

FACT SHEET



Homicide in Alaska, 1986-2015

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This fact sheet presents data from the Alaska Department of Public Safety’s annual report *Crime in Alaska* for the years 1986 through 2015 on homicides in Alaska. *Crime in Alaska* represents the State of Alaska’s contribution to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s national Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) program. The UCR program collects data from law enforcement agencies across the United States. This fact sheet explores the 30-year trend of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter (homicide) rates in Alaska.

Homicide rates. We looked at homicide data over a 30-year period, from 1986 to 2015. Homicide rates were calculated for Alaska (AK), the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) only, and Alaska — excluding the

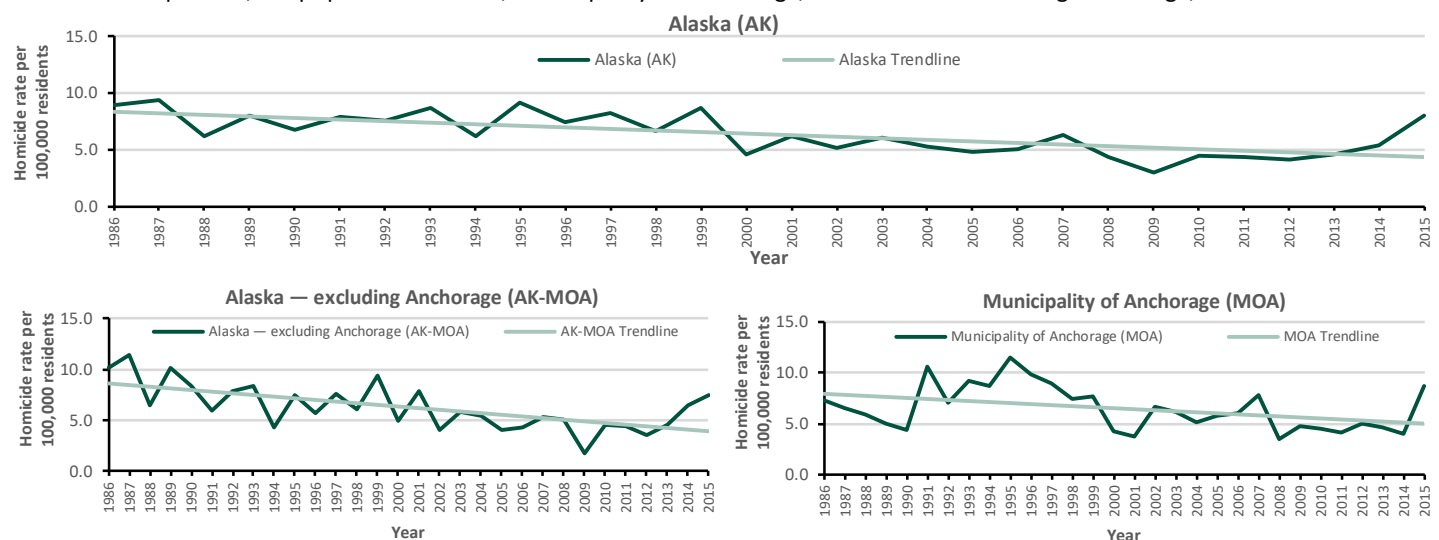
Municipality of Anchorage (AK-MOA). The homicide rates reported here were calculated using population data retrieved from the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development’s Research and Analysis Division. These homicide rates are presented in Figure 1.

Over the 30-year period from 1986 to 2015, there were 1,197 homicides in Alaska (AK-MOA=687; MOA=510), with an average of 40 homicides per year (AK-MOA=23 homicides per year; MOA=17 homicides per year).

Alaska (AK) homicide rate. The AK homicide rate in 1986 was 8.9 per 100,000 AK residents (Figure 1). In 2015, the AK homicide rate was 8.0 per 100,000 AK

Figure 1.

Homicide rate per 100,000 population: Alaska, Municipality of Anchorage, and Alaska — excluding Anchorage, 1986-2015



Source of data: Alaska Department of Public Safety, Criminal Records & Identification Bureau (1987-2016). *Crime in Alaska*, Juneau, AK.

Note: Homicide rates were calculated using the population estimates for each unique area. For example, the entire Alaska population was used to calculate Alaska rates, while the MOA population was used to calculate MOA rates, and the AK-MOA population was used to calculate AK-MOA rates.

residents. Over the period, the highest AK homicide rate was recorded in 1987 (9.4 per 100,000 AK residents), and the lowest AK homicide rate was recorded in 2009 (3.0 per 100,000 AK residents). Overall, the homicide rate in AK declined steadily over the 30-year period from 1986 to 2015.

Alaska – excluding MOA (AK-MOA) homicide rate. The AK-MOA homicide rate in 1986 was 10.1 per 100,000 AK-MOA residents (Figure 1). In 2015, the AK-MOA homicide rate was 7.5 per 100,000 AK-MOA residents. Over the period, the highest AK-MOA homicide rate was recorded in 1987 (11.4 per 100,000 AK-MOA residents), and the lowest AK-MOA homicide rate was recorded in 2009 (1.7 per 100,000 AK-MOA residents). Overall, the homicide rate in AK-MOA declined steadily over the 30-year period from 1986 to 2015.

Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) homicide rate. The homicide rate for MOA in 1986 was 7.3 per 100,000 MOA residents (Figure 1). In 2015, the MOA homicide rate was 8.7 per 100,000 MOA residents. Over the period, the highest MOA homicide rate was recorded in 1995 (11.5 per 100,000 MOA residents), and the lowest MOA homicide rate was recorded in 2008 (3.5 per 100,000 MOA residents). Overall, the homicide rate in MOA declined steadily over the 30-year period from 1986 to 2015.

Homicide weapons. Detailed information regarding weapons used in the commission of homicides is reported in the *Crime in Alaska*

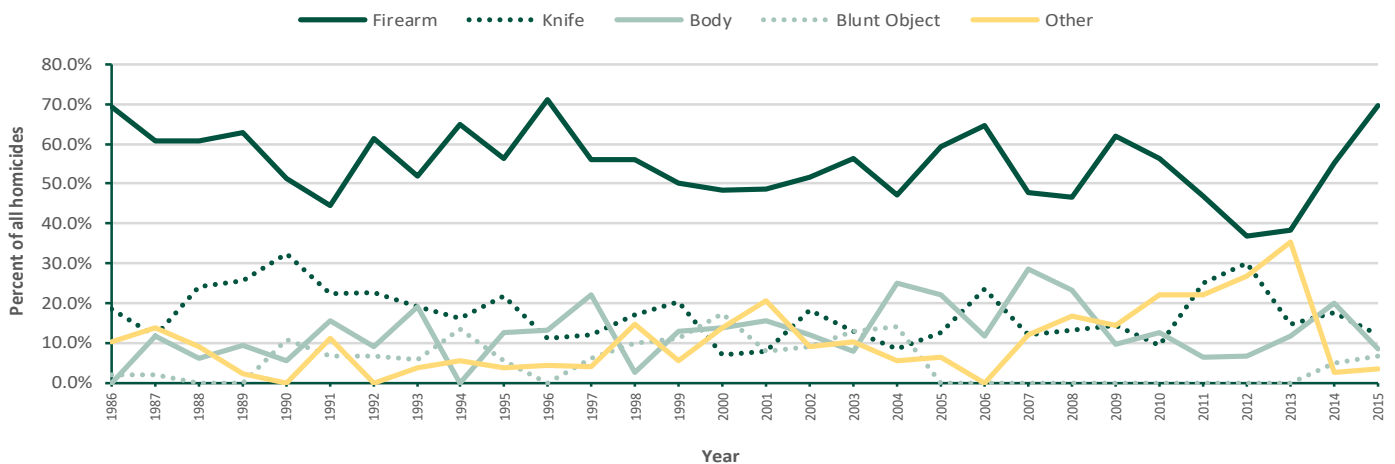
publications. For this report, we have categorized all reported homicide weapons into the following categories: (1) firearms – including handguns, rifles, shotguns, and unknown firearms; (2) knives – including knives, machetes, scalpels, and other sharpened-blade instruments; (3) body – including instances where hands, feet, or another part of the human body was the main weapon of harm; (4) blunt objects; and (5) other – including, but not limited to, poisoning, neglect/starvation, bombs, and fire. Multiple weapons may be used in a homicide, but only the most serious weapon is reported in the UCR. Figure 2 shows the prevalence of weapon type in Alaska homicides for the period from 1986 to 2015.

Firearm. The most-commonly used homicide weapon in Alaska from 1986 to 2015 was firearms (Figure 2). On average, 55.1% of all homicides in Alaska involved firearms. Firearm use in homicides was at a period low of 36.7% of all homicides in 2012, and a period high of 71.1% of all homicides in 1996. In 2015, 69.5% of all homicides involved a firearm.

Knife. Knives were the second-most commonly used weapons in homicides in Alaska from 1986 to 2015 (Figure 2). On average, 17.1% of all homicides in Alaska involved knives. Knife use in homicides was at a period low of 6.9% of all homicides in 2000, and a period high of 32.4% of all homicides in 1990. In 2015, 11.9% of all homicides involved knives.

Body. The third-most commonly used weapon in homicides in Alaska from 1986 to 2015 were the bodies

Figure 2. Percentage of all homicides in Alaska by weapon, 1986-2015



Source of data: Alaska Department of Public Safety, Criminal Records & Identification Bureau (1987-2016). *Crime in Alaska*, Juneau, AK.

of the offenders (Figure 2). On average, 12.5% of all homicides in Alaska involved only the body of the offender as a weapon. Offender body use in homicides was at a period high of 28.6% of all homicides in 2007. In 2015, 8.5% of all homicides involved only the body of the offender as a weapon.

Blunt Object. Figure 2 shows the percent of all homicides in which blunt objects were used as weapons in Alaska from 1986 to 2015 (Figure 2). On average, 5.1% of all homicides in Alaska involved blunt objects as a weapon. Blunt object use in homicides was at a period high of 17.2% of all homicides in 2000. In 2015, 6.8% of all homicides involved blunt objects as a weapon.

Other. The prevalence of other weapons used in homicides in Alaska from 1986 to 2015 is reported in Figure 2. On average, 10.3% of all homicides in Alaska involved other weapons. Other weapon use in homicides was at a period high of 35.3% of all homicides in 2013. In 2015, 3.4% of all homicides involved other weapons.

Victim-offender relationship. The relationship between victim and offender was also examined for this fact sheet. Relationships were categorized into three categories for ease of presentation: *known*, *strangers*, and *unknown*. The *known* category includes homicides when victims and offenders had previous personal contact and were known to each

other, such as intimate partners, family, friends, co-workers, and other acquaintances. The *stranger* category includes homicides when (1) both victims and offenders were identified and (2) no known victim-offender relationship was identified. Finally, the *unknown* category includes homicides when (1) either victim or offender were not identified and (2) no victim-offender relationship could be explored as a result.

Figure 3 shows the 30-year-average of victim-offender relationships from 1986 through 2015. Over the 30-year period, 69.2% of Alaska homicide victims knew their killers, while 13.3% of victims did not know their killers. The victim-offender relationship was unknown in 17.4% of Alaska homicides from 1986 to 2015.

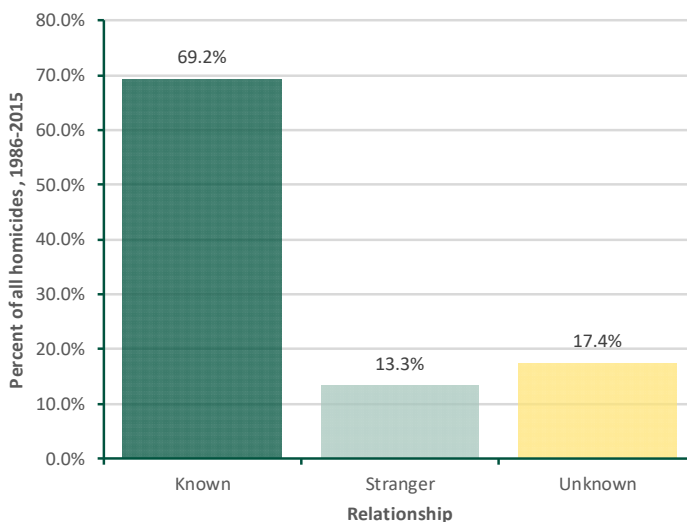
Known. As shown in Figure 3, 69.2% of all Alaska homicides, from 1986 to 2015, involved victims who knew their killers. Over the 30-year period, homicides when a victim knew their killer peaked at 86.0% in 1997 and hit a low of 43.3% of all Alaska homicides in 2009. (Data not shown.)

Stranger. As shown in Figure 3, 13.3% of all Alaska homicides, from 1986 to 2015, involved victims who did not know their killers. Over the 30-year period, homicides when a victim did not know their killer peaked at 43.3% in 2009 and hit a low of 0.0% of all Alaska homicides in 2002 and 2014. (Data not shown.)

Unknown. As shown in Figure 3, 17.4% of all Alaska homicides, from 1986 to 2015, involved victims whose relationship to their killers remains unknown. Over the 30-year period, homicides with unknown victim-offender relationships peaked at 37.9% in 2000 and hit a low of 4.7% of all Alaska homicides in 1989. (Data not shown.)

Clearance rates. Homicide cases are cleared by arrest or exceptional means (circumstances such as the death of a suspect — see end note for more detail). We looked at clearance rates for homicides in Alaska (AK), the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), and Alaska — excluding the Municipality of Anchorage (AK-MOA) over a 30-year period from 1986 to 2015. Overall, the number of cleared cases increased for AK (+13.4%) and MOA (+71.5%) and decreased for AK-MOA (-6.9%) (Figure 4).

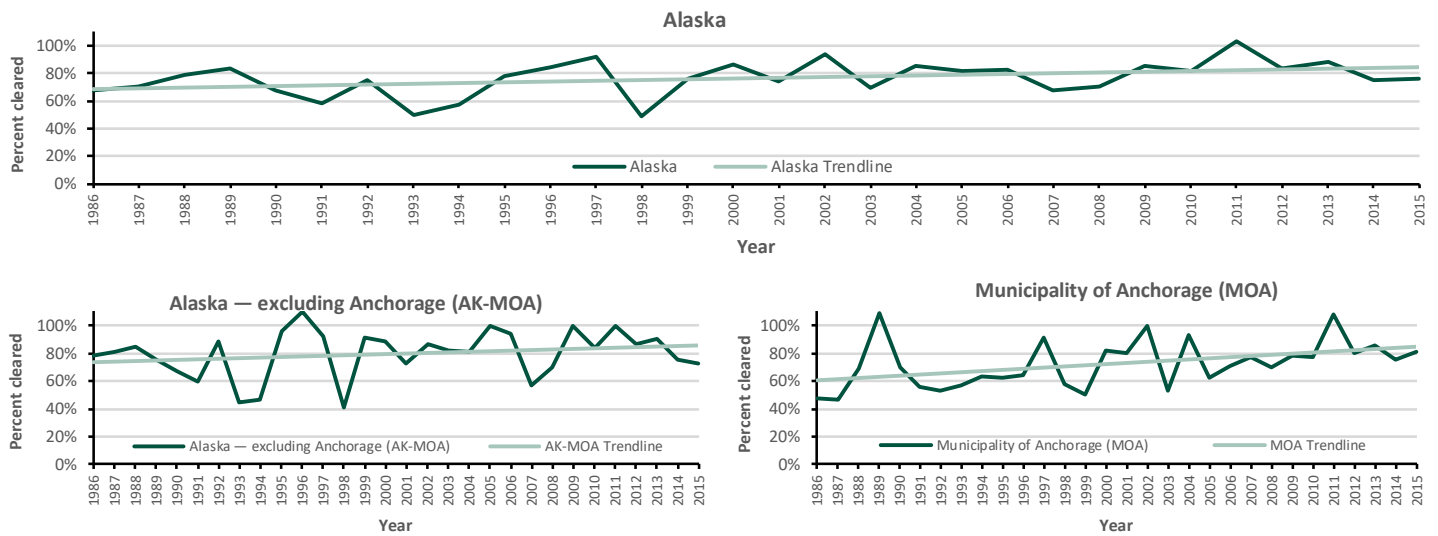
Figure 3. Homicide victim-offender relationships in Alaska, 1986–2015



Source of data: Alaska Department of Public Safety, Criminal Records & Identification Bureau (1987-2016). *Crime in Alaska*, Juneau, AK.

Figure 4.

Percentage of homicides cleared by arrest or exceptional means, 1986-2015



Source of data: Alaska Department of Public Safety, Criminal Records & Identification Bureau (1987-2016). *Crime in Alaska*, Juneau, AK.

Alaska (AK). Figure 4 shows the percentage of homicides that were cleared by arrest or exception in Alaska from 1986 to 2015. Overall, the 30-year trend reveals increases in AK’s homicide clearance rates. In 1986, the AK homicide clearance rate was 67.3%. In 2015, the AK homicide clearance rate was 76.3%. The average homicide clearance rate in AK over the period was 76.3%.

Alaska — excluding the Municipality of Anchorage (AK-MOA). Figure 4 shows the percentage of homicides that were cleared by arrest or exception in the AK-MOA from 1986 to 2015. Overall, the 30-year trend reveals increases in AK-MOA’s homicide clearance rates. In 1986, the AK-MOA homicide clearance rate was 78.1%. In 2015, the AK-MOA homicide clearance rate was 72.7%. The average homicide clearance rate in AK-MOA over the period was 79.9%.

Municipality of Anchorage (MOA). Figure 4 shows the percentage of homicides that were cleared by arrest or exception in the MOA from 1986 to 2015. Overall, the 30-year trend reveals increases in MOA’s homicide clearance rates. In 1986, the MOA homicide clearance rate was 47.1%. In 2015, the MOA homicide clearance rate was 80.8%. The average homicide clearance rate in MOA over the period was 72.3%.

SUMMARY

This fact sheet presents data reported on homicides in Alaska from 1986 to 2015 as reported in the Department of Public Safety publication, *Crime in Alaska*.

From 1986 to 2015, homicide rates decreased in Alaska (AK), in Alaska — excluding Anchorage (AK-MOA), and in the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA).

Based on a 30-year average, the most commonly used weapons in homicides from 1986 to 2015 were: (1) firearms (55.1%), (2) knives (17.1%), (3) body (12.5%), (4) blunt objects (5.1%), and (5) all other (10.3%). In 2015, the most commonly used weapons in homicides were: (1) firearms (69.5%), (2) knives (11.9%), (3) body (8.5%), (4) blunt objects (6.8%), and (5) all other (3.4%). From 1986 to 2015, on average, homicide victims overwhelmingly knew their killers (69.2%). Homicide victims were less likely to be killed by a stranger (13.3%) during this period. On average, 17.4% of relationships between victim and offender(s) were unknown.

On average from 1986 to 2015, 76.3% of homicides in AK were cleared by arrest or exceptional means. Overall, the homicide clearance rate increased from 1986 to 2015.

NOTES

CALCULATING RATES

Rates per 100,000 population are calculated by dividing the number of specified events by the total population of the focus area and then multiplying the total by 100,000. For example, to determine the homicide rate in Alaska for 2015, we take the total number of founded homicide cases reported in Alaska for 2015 (59), divide it by the total estimated state population for 2015 (737,625), and multiply the quotient by 100,000 to reach the homicide rate of 8.0 per 100,000 population $[(59 \div 737,625) * 100,000 = 8.0]$. Because Alaska has a small population, small changes in the number of reported homicides can lead to substantial fluctuations in rates. Rates calculated for the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) were based on the estimated population of all MOA residents. Rates calculated for Alaska — excluding the Municipality of Anchorage (AK-MOA) were based on the estimated population of Alaska, minus the estimated population of MOA.

All population estimates were retrieved from the State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development at <http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/index.cfm>. These population estimates differ from the population estimates provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, and used in the *Crime in Alaska* publications and by the FBI when calculating rates for the UCR. This may result in minor inconsistencies between published rates.

Crime in Alaska is available online at <http://dps.alaska.gov/Statewide/UCR.aspx> (2000–2015) and <https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/ajsac/ucr.cshhtml> (1976-1999)

OFFENSES CLEARED

Adapted from <https://ucr.fbi.gov>

Cleared by arrest. In the UCR Program, a law enforcement agency reports that an offense is cleared by arrest when three specific conditions have been met. The three conditions are that at least one person has been: (1) Arrested, (2) Charged with the commission of the offense, and (3) Turned over to the court for prosecution. The arrest of one person may clear several crimes, and the arrest of many persons may clear only one offense. In addition, some clearances that an agency records in a particular calendar year, such as 2015, may pertain to offenses that occurred in previous years.

Cleared by exceptional means. When elements beyond law enforcement's control prevent the agency from arresting and formally charging the offender, the agency can clear the offense exceptionally. Law enforcement agencies must meet the following four conditions in order to clear an offense by exceptional means. The agency must have: (1) Identified the offender, (2) Gathered enough evidence to support an arrest, make a charge, and turn over the offender to the court for prosecution, (3) Identified the offender's exact location so that the suspect could be taken into custody immediately, and (4) Encountered a circumstance outside the control of law enforcement that prohibits the agency from arresting, charging, and prosecuting the offender. Examples of exceptional clearances include, but are not limited to, the death of the offender (e.g., suicide or justifiably killed by police or citizen); the victim's refusal to cooperate with the prosecution after the offender has been identified; or the denial of extradition because the offender committed a crime in another jurisdiction and is being prosecuted for that offense.

The dataset for this Fact Sheet is available for download at:

https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/ajsac/documents/Fact_Sheets/ajsac.16-06.homicide.supp.zip



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

PRODUCTION

Barbara Armstrong, Editor

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