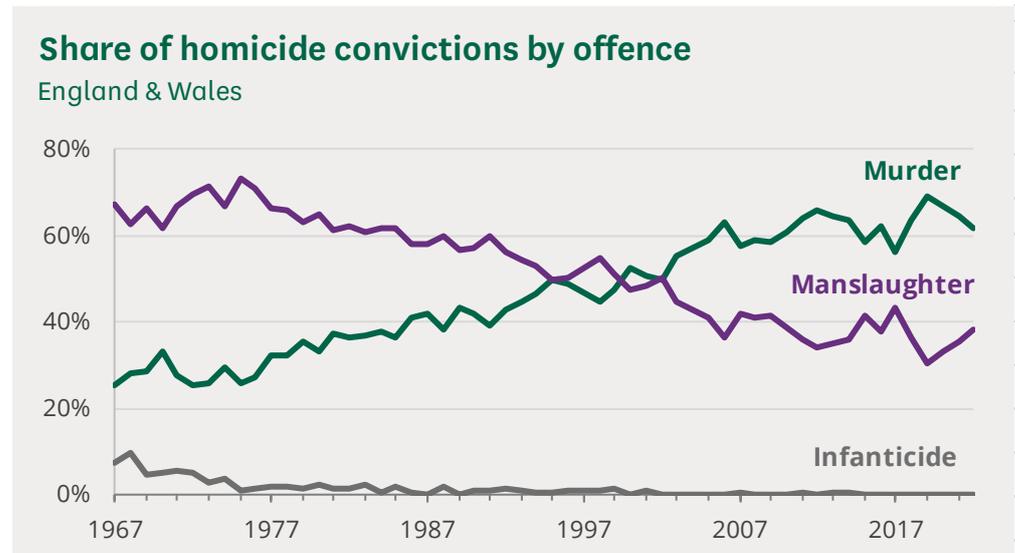
Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 24

A suspect charged with a homicide offence is only ‘indicted’ when they make their first appearance at the Crown court. The indictment is the document setting out the charges against the suspect, which will be read out to them at the start of their Crown court trial. Homicide offences are ‘indictable only’, meaning they can only be tried before the Crown court.

A homicide suspect can be charged but not subsequently indicted if their case is discontinued between charge and their first appearance at the Crown court (e.g. if the suspect dies awaiting trial).

¹⁹ [CPS data summary Quarter 3 2020-2021](#), Accessed 2 May 2023

The chart below shows the proportion of all homicide convictions each year that were for murder, manslaughter and infanticide, since 1967.



Note: years ending March from 1998 onwards

Source: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 24

The chart shows that the proportion of all homicide convictions that were convictions for murder has been increasing, whilst the proportion of homicide convictions for manslaughter has been decreasing. In 2021/22, around 62% of all convictions were for murder and 38% were for manslaughter. In comparison, in 1967 around 25% of all convictions were for murder and 67% were for manslaughter.

The proportion of all convictions that were for infanticide has remained low, at 0% to 1% each year since 1989. The highest rate of convictions for infanticide was in 1968 at 10%.

4.3

Sentences

Murder has carried a mandatory life sentence in England and Wales since capital punishment was suspended in 1965.²⁰

In the year ending March 2022, 196 life sentences were given for murder and seven for manslaughter.²¹

²⁰ [Legislation.gov.uk](#), Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Act 1965, 2017 (accessed 2 May 2023)

²¹ ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Worksheet 27

4.4 Prison population

As of 30 June 2022, there were 6,731 prisoners serving sentences for homicide. Of these, 5,857 were for murder, and 874 were for manslaughter (including corporate manslaughter). Almost all (95%) of these inmates were male (6,380), whilst there were 351 female inmates.²²

4.5 Reconvictions

Between 2011/12 and 2021/22, a total of 28 suspects were convicted of homicide having been previously convicted of homicide. Of these suspects reconvicted for homicide, 61% were convicted after their release or the end of their previous sentence for homicide, and the remaining 39% were convicted while serving a sentence for homicide.²³

²² MoJ, [Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2022](#), Annual prison population, table A1_5i

²³ ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#), 25th February 2020, Table 26
Note: doesn't include people with previous convictions for homicide outside of England and Wales.

5

Scotland and Northern Ireland

Scotland and Northern Ireland record crime separately to England and Wales. The [Scottish Government](#) publishes data for Scotland, and the [Police Service of Northern Ireland](#) publishes data for Northern Ireland.

5.1

Scotland

Unlike England and Wales, the number of offences in Scotland represents the number of complete acts of homicide, regardless of the number killed. This is demonstrated in the table below.

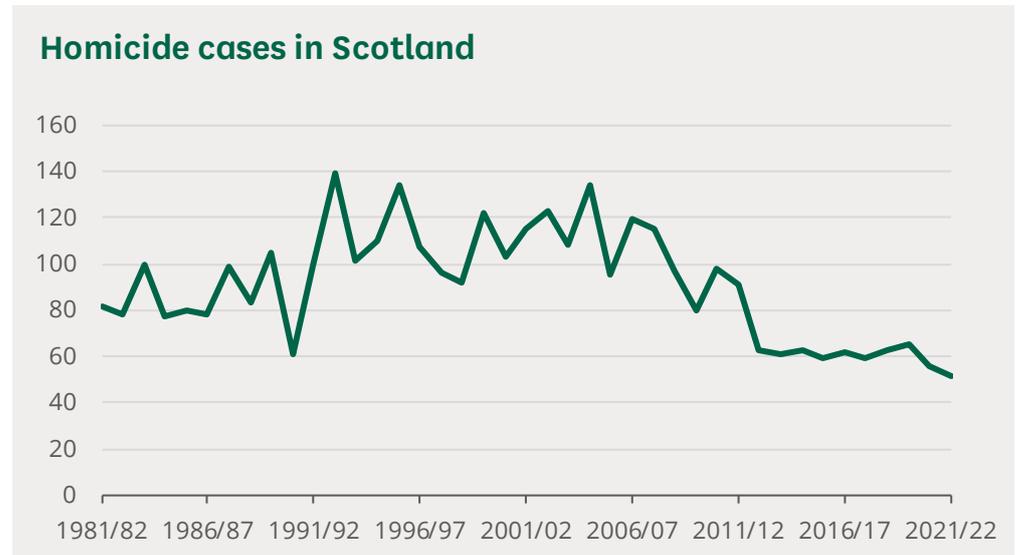
Number of homicide cases, victims and accused, Scotland					
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Total number of cases	59	63	65	56	52
Cases by number of victims:					
1	59	62	64	53	51
2+	-	1	1	3	1
Total number of victims	59	64	66	59	53
Total number of victims per million population(1)	10.9	11.8	12.1	10.8	9.7
Cases by number of accused:					
1	45	42	55	47	42
2	8	10	6	7	9
3+	5	8	3	2	1
unsolved	1	3	1	-	-
Total number of accused	81	86	77	67	63

Note: Population data are derived from relevant mid-year population estimates prepared by the National Records of Scotland.

Source: Scottish Government, [Homicide in Scotland 2021-2022: statistics](#), 25 October 2022, Table 1

In 2021/22, 52 cases of homicide were recorded in Scotland, a decrease of 4 cases compared with the 66 cases recorded in 2020/21.

The chart below shows that figures peaked in 1992/93 at 139, which was largely attributed to homicides in Strathclyde but outside of Glasgow. They have been decreasing gradually since.

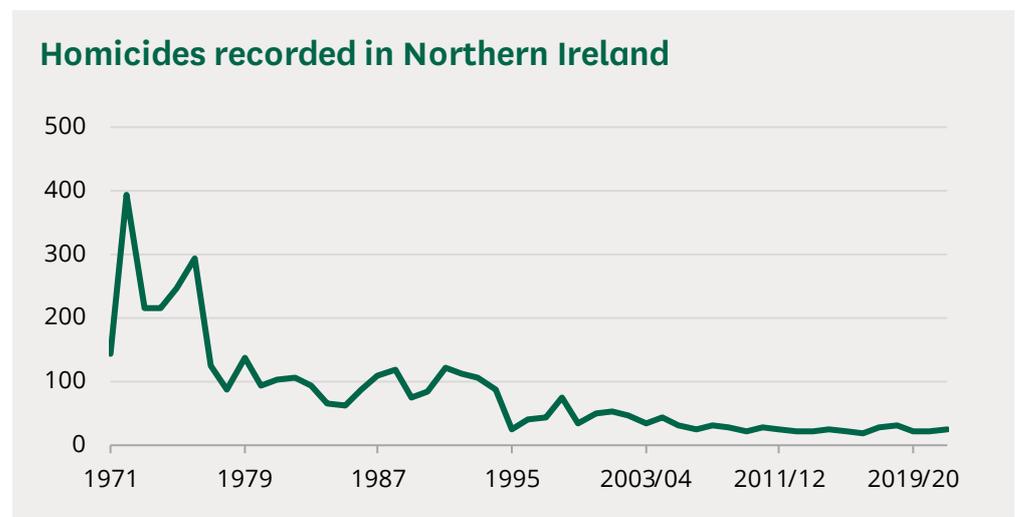


Source: Scottish Government, [Homicide in Scotland 2019-2020: statistics](#), 25 October 2022, Historic data table

5.2 Northern Ireland

In 2021/22 there were 24 homicides recorded in Northern Ireland. In 2016/17 there were 18 recorded homicides - the lowest number recorded since 1969.

The chart below shows that the number of recorded homicide offences peaked in 1972 at 393, towards the start of the Troubles (1968-98). It has since decreased and remained below 50 from 1999/00 onwards.



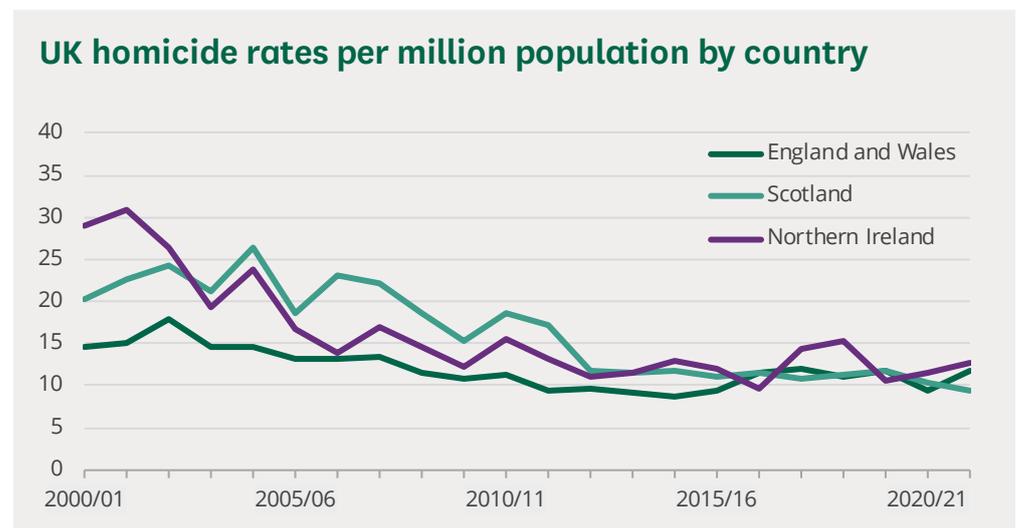
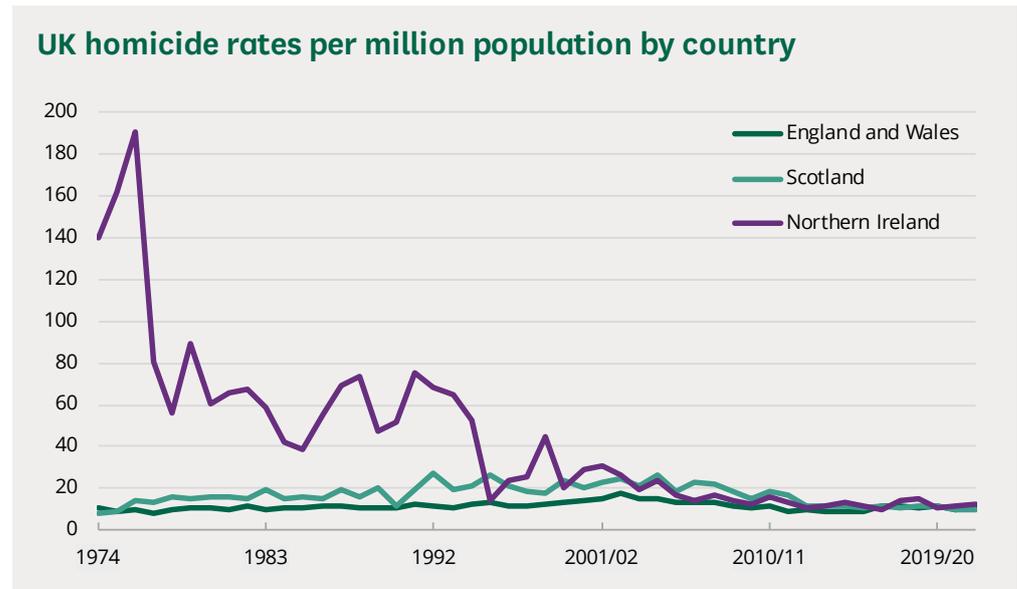
Source: Police Service of Northern Ireland, [Police recorded crime Annual Trends 1998/99 to 2021/22](#), Tables 2.2 & 2.3

5.3

Comparison between UK countries

Until the 1960s, Northern Ireland experienced relatively low homicide rates. After this, levels increased considerably during the Troubles, before gradually returning to rates similar to the rest of the UK by the end of the 1990s.

The following charts show homicide rates per million population for the countries of the UK since 1974, and from 2000 more specifically.²⁴



Sources: Police Service of Northern Ireland, [Police recorded crime Annual Trends 1998/99 to 2021/22](#), Tables 2.2 & 2.3; Scottish Government, [Homicide in Scotland 2020-2021: statistics](#), 25 October 2022, Table 1, Historic data table; Data for 1969-2022: ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022 - Appendix Tables](#), 9 February 2023, Table 1; ONS, [Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland](#), 21 December 2022

²⁴ For full data, [see appendix table A6 in the download available from this briefing's landing page.](#)

6 International comparisons

This section provides an international context for homicide in the UK. Issues exist around the comparability of data from different countries, so caution should be exercised when making comparisons.

6.1 Issues with comparing homicide statistics

The definitions of offences vary in different countries. For example, use of the term ‘homicide’ to refer to manslaughter, murder and infanticide (as in the UK) is common in many countries, but not all. Different social and economic conditions, as well as legal and criminal justice systems, may affect the number of homicides recorded.

Furthermore, homicides are recorded at different points in the criminal justice system depending on the country. For example, it may be recorded when the offence is discovered or on completion of legal proceedings. In some countries, the police will record a death as homicide if it cannot immediately be attributed to other causes.²⁵

6.2 Comparison between countries

Recent global trends show a general decline in homicide rates. Some explanations for this include increased incarceration, receding drug markets, innovations in policing, improvements in the economy, increased immigration and the legalization of abortion. One study has attributed the general decline in global homicide rates to ageing populations.²⁶

The [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime \(UNODC\)’s Global Study on Homicide](#) was most recently published in 2019, and describes a global average homicide rate of 61 homicides per million population.²⁷ It also showed the Americas (172 per million) and Africa (130 per million) were much

²⁵ ONS, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2018](#)

²⁶ The Conversation, [Homicide is declining around the world-but why?](#), 4 November 2019

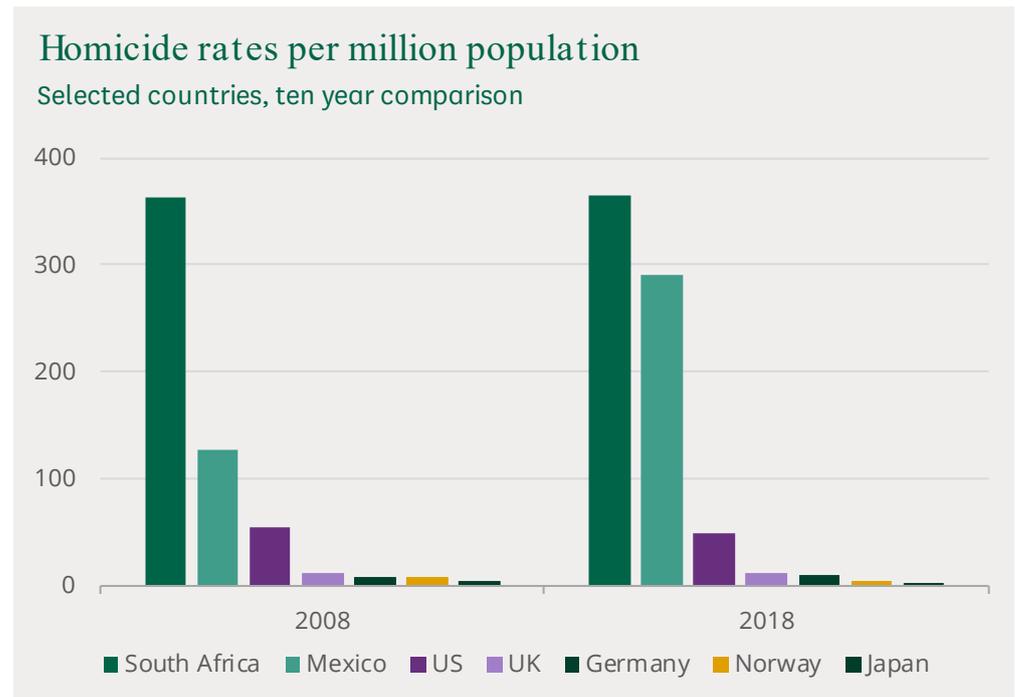
²⁷ UNODC, [Global Study on Homicide](#), 2019, p11.

Please note figures are given as rates per 100,000. In 2017 there were 6.1 homicides per 100,000 population where multiplying by 10 gives you rates per million population.

higher than the global average.²⁸ Asia (23), Europe (30) and Oceania (28) all had much lower rates than the global average.

Homicide rates from selected countries are displayed in the following chart.

Of these countries, South Africa has the highest homicide rate, last recorded in 2018 at 364 per 100,000 population with the next highest being Mexico with a rate of 291. Japan had the lowest homicide rate of 3 which was roughly 121 times lower than South Africa. Please see [Appendix table A7](#) for more detailed figures.



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, [Global Study on Homicide Data](#)

6.3

Europe

The European commission publishes [police data on intentional homicides in European countries](#) through Eurostat. The most recent figures are for 2020 which show that Latvia had the highest rate of homicide in Europe, with 49 offences per million population. Latvia was followed by Lithuania, Estonia, and Liechtenstein. The lowest rate was recorded in Luxembourg (3.2 offences per million population) followed by Italy and Slovenia.

The UK is no longer part of Eurostat so comparable UK data is not available for 2020. The most recent Eurostat data for the UK is from 2018, when the homicide rate for England and Wales ranked 18 out of 38, with 11.4 homicides per million population. Northern Ireland ranked 16 and Scotland 19. The non-

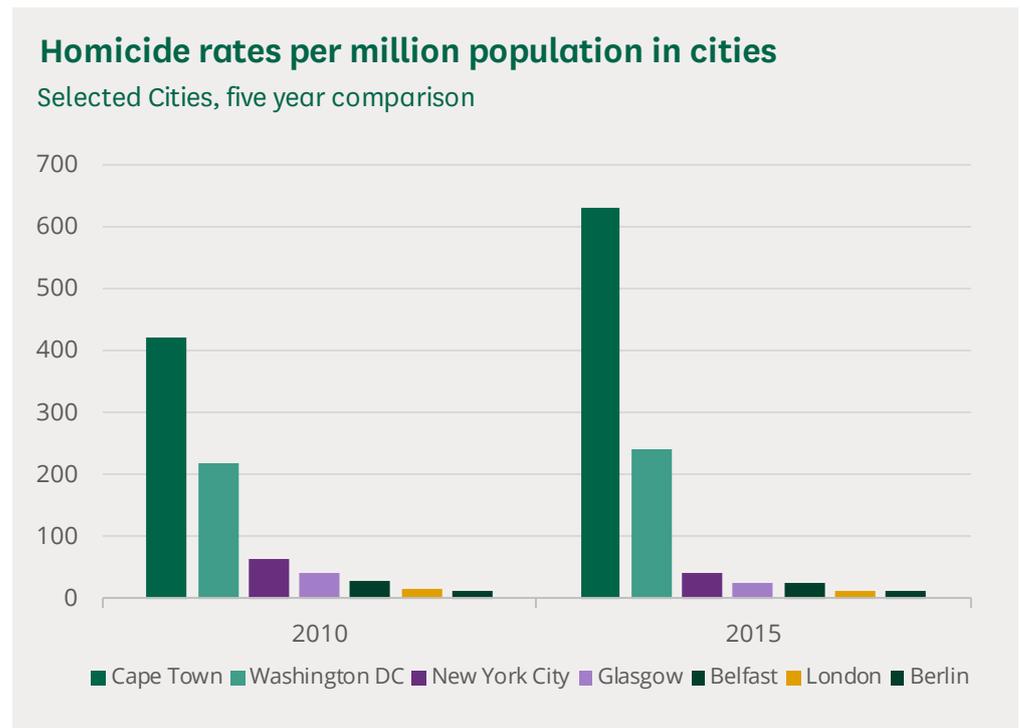
²⁸ As above; [p.21](#). The scale of homicide is difficult to determine in Africa as raw statistics for many countries are not available. Figures for Pacific states are also likely to be underreported.

UK country with the most similar rate was France, which saw 11.6 homicides per million population in 2018.²⁹

6.4

Major cities

The UNODC produces statistics on homicide in cities globally up to 2017. The following chart shows homicide rates per 100,000 population in selected major cities from 2010 to 2015. Data from 2015 onwards is less complete.



Sources: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, [Homicide counts and rates](#) (2000-2017); DC Metropolitan Police Department, 2017, [Homicide closure rates](#); United States Census Bureau, 2017, [Population and Housing Unit Estimates](#); Cape Town figures are from the [University of Cape Town's Centre of Criminology](#)

Further data for more cities can be found in Appendix table A8 [in the spreadsheet attached to the landing page of this briefing paper](#). Generally, homicide rates in European cities are lower than major US cities. The rate of 8.5 per 100,000 population in Paris for 2015 can be attributed to the various terrorist attacks experienced.

²⁹ See appendix table A10 for full Eurostat data

7

Further reading

- Crown Prosecution Service, [Homicide: Murder and Manslaughter, Legal Guidance](#), updated 9 September 2022
- ONS, [Focus on violent crime and sexual offences, England and Wales: year ending March 2016](#), published 9 February 2017

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe or scan the code below:



 commonslibrary.parliament.uk

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)