

Homicide trends in Canada, 2021

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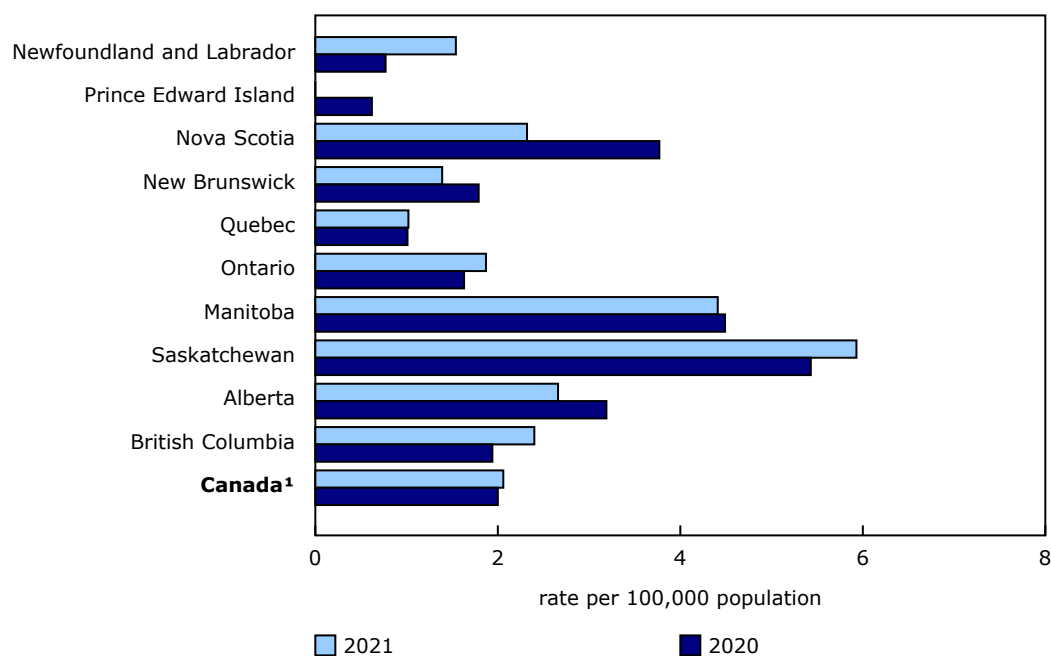
In 2021, police services reported 788 homicides in Canada. This represented 29 additional homicides compared with the previous year and a third consecutive increase since 2019. Consequently, the national homicide rate rose by 3% to 2.06 homicides per 100,000 population, compared with 2020. Despite these recent increases, homicides remained relatively rare events, as reported historically. They accounted for less than 0.2% of all police-reported violent crimes in 2021.

Detailed information on homicide in Canada is provided in the accompanying *Juristat* article released today, "[Homicide in Canada, 2021](#)," and the "[Infographic: Homicide in Canada, 2021](#)."

National increase largely the result of growth in Ontario and British Columbia

Increases in homicides in Ontario (+37; 277 homicides) and British Columbia (+25; 125 homicides) from 2020 contributed the most to the overall rise in 2021. However, these increases were partially offset by sizable decreases in Alberta (-23; 118 homicides) and Nova Scotia (-14; 23 homicides). It should be noted that the observed decline in Nova Scotia follows an unusually high homicide count in 2020 because of a mass shooting in the province. Among the provinces, Saskatchewan had the highest homicide rate (5.93 per 100,000 population) in 2021, up 9% from 2020 and a third consecutive yearly increase.

Chart 1
Homicides, by province, 2020 and 2021



1. Includes the territories.

Note(s): Populations are based upon July 1, 2021 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography.

Source(s): Homicide Survey (3315).



In 2021, there were 117 homicides in Toronto, the highest homicide count among census metropolitan areas (CMAs). However, as Toronto is the most populous CMA in the country, it ranked 17th in terms of the homicide rate (1.81 homicides per 100,000 population). The highest homicide rates were recorded in the Regina (5.67), Thunder Bay (5.63), and Winnipeg (5.39) CMAs. Trois-Rivières and Guelph were the only CMAs with no homicides reported by police in 2021.

Highest gang-related homicide rate since 2005

Police reported 184 gang-related homicides in 2021, accounting for nearly one-quarter (23%) of all homicides. In 2021, there were 33 additional gang-related homicides compared with 2020, resulting in the highest rate (0.48 per 100,000 population) recorded in Canada since comparable data were first collected in 2005.

This change was attributable to increases in several provinces, including Ontario (+13; 65 gang-related homicides), British Columbia (+13; 39 gang-related homicides), and Quebec (+6; 21 gang-related homicides). Gang-related homicides tend to be concentrated in urban areas; as a result, increases at the provincial level largely reflect rises in CMAs. In 2021, Vancouver (+13) and Montréal (+11) had the largest increases among CMAs in the number of homicides involving gangs compared with the previous year.

However, when the size of the population was accounted for, the highest gang-related homicide rate among the provinces was observed in Saskatchewan, at 2.12 per 100,000 population, a 9% increase from the previous year. Likewise, Regina had the highest gang-related homicide rate among the CMAs, at 3.03 per 100,000 population. This rate was nearly three times higher than in 2020 (1.14) and well above its previous 10-year average (1.10).

Firearms remain the most common weapon used to perpetrate homicides

In 2021, at the national level, two in five homicides (40%) resulted from victims being shot, while stabbing and beating represented 32% and 17% of homicides, respectively. Among firearm-related homicides, handguns were the primary type of firearm used (57%), followed by rifles and shotguns (26%). The remaining firearm-related homicides were perpetrated with firearm-like weapons and firearms of unknown type (17%). Almost half (46%) of firearm-related homicides were identified as gang-related. Overall, the national firearm-related homicide rate increased by 6% compared with 2020, from 0.73 to 0.78 per 100,000 population.

Among the provinces, Saskatchewan (1.86 per 100,000 population), Nova Scotia (1.21), Manitoba (1.01), British Columbia (1.00), and Alberta (0.95) had the highest firearm-related homicide rates in 2021, all above the national rate. Among the CMAs, the highest firearm-related homicide rate was observed in Regina (2.65) for the second year in a row. This latest rate represented a 40% increase from 2020 (1.89).

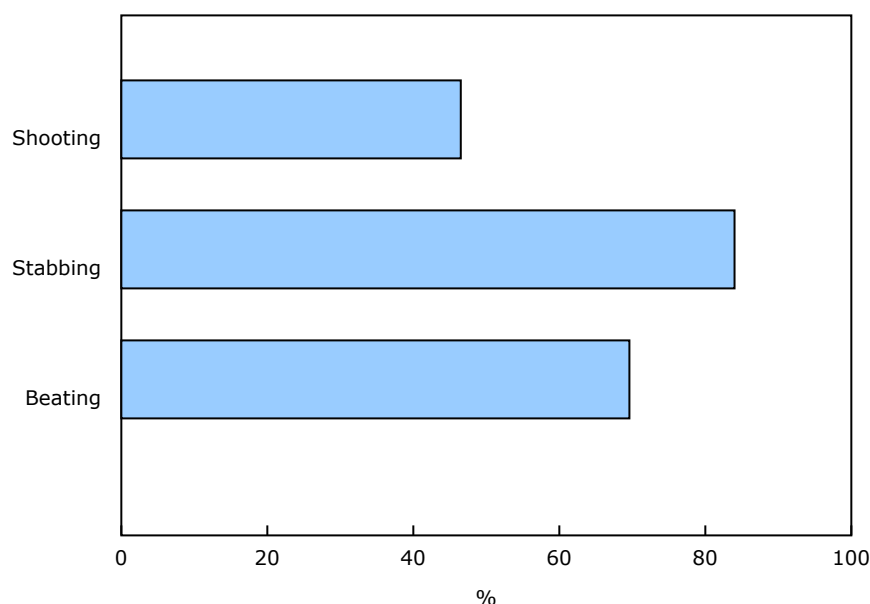
While Statistics Canada has increased the amount of information collected on crime guns, the agency continues to engage with police services to improve data on remaining gaps, such as the origin of firearms used in crimes.

On average, firearm-related homicides take the longest to solve

A homicide is considered solved (or "cleared") when police report laying or recommending a charge of homicide against at least one accused person, or report clearing it by other means (e.g., the suicide of the accused person). Data for the five-year period from 2017 to 2021 suggest an average time of 36 days for a homicide to be solved. However, variations are observed in the length of time required to solve a homicide based on various characteristics.

One key characteristic is the primary method used to commit the homicide. Shooting, stabbing, and beating are generally the main methods used, accounting for 88% of all homicides over these five years. Data for the same period suggest that homicides by shooting take the longest to solve. Within 100 days, 47% of homicides by shooting were solved. By contrast, 70% of homicides by beating and 84% of homicides by stabbing were solved in the same timeframe.

Chart 2
Percentage of solved homicides after 100 days, by primary method, Canada, 2017 to 2021



Note(s): Excludes homicides where the primary method used to commit the homicide was unknown.
Source(s): Homicide Survey (3315).

The involvement of gang-related activities in the perpetration of a homicide also has an impact on its clearance. Within 100 days, 27% of gang-related homicides were reported as solved. By contrast, three-quarters of homicides (75%) unrelated to gangs were solved within 100 days.

The rate of homicides involving Indigenous victims remains disproportionately high

In 2021, police reported 190 homicide victims as Indigenous. This represented one-quarter (25%) of the 752 victims for whom information about Indigenous identity was available (see Note to readers). The homicide rate of Indigenous victims was 9.17 per 100,000 Indigenous people, six times higher than that of non-Indigenous people (1.55 per 100,000 non-Indigenous people). Among Indigenous victims, nearly two-thirds (65%) were First Nations, 6% were Métis, and 5% were Inuk (Inuit). The Indigenous groups to which the remaining victims belonged were reported by police as unknown.

Approximately one-third of homicide victims were racialized people

In 2021, 247 homicide victims were identified by the police as being racialized persons (see Note to readers). This represented 32% of the 762 victims for whom information about racialized groups was available. These numbers resulted in a homicide rate of 2.51 per 100,000 racialized people, 38% higher than the rate for the rest of the population (1.81). Among racialized homicide victims, approximately half (49%) were Black, and nearly one in five (19%) were South Asian.

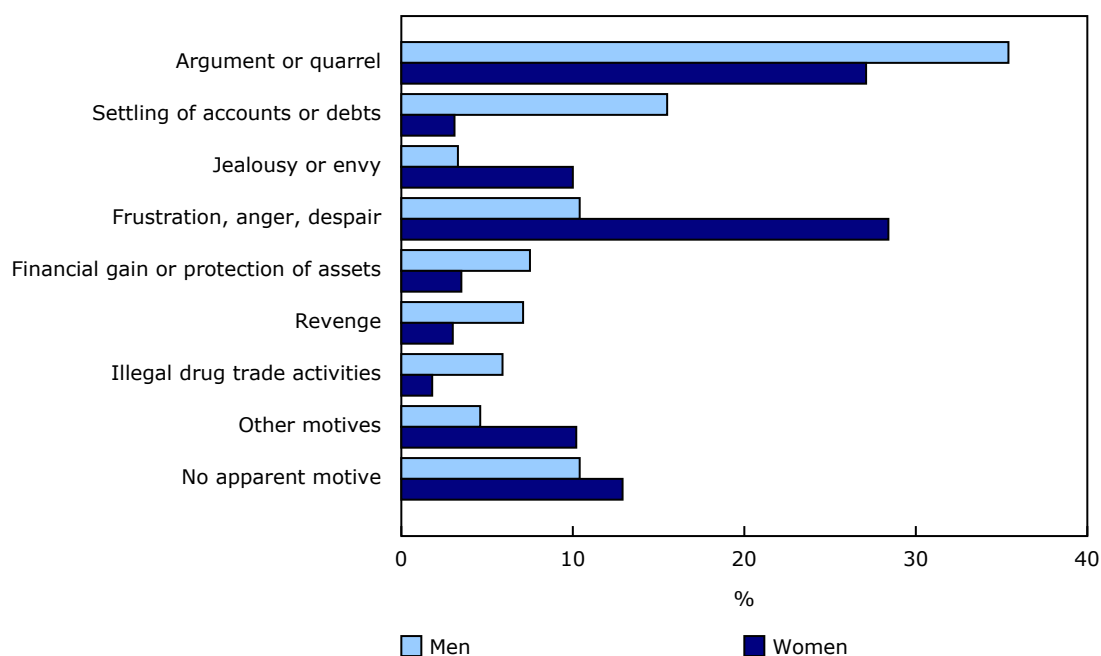
Most victims of spousal or intimate partner homicide are women

Overall, in 2021, 17% of homicide victims were killed by a spousal or intimate partner. Unlike homicide in general, most victims of spousal or intimate partner homicide are women. In fact, among spousal and intimate partner homicide victims in Canada in 2021, 76% were women, while 24% were men. Furthermore, the proportion of women (44%) who were killed by their spouse or intimate partner in Canada was approximately seven times greater

compared with men (7%). It should be noted that data on the type of accused-victim relationship includes only homicides in which the incident is solved and there is a known accused person. If there is more than one accused person, only the closest relationship to the victim was recorded.

Data from 2012 to 2021 also show that 28% of women who were victims in general were reportedly killed out of frustration, anger, and despair, compared with 10% for men. Additionally, the proportion of women (10%) killed because of jealousy and envy was more than three times greater than that of men (3%).

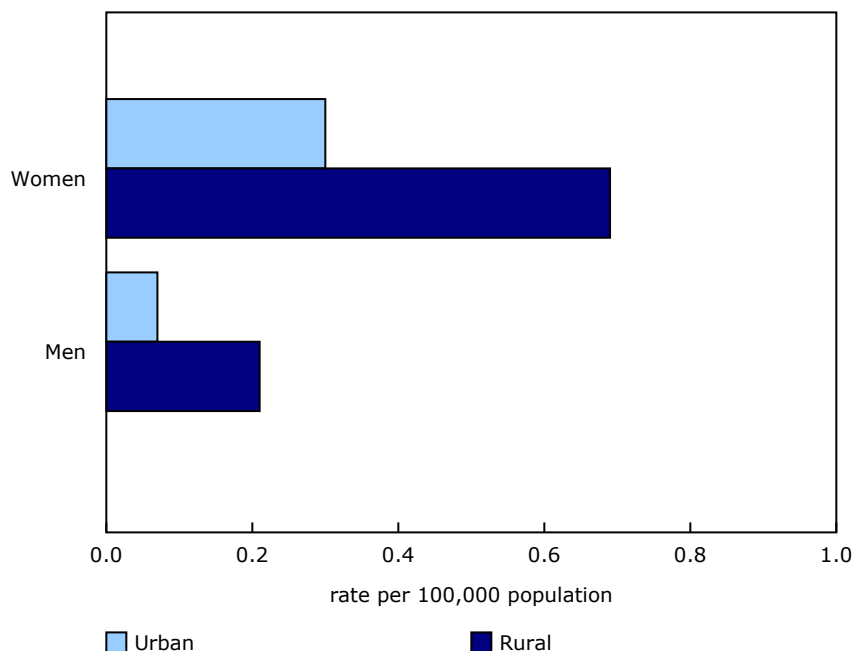
Chart 3
Homicides, by apparent motive and gender, 2012 to 2021



Note(s): Excludes homicides where the apparent motive and the gender of the victim was unknown.
Source(s): Homicide Survey (3315).

Spousal or intimate partner homicides accounted for a larger proportion of homicides in rural communities than in urban communities over the 10 years from 2012 to 2021. They accounted for 23% of homicides in rural areas and 17% in urban areas. The spousal and intimate partner homicide rate of women in rural areas was more than double that of women in urban areas (0.69 versus 0.30 per 100,000 population).

Chart 4
Spousal and intimate partner homicide rate, by gender and urban or rural geography, 2012 to 2021



Note(s): Includes homicides with a known accused. If there were more than one accused, only the closest relationship to the victim was recorded. Excludes homicides where information on the gender of the victim was reported as unknown. Populations are based upon July 1, 2021 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography.

Source(s): Homicide Survey (3315).

In contrast, in 2021, 6 in 10 men who were victims of homicide (60%) were killed by an acquaintance or someone with whom they had a criminal relationship. An additional 18% of men were killed by a stranger, more than double the proportion for women (8%). These trends were consistent with the previous 10-year trends (2011 to 2020).

Moreover, data from 2012 to 2021 show that the proportion of men killed to settle accounts or debts (15%) was more than five times greater than that of women (3%). Moreover, a little more than one-third (35%) of men who were victims were killed because of an argument or a quarrel, compared with 27% of women.

Note to readers

The data presented in this article are drawn from the Homicide Survey, which collects police-reported information on the characteristics of all homicide incidents, victims and accused people in Canada. This survey began collecting information on all murders in 1961 and was expanded in 1974 to include all incidents of manslaughter and infanticide. The term "homicide" is used to refer to each single victim of homicide. For instance, a single incident can have more than one victim; for the purpose of this article, each victim would be counted as a homicide.

When a homicide becomes known to police, the investigating police service completes the survey questionnaires, which are then sent to Statistics Canada. There are cases where homicides become known to police months or years after they occurred. These incidents are counted in the year they become known to police (based on the report date). Information on people accused of homicide is available only for solved incidents (i.e., where at least one accused has been identified). Accused characteristics are updated as homicide cases are solved, and new information is submitted to the Homicide Survey. Information collected through the victim and incident questionnaires is also updated accordingly when a case is solved.

Because of revisions to the Homicide Survey database, annual data reported by the Homicide Survey prior to 2020 may not match the annual homicide counts reported by the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

Comparisons between the provinces and the territories were excluded from the analysis because of the relatively small population sizes in the territories. This causes rates to be impacted more strongly by changes in homicide counts, making comparisons over time and across geographies less meaningful.

The current analysis uses the concept of gender. Prior to 2019, Homicide Survey data was presented by the sex of the victims and accused persons. Gender refers to the gender a person publicly expresses in their daily life, including at work, while shopping or accessing other services, in their housing environment or in the broader community. Given that small counts of victims and accused persons reported or were identified as being non-binary, the aggregate Homicide Survey data available to the public has been recoded to distribute these counts to either "men" or "women" in order to ensure the protection of confidentiality and privacy. Victims and accused persons who reported or were identified as being non-binary have been distributed to either men or women categories based on the regional distribution of victims' or accused persons' gender.

Defining Indigenous identity

For the purposes of the Homicide Survey, Indigenous identity includes people identified as First Nations people (either status or non-status), Métis or Inuit, and people with an Indigenous identity whose Indigenous group is not known to police. Non-Indigenous identity refers to instances where the police have confirmed that a victim or accused person is not identified as an Indigenous person. Indigenous identity reported as "unknown" by police includes instances where police are unable to determine the Indigenous identity of the victim or accused person, where Indigenous identity is not collected by the police service, or where the accused person has refused to disclose their Indigenous identity to police.

Defining racialized population

The concept of "racialized groups" is measured with the "visible minority" variable in this release. There is currently no definition or standard for "racialized groups." Until further notice, derivation and dissemination of data for "racialized groups" follow the visible minority of person standard. "Visible minority" refers to whether or not a person belongs to one of the visible minority groups defined by the Employment Equity Act. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-White in colour." The visible minority population consists of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese. The concept of "rest of the population" is used to include any victim or accused person excluded from the concept of "racialized groups" or "visible minority."

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3315](#).

The *Juristat* article "[Homicide in Canada, 2021](#)" ([85-002-X](#)) is now available. The "[Infographic: Homicide in Canada, 2021](#)" ([11-627-M](#)) is also released today.

Additional data are available upon request.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).