

Homicide in Canada, 2020

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Nationally, police reported 743 homicides in 2020, which includes the 22 victims of the Nova Scotia attacks, the largest mass murder in Canadian history. This is the highest number of homicides recorded in Canada since 1991, and 56 more than in 2019, pushing Canada's homicide rate up 7% from 1.83 homicides per 100,000 population in 2019 to 1.95 per 100,000 population in 2020. This marks the highest national homicide rate since 2005.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound impacts on Canadian society since March 2020. These marked societal and economic changes have contributed to a shift in crime patterns across Canada. In 2020, during the pandemic, the Crime Severity Index (CSI), which measures the volume and severity of police-reported crime in Canada, decreased 8%. In contrast, homicide rates, which have a significant influence on the overall and violent CSIs due to the severity of the crime, increased in 2020. While homicide continues to be a relatively rare occurrence, representing less than 0.2% of all violent crimes in Canada in 2020, homicide rates are considered benchmarks for levels of violence both in Canada and internationally.

Many victim service providers and victim advocates have expressed concerns over the impact of lockdown restrictions and stay-at-home orders put in place due to the pandemic on violence in the home. Risk factors for family violence such as social isolation, reduced income and job loss were amplified amidst the pandemic, potentially leading to increased tension in the home and escalations of violence. In fact, a [web panel survey](#) conducted by Statistics Canada in March 2020 found that 8% of Canadians were concerned about violence in the home during the pandemic. While the number of spousal homicides decreased by 9 in 2020, Canada saw more homicides committed by other family members (+11) and intimate partners (+7).

Detailed information on homicide in Canada is provided in the accompanying *Juristat* article "[Homicide in Canada, 2020](#)" and the "[Infographic: Homicide in Canada, 2020](#)," both released today.

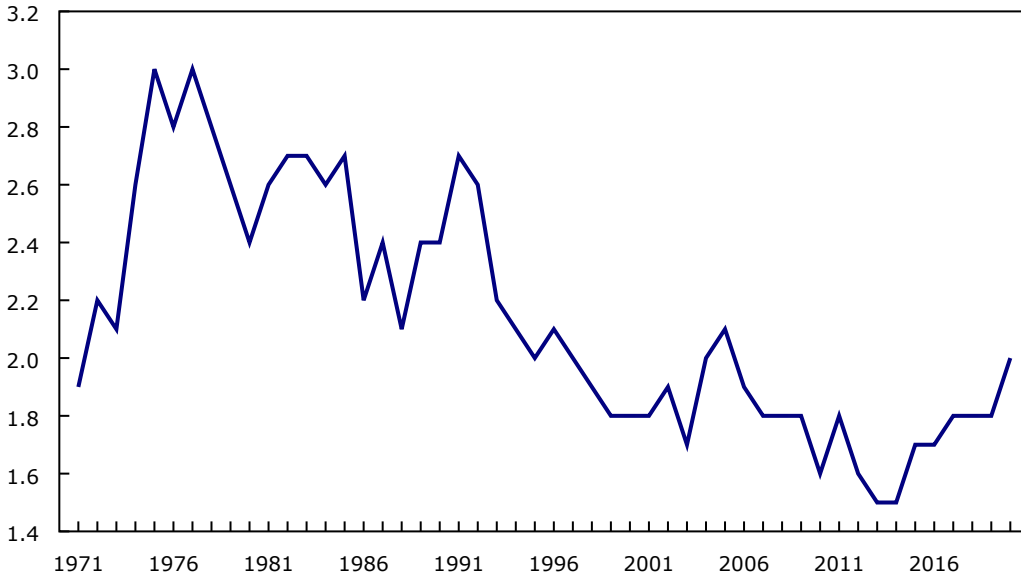
National increase driven by increases in Alberta and Nova Scotia

The national increase in homicides was mainly attributable to notable increases in the number of homicides in Alberta (+39) and Nova Scotia (+29). Most of the increase in Nova Scotia was due to the mass shooting in April 2020 that killed 22 people and injured 3 others. This attack contributed to an uncharacteristically high homicide count and rate for the province of Nova Scotia in 2020 and is also reflected in the increase in firearm-related homicide for the province.



Chart 1
Rate of homicides, Canada, 1971 to 2020

rate per 100,000 population



Note(s): Populations are based upon July 1, 2020 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. Excludes 329 victims killed in the Air India incident that occurred in 1985.

Source(s): Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Homicide Survey (3315).

In Alberta, the Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) of Calgary and Edmonton both saw the largest increases in homicides in 2020, with 15 more victims in each CMA compared with 2019. Overall, the number of homicides increased in 20 of Canada's 36 CMAs.

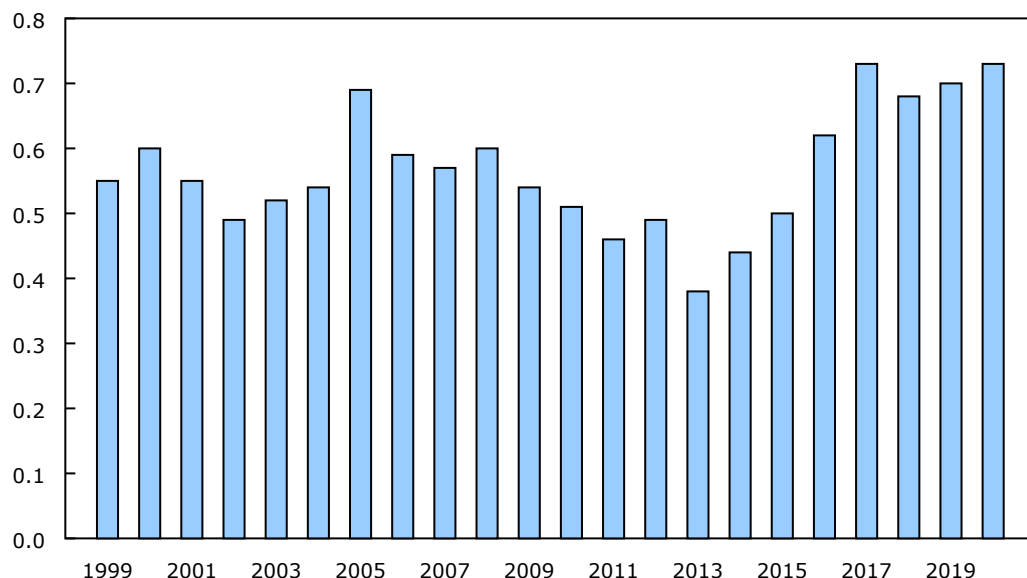
Due in part to its large population, the Toronto CMA continued to have the highest number of homicides in Canada, yet saw the greatest year-over-year decline in homicides of all CMAs, with 25 fewer victims in 2020. Consequently, the largest provincial decline in the number of homicides was observed in Ontario (-19). Manitoba saw the second largest decrease in 2020 (-10).

Firearm-related homicides increase for second year in a row

In 2020, police reported 277 homicides committed with a firearm in Canada, 15 more than in 2019. This represents a 6% increase in the national rate of firearm-related homicides and marks the second year in a row that the rate of firearm-related homicides increased in Canada. In 2020, 49% of firearm-related homicides were committed with a handgun.

Chart 2
Rate of firearm-related homicides, Canada, 1999 to 2020

rate per 100,000 population



Note(s): A homicide is classified as firearm-related when the weapon used to cause death is a firearm. Firearms include handguns, rifles or shotguns, fully automatic firearms, firearm-like weapons (e.g., nail guns or pellet guns) and firearms of an unknown type. Populations are based upon July 1, 2020 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography.

Source(s): Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Homicide Survey (3315).

The national increase in firearm-related homicides in 2020 can be attributed to increases in Nova Scotia (+22), where the Nova Scotia attacks in April 2020 accounted for 22 firearm-related homicides in the province, and in Alberta (+21). In Alberta, the Edmonton (+8) and Calgary (+6) CMAs both reported increases in the number of firearm-related homicides.

Most other provinces noted decreases in the number of firearm-related homicides, with CMAs accounting for the majority of the decrease. There were no changes reported among the territories in 2020.

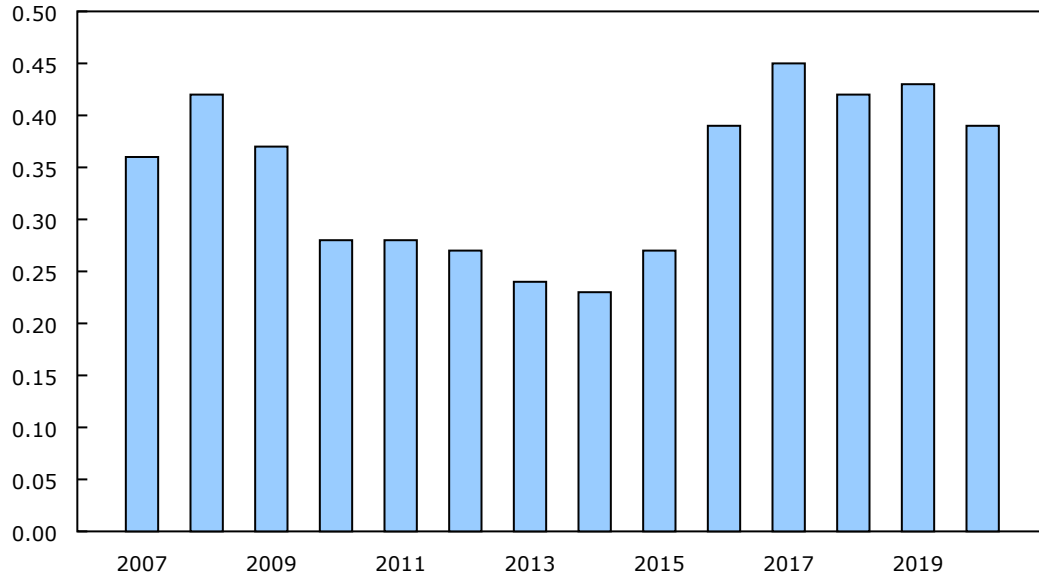
When accounting for population, the highest rates of firearm-related homicides were in the Regina (1.89 per 100,000 population) and Saskatoon (1.76) CMAs. Of the CMAs with at least one firearm-related homicide in 2020, the lowest rates were in Kitchener–Cambridge–Waterloo (0.17 per 100,000 population), Halifax (0.22) and Montréal (0.27). 8 of the 36 CMAs reported zero firearm-related homicides in 2020.

Gang-related homicides decrease in 2020

While the rate of firearm-related homicides increased in 2020, the rate of gang-related homicides decreased 10%. In 2020, there were 148 gang-related homicides, a decrease of 14 victims (-9%) from 2019. This was the largest year-over-year decrease in gang-related homicides since 2013. The largest declines were seen in Ontario (-8), Québec (-6) and Manitoba (-6). In Ontario, some of the decrease was attributable to fewer gang-related homicides in the Toronto CMA (-11). The decline in Québec was predominantly in Montréal (-12), while Manitoba's decrease can be mostly attributed to Winnipeg (-4).

Chart 3
Rate of gang-related homicides, Canada, 2007 to 2020

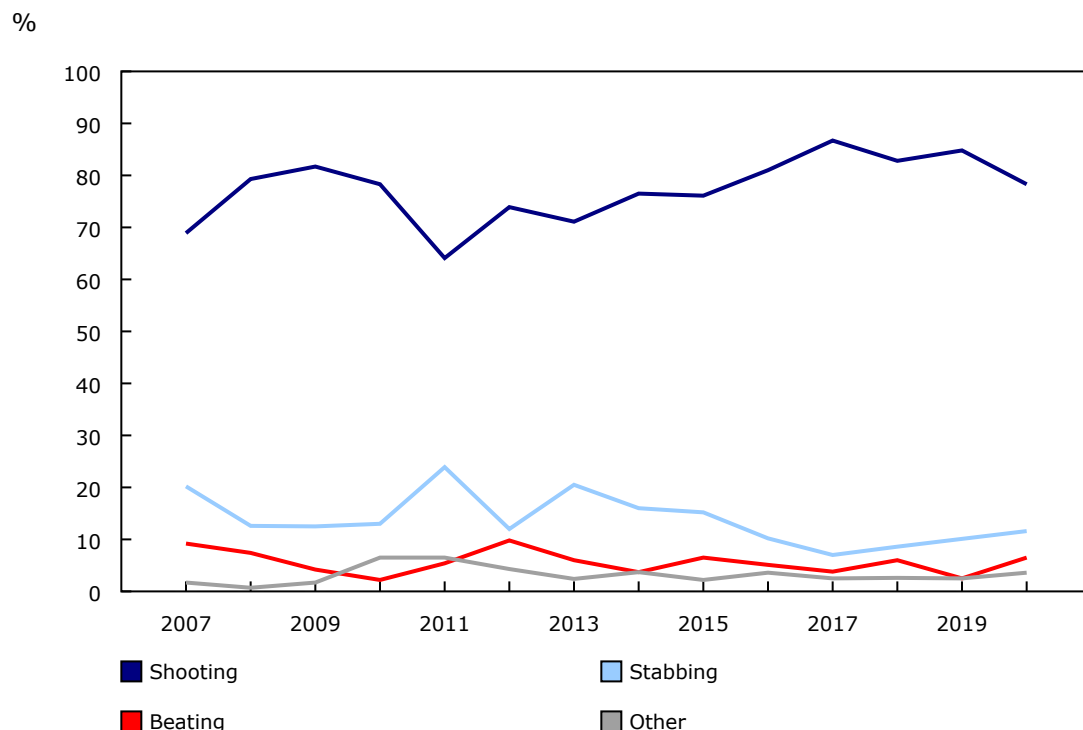
rate per 100,000 population



Note(s): These data became available in 1991. A homicide is classified as gang-related when police confirm or suspect that the accused person and/or the victim involved in the homicide was either a member, or a prospective member, of an organized crime group or street gang or was somehow associated with an organized crime group or street gang, and the homicide was carried out as a result of this association. Prior to 2005, police were asked if the homicide was "gang-related." Beginning in 2005, the question was amended to give police the option of specifying whether the homicide was either (a) confirmed as gang related or (b) suspected as being gang-related. As such, figures may be underestimated prior to 2005 due to suspected gang-related incidents that were excluded from the figures. Populations are based upon July 1, 2020 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography.
Source(s): Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Homicide Survey (3315).

Approximately 8 out of every 10 gang-related homicides in Canada were committed with a firearm and, of these, 81% were committed with a handgun.

Chart 4
Gang-related homicides, by method used to cause death, Canada, 2007 to 2020



Note(s): These data became available in 1991. A homicide is classified as gang-related when police confirm or suspect that the accused person and/or the victim involved in the homicide was either a member, or a prospective member, of an organized crime group or street gang or was somehow associated with an organized crime group or street gang, and the homicide was carried out as a result of this association. Prior to 2005, police were asked if the homicide was "gang-related." Beginning in 2005, the question was amended to give police the option of specifying whether the homicide was either (a) confirmed as gang related or (b) suspected as being gang-related. As such, figures may be underestimated prior to 2005 due to suspected gang-related incidents that were excluded from the figures. The "other" category includes strangulation, suffocation, drowning, smoke inhalation, burns (fire, liquid, acid), poisoning or lethal injection, exposure/hypothermia, shaken baby syndrome, and other methods.

Source(s): Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Homicide Survey (3315).

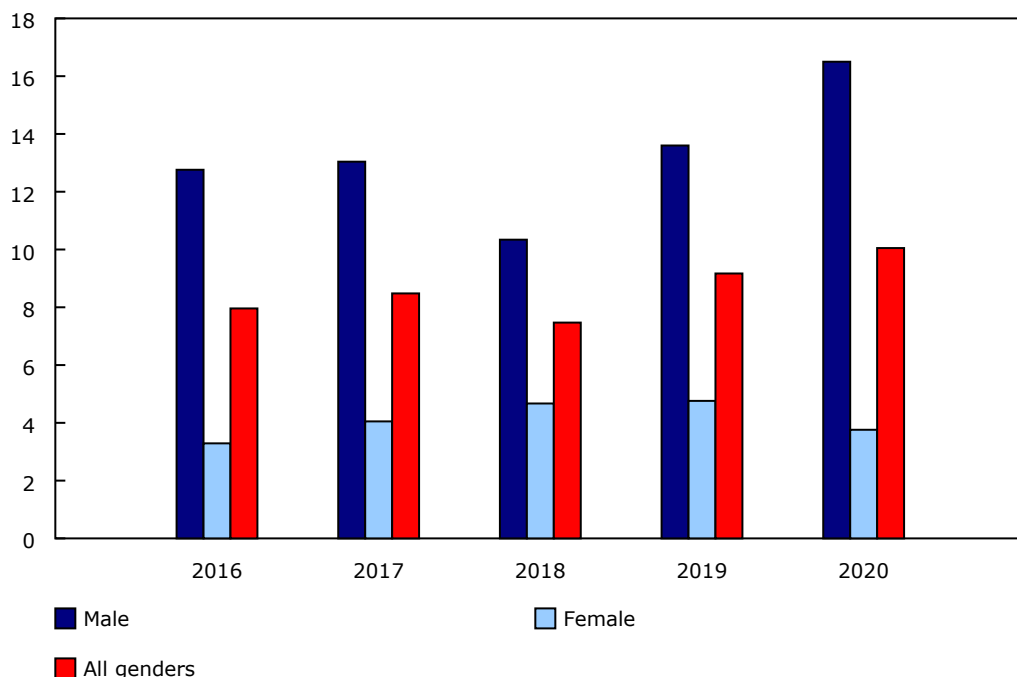
Rate of Indigenous homicide victims seven times higher than rate of non-Indigenous victims

In 2020, there were 201 victims of homicide who were First Nations, Métis, Inuit or an Indigenous identity where the Indigenous group was not known to police, representing 28% of all homicide victims in Canada. The number of Indigenous men victims increased 24% (+32) to 163 compared with 2019, the highest since 2014 when data on Indigenous identity first became available through the Homicide Survey. In contrast, there were 9 fewer Indigenous women victims of homicide than in 2019, marking the first decrease in four years.

In 2020, the homicide rate for Indigenous victims was seven times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous people (10.05 per 100,000 population for Indigenous peoples, compared with 1.41 per 100,000 for non-Indigenous people). Homicide rates were almost eight times greater for Indigenous men (16.50 per 100,000) than non-Indigenous men (2.14 per 100,000). Among women, rates were almost five and half times greater (3.76 per 100,000 Indigenous women compared with 0.69 per 100,000 non-Indigenous women).

Chart 5
Rate of Indigenous homicide victims by gender, Canada, 2016 to 2020

rate per 100,000 Indigenous population



Note(s): Indigenous identity is reported by the police and is determined through information found with the victim, such as status cards, or through information supplied by the victims' families, community members, or other sources (i.e., band records or forensic evidence such as genetic testing). The year 2014 marked the first cycle of collection of the Homicide Survey data, for which complete information regarding Indigenous identity was reported for victims of homicide. "Indigenous identity" includes those identified by police as First Nations persons (either status or non-status), Métis, Inuit, or an Indigenous identity where the Indigenous group was not known to police. Populations are based upon July 1, 2020 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography.
Source(s): Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Homicide Survey (3315).

A history of colonization, including residential schools, work camps and forced relocation, profoundly impacted Indigenous communities and families. Indigenous peoples often experience social and institutional marginalization, discrimination, and various forms of trauma and violence, including intergenerational trauma and gender-based violence. As a result, many Indigenous peoples experience challenging social and economic circumstances. These factors play a significant role in the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the criminal justice system and as victims of crime.

One in four victims are designated as visible minorities

In 2020, the Homicide Survey collected information on whether victims and accused persons were members of population groups designated as visible minorities.

Of the 719 homicide victims for whom police reported a visible minority identity in 2020, 25% (179 victims), were designated as visible minorities. In addition, half (50%) of all victims designated as a visible minority were identified as Black (89 victims). In 2020, victims designated as visible minorities also tended to be men (89%).

Almost half of homicide victims designated as visible minorities were in Ontario (88 victims; 49%), largely in the Toronto CMA (66 victims). The province of Ontario also has the largest visible minority population, and 51% of people residing in the Toronto CMA, the province's most populous city, are designated as visible minorities. Even with this large population, visible minorities were still overrepresented as victims of homicide in the CMA and accounted for more than two-thirds (69%) of homicide victims in Toronto.

Most victims know their killer

Among the 474 solved homicides where a relationship between the accused and the victim was reported, 82% (388) were committed by a person the victim knew. The majority of solved homicides in Canada in 2020 were committed by an acquaintance (38%) or a family member (31%, including 10% killed by a spouse and 20% by another family member). An additional 5% of victims were killed by someone with whom they had a current or former non-spousal intimate relationship and 8% by someone with whom they had a criminal relationship. In contrast, 18% of homicides in 2020 were committed by a stranger.

Note to readers

The data presented in this article are drawn from the 2020 Homicide Survey, which collects police-reported information on the characteristics of all homicide incidents, victims and accused persons in Canada.

The term "homicide" is used to refer to each single victim of homicide. For instance, a single incident can have more than one victim and for the purpose of this article, each victim would be counted as a homicide.

There are cases where homicides become known to police months or years after they occurred. These incidents are counted in the year in which they become known to police. New information pertaining to the detailed data on homicides that have already been reported to Statistics Canada is updated annually, as is data on accused persons.

Due to revisions to the Homicide Survey database, annual data reported by the Homicide Survey prior to 2016 may not match the annual homicide counts reported by the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) survey. Data from the Homicide Survey is appended to the UCR database each year for the reporting of annual police reported crime statistics.

Information on persons accused of homicide are only available for solved incidents (that is, where at least one accused has been identified). For incidents involving more than one accused, only the relationship between the victim and the closest accused is recorded.

For the purposes of the Homicide Survey, Indigenous identity includes those identified as First Nations persons (either status or non-status), Métis, Inuit or an Indigenous identity where the 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.

**Table 1
Homicides, by census metropolitan area, 2019 and 2020**

	2020	2020 ^r		2019 ^r		Difference from 2019		Average 2010 to 2019	
	population (number)	number of victims	rate ²	number of victims	rate ²	number of victims	% change in rate	number of victims	rate ²
Canada	38,005,238	743	1.95	687	1.83	56	7.0	599	1.68
Census metropolitan areas, total	27,278,656	476	1.74	446	1.65	30	5.4	396	1.58
Non-census metropolitan areas, total	10,726,582	267	2.49	241	2.26	26	9.9	203	1.92
Census metropolitan area¹									
500,000 and over population									
Toronto	6,466,473	105	1.62	130	2.03	-25	-20.1	96	1.59
Montréal	4,347,799	42	0.97	45	1.04	-3	-7.3	46	1.14
Vancouver	2,738,508	45	1.64	41	1.51	4	8.5	43	1.70
Calgary	1,544,404	39	2.53	24	1.57	15	60.7	25	1.81
Edmonton	1,472,417	47	3.19	32	2.21	15	44.4	39	2.93
Ottawa ³	1,106,990	10	0.90	13	1.20	-3	-24.4	12	1.22
Winnipeg	832,017	41	4.93	44	5.32	-3	-7.4	29	3.60
Québec	823,507	7	0.85	5	0.61	2	38.8	4	0.56
Hamilton	777,113	18	2.32	14	1.83	4	26.7	10	1.40
Kitchener–Cambridge–Waterloo	605,232	8	1.32	5	0.84	3	56.9	6	1.00
London	553,218	7	1.27	5	0.92	2	37.8	7	1.45
100,000 to less than 500,000 population									
Oshawa	498,011	7	1.41	4	0.84	3	66.8	4	0.85
St. Catharines-Niagara	481,727	5	1.04	6	1.25	-1	-17.3	4	0.86
Halifax	448,518	7	1.56	3	0.68	4	128.6	9	2.20
Victoria	409,282	6	1.47	2	0.50	4	195.7	4	0.99
Windsor	356,114	5	1.40	6	1.70	-1	-17.5	4	1.10
Gatineau ⁴	342,855	7	2.04	3	0.88	4	130.7	3	1.05
Saskatoon	341,213	14	4.10	16	4.77	-2	-13.9	9	2.83
Regina	264,201	12	4.54	8	3.05	4	48.7	8	3.34
Barrie	259,730	0	0.00	3	1.18	-3	-100.0	2	1.06
Kelowna	221,641	3	1.35	1	0.46	2	194.2	3	1.68
St. John's	209,163	2	0.96	4	1.91	-2	-50.0	2	1.17
Sherbrooke	207,799	1	0.48	1	0.49	0	-1.4	1	0.61
Abbotsford-Mission	204,563	3	1.47	1	0.49	2	197.3	4	2.22
Kingston	173,740	3	1.73	3	1.74	0	-0.8	2	0.91
Saguenay	170,190	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	...	1	0.54
Greater Sudbury	168,927	5	2.96	3	1.78	2	66.3	1	0.84
Moncton	167,142	2	1.20	5	3.04	-3	-60.6	2	1.12
Trois-Rivières	161,284	2	1.24	0	0.00	2	...	1	0.84
Brantford	152,748	4	2.62	4	2.66	0	-1.4	2	1.53
Guelph	145,379	3	2.06	0	0.00	3	...	1	0.75
Saint John	131,518	1	0.76	3	2.29	-2	-66.8	2	1.69
Peterborough	129,126	3	2.32	1	0.78	2	198.4	1	1.13
Thunder Bay	125,905	8	6.35	7	5.57	1	14.1	6	5.15
Lethbridge	125,785	2	1.59	0	0.00	2
Belleville	114,417	2	1.75	4	3.55	-2	-50.7

^r revised

... not applicable

1. A census metropolitan area (CMA) consists of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban core. A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more live in the urban core. To be included in the CMA, other adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the central urban area, as measured by commuting flows derived from census data. A CMA typically comprises more than one police service.

2. Rates are calculated per 100,000 population using revised July 1st, 2020 population estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography.

3. Ottawa refers to the Ontario part of the Ottawa–Gatineau CMA.

4. Gatineau refers to the Quebec part of the Ottawa–Gatineau CMA.

Note(s): There may be a small number of homicides included in a given year's total that occurred in previous years. Homicides are counted according to the year in which they are reported to Statistics Canada. Percentage changes are based on unrounded rates.

Source(s): Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Homicide Survey (3315).

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

The *Juristat* article "[Homicide in Canada, 2020](#)" ([85-002-X](#)) is now available. The "[Infographic: Homicide in Canada, 2020](#)" ([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).