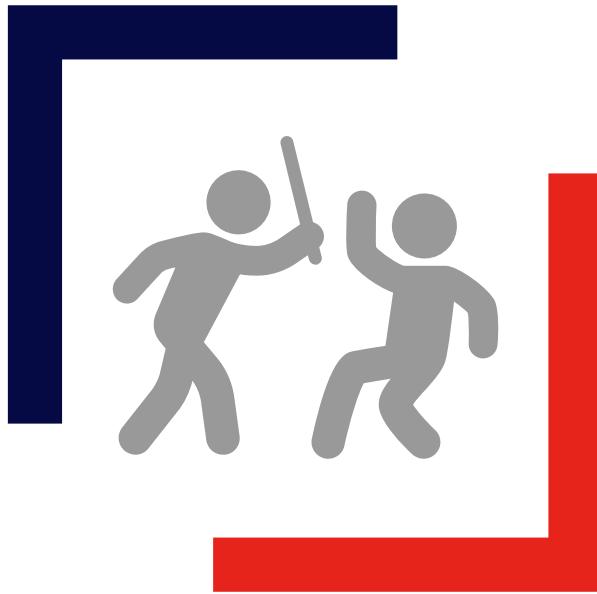


14

Section



Violence



STATE OF THE NATION



Violence

Introduction. Safety from physical violence, along with food, water, and shelter, is among the most basic human needs. Violence resulting in death not only indicates a direct loss of life but instills fear in others who see themselves as facing increased risks in their daily lives. That fear, in turn, can lead people to avoid interactions with others and prevent people from reaching their full potential.

Summary of Results. The United States has historically been one of the most violent countries in the world, and this is still true today. However, contrary to public perception, the murder rate has declined sharply since the early 1990s. This is also very likely true of shootings, because of the close connection between murder and shootings, though the shootings data do not go back to 1990. We are having mixed success in improving our international standing on these measures.



Murder Rate

Specific measure: Rate of murder and other unlawful, but intentional, killings per 100,000 people. (Source: Authors' analysis of FBI and Brennan Center for Justice data).

National Trend % of countries the US outperforms 30% Intl. Rank Trend

Why did we include this measure? Murder is the most severe form of violence. It is also the one most accurately measured.

Figure 32: Murder Rate (National Trend)



How does the US rank globally?

- Specific Measure: (Same as above.) (Source: Authors' analysis of United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime data).
- Percentage of countries the US outperforms: 30% (out of 70 countries)
- International Rank Trend: ↓

What do the data show? Our murder rate is very high by global standards. In 2023, 5.7 out of every 100,000 people in the US were murder victims. We rank just ahead of Russia and just behind Ukraine, Latvia, and Lithuania. However, the murder rate declined by almost 50% between 1990 and 1999 and continued declining for the most part until 2014. The murder rate spiked with the onset of COVID but then returned nearly to its prior level—well below the level of the 1990s.

What might explain these patterns? Almost all murders are committed with guns. Broad civilian access to guns is unique to the United States. The Constitution's Second Amendment provides the right to bear arms and, as a result, the country has more guns than people. Because almost all murders are committed with guns, and there are essentially no alternative weapons that are as lethal, this is one viable explanation for our high murder rate.

Cycles of high murder rates are also partly driven by demographics, especially the number of men in the population between the ages of 20 and 34. The decline in the murder rate from 1990 to 1999 coincided with a decline in the percent of the population who are men in that age range. The decline in the crack epidemic in the late 1990s and stricter sentencing and mass incarceration were also likely causes. The increased number of police officers might have been a factor in the 1990s, though the number of officers has subsequently declined to near their prior levels even as the murder rate has remained much lower than the 1990s.



Shootings

Specific measure: Rate of fatal and nonfatal shootings per 100,000 population. This includes murders and suicides as well as officer-involved, accidental, mass shootings and many other types. (Source: Authors' analysis of Gun Violence Archive, Centers for Disease Control, and Washington Post Fatal Force Tracker data).

National Trend
* % of countries the US outperforms
10% Intl. Rank Trend
↑

Why did we include this measure? All uses of guns create physical injury, trauma, and/or fear.

Figure 33: Shootings (National Trend)



How does the US rank globally?

- Specific Measure: Rate of fatal shooting deaths per 100,000 population. (Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation).
- Percentage of countries the US outperforms: 10% (out of 115 countries)
- International Rank Trend: ↑

What do the data show? The rate of gun violence generally tracks the murder rate. We are among the most dangerous comparison countries on this measure, though improving somewhat in global terms. We rank just below the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Guyana, and far below China and Russia. The rate of nonfatal shootings closely tracks fatal ones.

The fatal shooting rates are generally higher than the murder rates shown earlier because the fatal shootings measure also includes suicides and accidental shootings. We characterize this trend as “unclear” because, although shootings have increased in recent years, shootings rates closely track the murder rate, which improved in the years during which we lack shootings data.

What might explain these patterns? Given the close connection between the murder rate and gun violence, see the explanations above for the murder rate.

For more information about data sources and treatments, see the Data Notes section.



Board and Public Support for this Topic and Measures

	Support from Board	Support from Public
Violence (as topic)	100%	76%
Murder Rate	86%	73%
Gun Violence (Fatal & Non-Fatal)	79%	72%

Other Measures Considered: We also considered including various types of assaults, but data accuracy was a serious concern so we did not vote on it.