

# FACT SHEET



## Firearm Use in Violent Crime in the U.S. and Alaska, 1985–2012

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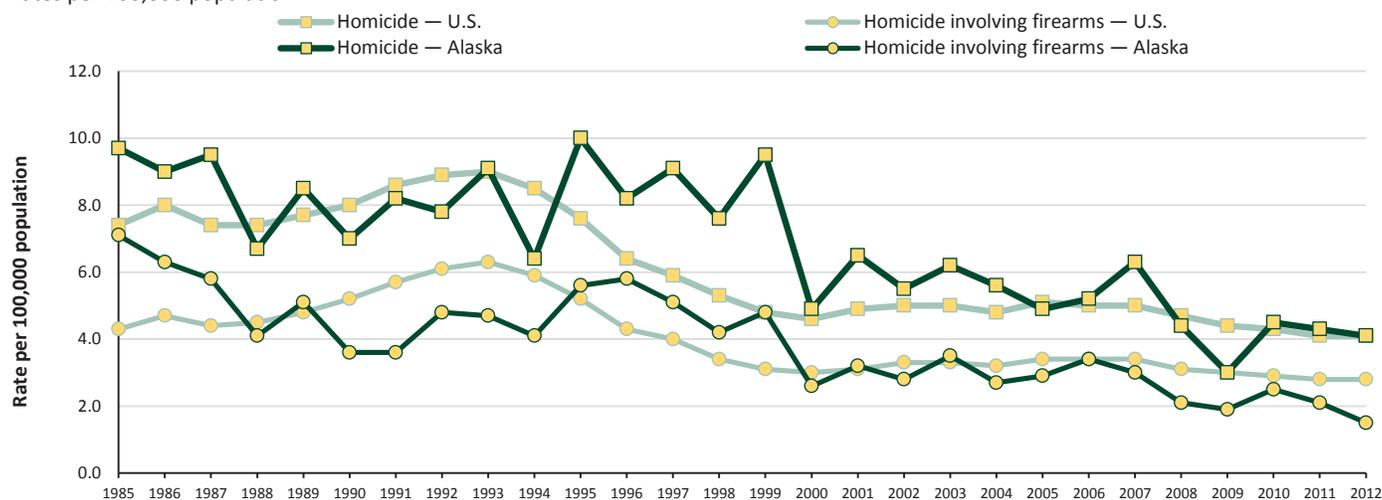
This fact sheet presents Uniform Crime Report (UCR) statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Alaska Department of Public Safety (DPS) for the period from 1985–2012. The data presented primarily focuses on the use of firearms in the commission of three types of violent crime: (1) murder and nonnegligent manslaughter (homicide), (2) robbery, and (3) aggravated assault. In addition to firearms, data is presented on three other weapons categories — cutting instruments and knives; hands, fists, feet, or other physical force (strong-arm tactics); and other weapons — in order to report the proportion of crime attributable to each of the four weapons categories.

These data were extracted from the FBI's *Crime in the United States* (<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr>) and DPS's *Crime in Alaska* (<http://www.dps.state.ak.us/statewide/ucr.aspx>) publications.

**Uniform Crime Reports.** Recognizing the need for national crime statistics, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) set the foundations for the current UCR program in the 1920s. In June 1930, Congress designated the FBI as the agency authorized to collect, compile, and distribute crime records in an effort to measure the volume of crime in the United States. The UCR program collects monthly information from more than 18,000 city, university and college, county, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement

**FIGURE 1.**

Homicide Rates in the U.S. and Alaska, 1985–2012  
Rates per 100,000 population



Source of data: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1986–2013). *Crime in the United States*. Washington, DC; Alaska Department of Public Safety, Criminal Records & Identification Bureau (1986–2013). *Crime in Alaska*. Juneau, AK.

agencies that voluntarily report data on crimes brought to their attention. The primary objective of the UCR program is to produce reliable data on crime for use in law enforcement administration, operation, and management. In 2012, UCR data was reported by law enforcement agencies representing 98.1% of the total U.S. population.

The UCR records data for eight serious crimes (called Part I offenses) and more than twenty less serious offenses (called Part II offenses). Part I offenses include four violent crimes — murder and nonnegligent manslaughter (homicide), forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault — and four property crimes — burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. This fact sheet reports on the use of firearms in three Part I violent crimes: homicide, robbery, and aggravated assault.

Since 1982, the Alaska Department of Public Safety (DPS), Division of Statewide Services (DSS), has administered the UCR program for Alaska. The Criminal Records and Identification Bureau (CRIB), located within the DSS, collects, tabulates, reports, and publishes UCR data submitted by Alaska law enforcement agencies. As is the case nationally, submitting agencies retain responsibility for the accuracy of the data. While UCR reporting to the FBI is voluntary, AS §12.62.130 requires Alaska law enforcement agencies to submit crime data to DPS. In 2012, 33 agencies provided UCR crime data to DPS. An estimated 99.4% of the state's total population fell within the jurisdiction of the submitting agencies.

**Crime rates.** Crime rates per 100,000 population are calculated through dividing the number of specified crimes by the total population of the focus area and then multiplying the total by 100,000. For example, to determine the homicide crime rate in Alaska for 2012, we take the total number of homicides reported in Alaska for 2012 (30), divide it by the total estimated state population (726,997) and multiply the sum by 100,000 to reach the homicide rate of 4.1 per 100,000 population  $[(30/726,997)*100,000=4.1]$ . Because Alaska has a small population, even small changes in the number of reported crimes can lead to substantial fluctuations in crime rates.

**Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter (homicide).** From 1985 to 2012, the rate of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter (homicide) reported to law enforcement agencies in the United States dropped 44.6%, from an estimated rate of 7.4 per 100,000 population in 1985 to an estimated 4.1 per 100,000 in 2012 (Figure 1). By comparison, the rate of homicides reported to law enforcement agencies in Alaska declined 57.7% over the 27-year period, from an estimated rate of 9.7 per 100,000 population in 1985 to 4.1 per 100,000 in 2012. In the U.S., homicide rates ranged from a high of 9.0 per 100,000 population in 1993 to a low of 4.1 per 100,000 population in 2011 and 2012. In Alaska, homicide rates ranged from a high of 10.0 per 100,000 population in 1995 to a low of 3.0 per 100,000 in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

Although the overall trend is declining for homicide rates in the U.S. and Alaska, Alaska has seen more variability within the time period. The first short-term trend revealed in Alaska is from 1988 to 1993, when homicide rates went from 6.7 to 9.1, then fell to 6.4 in 1994 before peaking at 10.0 in 1995. From 2000 to 2007, homicide rates in Alaska remained fairly stable. Rates decreased in 2008 and 2009, slightly increased in 2010, and have been decreasing in the past two years.

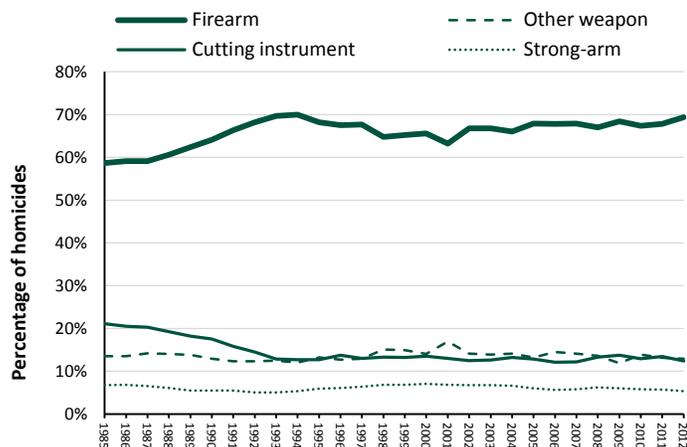
Figure 1 also shows that rates of homicides involving firearms declined from 1985–2012. Nationally, the rate of homicides involving firearms decreased 34.9% from 4.3 per 100,000 population in 1985 to 2.8 per 100,000 in 2012. In Alaska, the rate of firearms-involved homicide decreased 78.9% from 7.1 per 100,000 population in 1985 to 1.5 per 100,000 in 2012. In the U.S., homicide rates involving firearms ranged from a high of 6.3 per 100,000 population in 1993 to a low of 2.8 per 100,000 population in 2011 and 2012. In Alaska, the rate of homicides involving firearms ranged from a high of 7.1 per 100,000 population in 1985 to a low of 1.5 per 100,000 in 2012.

In 2012, the majority of all homicides reported to law enforcement officials in the U.S. involved the use

1. Due to the small number of homicides in Alaska each year, each homicide carries more weight than in the U.S. sample, making homicide rates in Alaska highly variable.

**FIGURE 2.**

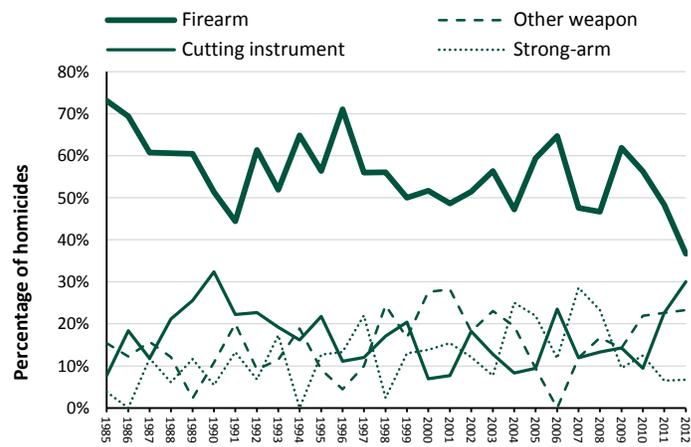
Homicides in the U.S. by Weapon Used, 1985–2012



Source of data: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1986–2013). *Crime in the United States*. Washington, DC.

**FIGURE 3.**

Homicides in Alaska by Weapon Used, 1985–2012



Source of data: Alaska Department of Public Safety, Criminal Records & Identification Bureau (1986–2013). *Crime in Alaska*. Juneau, AK.

of firearms. While the firearms-involved homicide rate in the U.S. dropped between 1985 and 2012, the **proportion** of homicides involving a firearm increased 18.2% from 58.7% in 1985 to 69.4% in 2012 (Figure 2). Conversely, in Alaska, the proportion of firearms-involved homicide dropped 49.8% from 73.1% in 1985 to 36.7% in 2012 (Figure 3).

In Alaska, firearms-involved homicides have declined overall in the time period, with short-term trends evident in the data. From 1985 until 1991, firearms-involved homicides decreased, followed by several years of volatility, with the proportion of firearms-involved homicides reaching 71.1% in 1996. In 1997, the proportion of homicides involving firearms decreased dramatically, followed by a period of stability until 2005 when the proportion became more volatile until 2009. The proportion of homicides involving firearms decreased from 2010 to 2012 in Alaska.

The proportion of homicides in the U.S. committed with a knife or other cutting instrument declined 41.2% from 21.1% in 1985 to 12.4% in 2012. In contrast, although firearms-involved homicides have decreased, the proportion of Alaska homicides involving cutting instruments increased nearly threefold (+289.6%) from 7.7% in 1985 to 30.0% in 2012.

Nationally, the proportion of homicides involving strong-

arm tactics and other weapons decreased (-20.9% and -4.4% respectively) from 1985 to 2012. Although the proportion of firearms-involved homicides declined, the proportion of homicides in Alaska involving strong-arm tactics and other weapons increased substantially (+76.3% and +51.3% respectively) between 1985 and 2012.

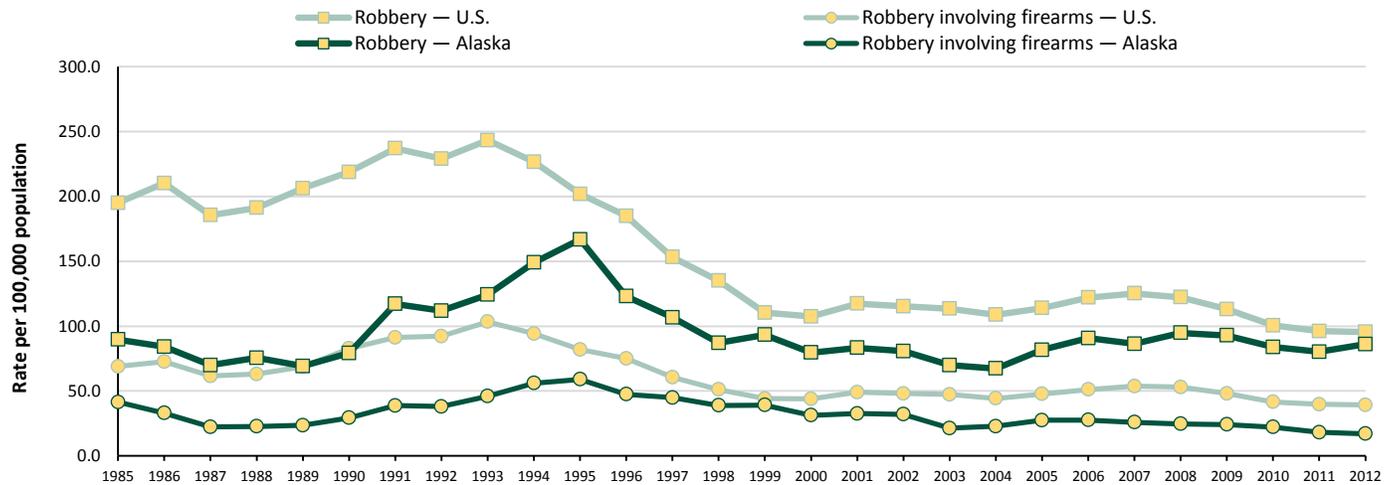
Overall, the use of weapons in homicides differs between the U.S. and Alaska, with Alaska showing more variation in weapons used in homicides. In Alaska, it is 47.1% less likely that a homicide will include a firearm, but more likely that it will include a cutting instrument, strong-arm tactics, or other weapon (+141.9%, +26.4%, and +80.6%, respectively).

**Robbery.** The rate of robberies reported to law enforcement agencies in the United States has dropped 51.0%, from an estimated rate of 195.1 per 100,000 population in 1985 to an estimated 95.6 per 100,000 in 2012 (Figure 4). By comparison, in Alaska the rate of robberies reported to law enforcement agencies declined 4.0% over the 27-year period, from an estimated rate of 89.7 per 100,000 population in 1985 to 86.1 per 100,000 in 2012. In the U.S., robbery rates ranged from a high of 243.4 per 100,000 population in 1993 to a low of 95.6 per 100,000 population in 2012. In Alaska, robbery rates ranged from a high of 166.8 per 100,000 population in 1995 to a low of 67.4 per 100,000 in 2004.

**FIGURE 4.**

**Robbery Rates in the U.S. and Alaska, 1985–2012**

Rates per 100,000 population



Source of data: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1986–2013). *Crime in the United States*. Washington, DC; Alaska Department of Public Safety, Criminal Records & Identification Bureau (1986–2013). *Crime in Alaska*. Juneau, AK.

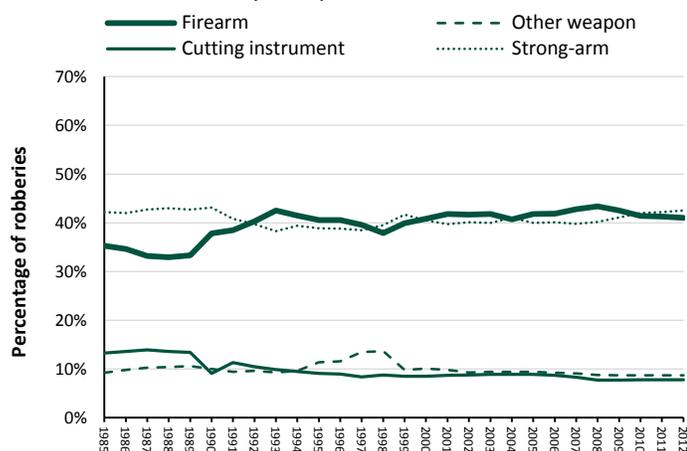
Overall, the rates of robberies involving firearms also declined from 1985–2012. Nationally, the rate of robberies involving firearms decreased 43.1% from 68.9 per 100,000 population in 1985 to 39.2 per 100,000 in 2012. In Alaska, the rate of firearms-involved robberies decreased 58.8% from 41.5 per 100,000 population in 1985 to 17.1 per 100,000 in 2012. In the U.S., robbery rates involving firearms ranged from a high of 103.4 per 100,000 population in 1993 to a low of 39.2 per 100,000 population in 2012. In Alaska, the rate of robberies involving firearms ranged from a high of 59.0 per 100,000 population in 1995 to a low of 17.1 per 100,000

in 2012. The rate of robberies involving firearms has decreased consistently since 2006.

In 2012, firearms were the second-most commonly used weapon in robberies in the U.S (closely following strong-arm tactics). While the rate of robberies involving firearms in the U.S. dropped between 1985 and 2012, the **proportion** of robberies involving a firearm increased 16.1% from 35.3% in 1985 to 41.0% in 2012 (Figure 5). Conversely, in Alaska, the proportion of firearms-involved robbery dropped 57.2% from 46.3% in 1985 to 19.8% in 2012 (Figure 6). In Alaska, robberies

**FIGURE 5.**

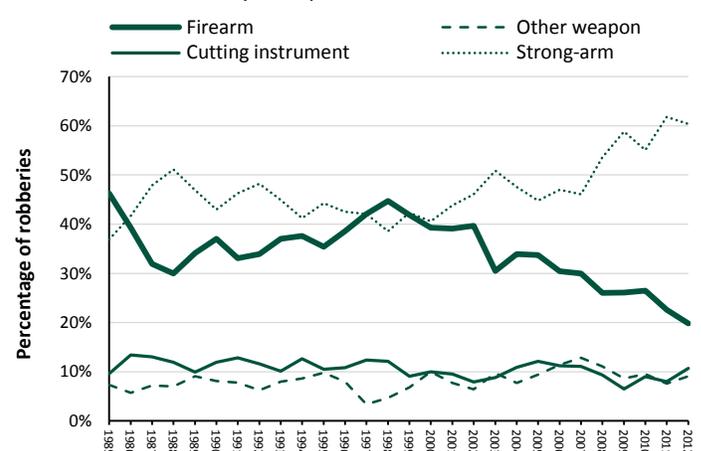
**Robberies in the U.S. by Weapon Used, 1985–2012**



Source of data: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1986–2013). *Crime in the United States*. Washington, DC.

**FIGURE 6.**

**Robberies in Alaska by Weapon Used, 1985–2012**



Source of data: Alaska Department of Public Safety, Criminal Records & Identification Bureau (1986–2013). *Crime in Alaska*. Juneau, AK.

committed with firearms were a distant second to robberies committed using strong-arm tactics. Further, the use of firearms in robberies in Alaska has been decreasing steadily since 1999.

The proportion of robberies in the U.S. committed with a knife or other cutting instrument declined 41.4% from 13.3% in 1985 to 7.8% in 2012. In contrast, the proportion of Alaska robberies involving cutting instruments increased 11.5% from 9.6% in 1985 to 10.7% in 2012.

Nationally, the proportion of robberies involving strong-arm tactics and other weapons increased (+0.7% and +63.7% respectively) from 1985 to 2012. The proportion of robberies in Alaska involving strong-arm tactics and other weapons also increased (+63.7% and +24.7% respectively) between 1985 and 2012.

Overall, the use of weapons in robberies differs between the U.S. and Alaska. In Alaska, it is 51.7% less likely that a robbery will include a firearm, but more likely that it will include a cutting instrument, strong-arm tactics, or other weapons (+37.2%, +42.1%, and +4.6%, respectively).

**Aggravated Assault.** The rate of aggravated assault reported to law enforcement agencies in the United States dropped 25.1%, from an estimated rate of 280.1

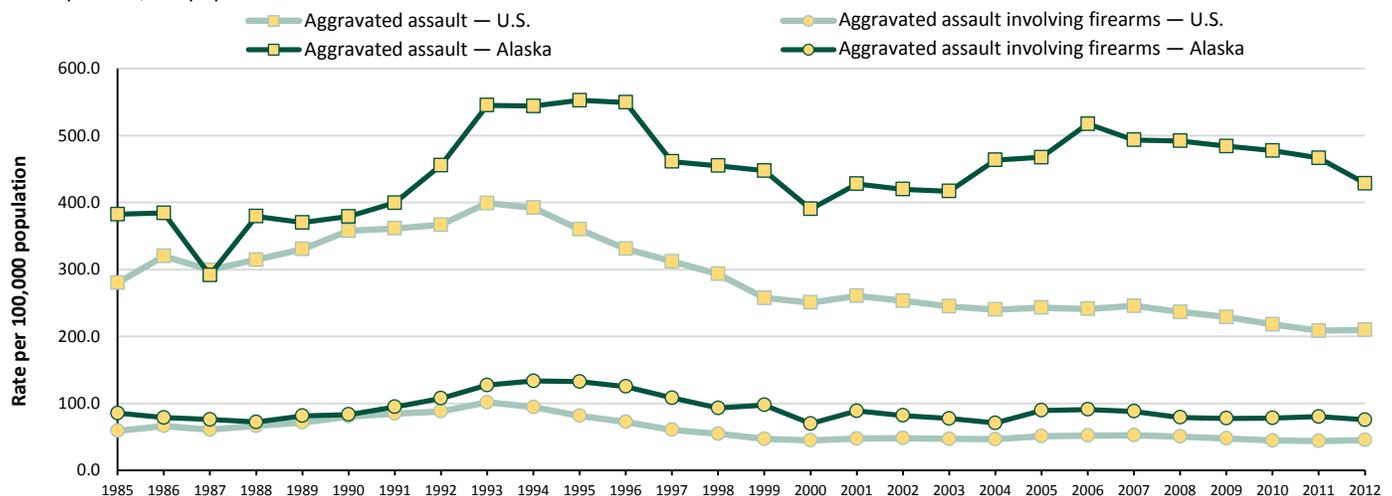
per 100,000 population in 1985 to an estimated 209.7 per 100,000 in 2012 (Figure 7). By comparison, the rate of aggravated assault reported to law enforcement agencies in Alaska increased 12.1% over the 27-year period, from an estimated rate of 382.4 per 100,000 population in 1985 to 428.5 per 100,000 in 2012. In the U.S., aggravated assault rates ranged from a high of 399.1 per 100,000 population in 1993 to a low of 208.6 per 100,000 population in 2011. In Alaska, aggravated assault rates ranged from a high of 552.6 per 100,000 population in 1995 to a low of 291.7 per 100,000 in 1987.

The rates of aggravated assault involving firearms also declined from 1985–2012. Nationally, the rate of aggravated assaults involving firearms decreased 23.3% from 59.2 per 100,000 population in 1985 to 45.4 per 100,000 in 2012. In Alaska, the rate of firearms-involved aggravated assaults decreased 11.8% from 85.6 per 100,000 population in 1985 to 75.5 per 100,000 in 2012. In the U.S., aggravated assault rates involving firearms ranged from a high of 101.7 per 100,000 population in 1993 to a low of 43.9 per 100,000 population in 2011. In Alaska, the rate of aggravated assaults involving firearms ranged from a high of 133.4 per 100,000 population in 1994 to a low of 69.8 per 100,000 in 2000.

While the firearms-involved aggravated assault rate in the U.S. dropped between 1985 and 2012, the **proportion**

**FIGURE 7.**

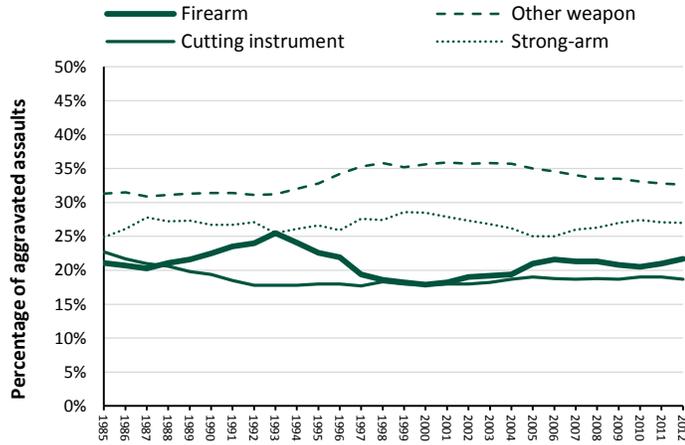
Aggravated Assault Rates in the U.S. and Alaska, 1985–2012  
Rates per 100,000 population



Source of data: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1986–2013). *Crime in the United States*. Washington, DC; Alaska Department of Public Safety, Criminal Records & Identification Bureau (1986–2013). *Crime in Alaska*. Juneau, AK.

**FIGURE 8.**

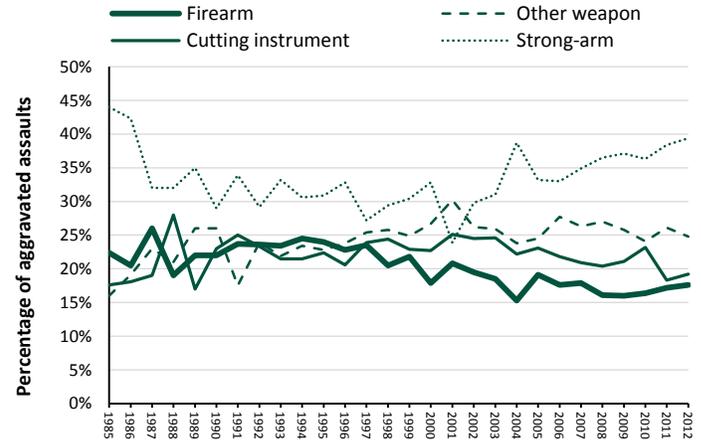
Aggravated Assaults in the U.S. by Weapon Used, 1985–2012



Source of data: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1986–2013). *Crime in the United States*. Washington, DC.

**FIGURE 9.**

Aggravated Assaults in Alaska by Weapon Used, 1985–2012



Source of data: Alaska Department of Public Safety, Criminal Records & Identification Bureau (1986–2013). *Crime in Alaska*. Juneau, AK.

of aggravated assaults involving a firearm increased 2.8% from 21.1% in 1985 to 21.7% in 2012 (Figure 8). In Alaska, the proportion of firearms-involved aggravated assault dropped 21.4% from 22.4% in 1985 to 17.6% in 2012 (Figure 9). The proportion of aggravated assaults in Alaska involving firearms decreased from 2006 to 2010, but has increased yearly since then.

The proportion of aggravated assaults in the U.S. committed with a knife or other cutting instrument declined 17.6% from 22.7% in 1985 to 18.7% in 2012. In contrast, the proportion of Alaska aggravated assaults involving cutting instruments increased 9.1% from 17.6% in 1985 to 19.2% in 2012.

Nationally, the proportion of aggravated assaults involving strong-arm tactics and other weapons increased (+8.4% and +4.2% respectively) from 1985 to 2012. In Alaska, the proportion of aggravated assaults involving strong-arm tactics decreased 10.5%, while the proportion of aggravated assaults involving other weapons increased 55.0% from 1985 to 2012.

Overall, the use of weapons in aggravated assaults differs between the U.S. and Alaska. In Alaska, it is 18.9% less likely that an aggravated assault will include a firearm or other weapon (-23.9%), but more likely that it will include a cutting instrument or strong-arm tactics (+2.7% and +45.9%, respectively).

## SUMMARY

This fact sheet presents UCR data on the use of firearms and other weapons in violent crime for 1985–2012 for the U.S. and Alaska.

**United States.** Since 1985, the U.S. homicide rate per 100,000 population has declined markedly. In 2012, the national homicide rate was nearly half of the 1985 rate. The proportion of homicides committed with a firearm also declined substantially in the U.S. between 1985 and 2012. The proportion of homicides committed with knives, strong-arm tactics and other weapons also decreased over the reported time.

Robbery rates in the U.S. dropped by more than half from 1985 to 2012. Nationally, the proportion of robberies committed with a firearm increased from 1985 to 2012. The proportion of robberies committed with knives decreased, while the use of strong-arm tactics, and other weapons in robberies increased from 1985 to 2012.

The rate of aggravated assaults for this time period also decreased. The proportion of aggravated assaults involving a firearm decreased substantially in the U.S. between 1985 and 2012. The proportion of aggravated assaults involving knives also declined, while the proportion of aggravated assaults involving strong-arm

tactics and other weapons increased slightly from 1985 to 2012.

**Alaska.** Since 1985, Alaska has also experienced a substantial decline in homicide rate per 100,000 population overall. In 2012, the Alaska homicide rate was less than half of the 1985 rate. The proportion of homicides committed with a firearm also declined significantly in Alaska between 1985 and 2012. The proportion of homicides committed with knives increased nearly threefold, while the proportion of homicides involving strong-arm tactics and other weapons also increased significantly over the period.

Robbery rates in Alaska declined marginally from 1985 to 2012. Statewide, the proportion of robberies committed with a firearm decreased substantially from 1985 to 2012. The proportion of robberies committed with knives increased, while the use of strong-arm tactics

and other weapons in robberies increased substantially from 1985 to 2012.

The rate of aggravated assaults for this period increased in Alaska. The proportion of aggravated assaults involving a firearm decreased in Alaska between 1985 and 2012. The proportion of aggravated assaults involving knives and strong-arm tactics decreased, while the proportion of aggravated assaults involving other weapons increased by more than half from 1985 to 2012.

Overall, from 1985–2012, firearms use as a proportion of weapons used in violent crimes has declined in Alaska, with an expectation of a continued downward trend. Short-term trends reflect a decrease in the proportion of homicides and robberies committed with firearms, and an increase in the proportion of aggravated assaults committed with firearms.

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## NOTES

### CRIME DEFINITIONS

*Adopted from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program definitions.*

**Murder/nonnegligent manslaughter.** The willful (nonnegligent) killing of one human by another. Classification of this offense is made by police and is not the result of a court, coroner, medical examiner, jury or other judicial body.

**Robbery.** The taking, or attempted taking, of anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force, or threat of force, or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear.

**Aggravated assault.** An unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purposes of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury. This offense typically involves the use of a weapon likely to produce death or serious physical injury. Attempts involving the use of a gun, knife, or other weapon are included in this classification.

### WEAPON CLASSIFICATIONS

**Firearm.** A firearm is used as a weapon or employed as a means of force to threaten the victim or put the victim in fear.

**Knife or cutting instrument.** A knife, broken bottle, razor, ice pick, or other cutting or stabbing instrument is used or threatened.

**Personal weapons/strong-arm.** Only personal weapons such as hands, arms, feet, fists, and teeth are used or threatened.

**Other dangerous weapon.** A club, acid, explosive, brass knuckles, Mace, pepper spray, or other dangerous weapon is employed or its use is threatened.

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# THE ALASKA JUSTICE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS CENTER



## ABOUT

The Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Center (AJSAC) was established by Administrative Order No. 89, signed by Governor William Sheffield on July 2, 1986. Since that time the AJSAC has been housed within the University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center. The AJSAC assists Alaska criminal justice agencies, as well as state and local governments and officials, with the development, implementation, and evaluation of criminal justice programs and policies through the collection, analysis, and reporting of crime and justice statistics.

Since 1972, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and its predecessor agency, the National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service, has provided support to state and territorial governments to establish and operate Statistical Analysis Centers (SACs) to collect, analyze, and report statistics on crime and justice to federal, state, and local levels of government, and to share state-level information nationally. There are currently 53 SACs located in the United States and its Territories. The AJSAC is a member of the Justice Research and Statistics Association (JRSA), a national nonprofit organization comprised of SAC directors, researchers, and practitioners dedicated to policy-oriented research and analysis.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

### Location

The Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Center (AJSAC) is housed in the University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center, which is located on the second floor of the UAA/APU Consortium Library, Suite 213.

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## ON THE WEB

To learn more about the AJSAC research, please visit our website at: <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/ajsac/>.

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