

Homicides in the US surged by almost 30 percent in 2020

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27 September 2021

Homicides in the US surged by nearly 30 percent in 2020, the greatest one-year increase ever recorded by the FBI since the agency began collecting the annual statistics in 1960. The spike in murders was a primary factor in the overall 5.6 percent increase in violent crime in the US last year.

The total number of homicides reported in 2020 was 21,570, which was almost 5,000 more than the previous year. While the increase over 2019 was dramatic, and indicative of the intensity of the social tensions rooted in a year dominated by the coronavirus pandemic, the number of homicides did not come close to the record of nearly 25,000 murders committed in 1991.

The FBI released the statistics on Monday in the 2020 edition of its report called, “Crime in the US.” The report says that there were an estimated 1,277,696 violent crimes committed, approximately 388 offenses per 100,000 inhabitants. The data is maintained by the FBI in its Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program.

An FBI statement announcing the data said, “The UCR Program collects information on crimes reported by law enforcement agencies regarding the violent crimes of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, as well as the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.”

The agency statement also indicated that the number of homicides was likely even higher given that only 15,897 law enforcement agencies out of a total of 18,819 nationwide submitted data to the UCR program.

One notable aspect of the data is that the increase in murders was a nationwide phenomenon, not a regional one. According to an assessment of the data published by the *New York Times*, “No geographic area was spared.” In cities with populations over 250,000 that reported full data, the number of murders rose over 35

percent. In cities with 100,000 to 250,000 people, homicides increased over 40 percent and in cities under 25,000, it rose 25 percent.

It is also significant that 77 percent of the homicides were committed with a firearm, the largest share ever reported and an increase from 67 percent in the previous decade. Additionally, while the total number of violent crimes increased, the data shows a decrease in other major crimes in 2020. The *Times* report says, “Murder, although it carries the highest societal cost, makes up a tiny portion of major crimes as defined by the FBI.”

The *Times* analysis went on, “Some of the reduction in overall crime was clearly related to the pandemic. Theft made up around seven in 10 property crimes, and it’s hard to commit shoplifting when stores are closed. But overall crime was dropping long before the pandemic: 2020 was the 18th straight year of declining overall crime.”

Some analysts have attributed the increase in murder to a stand down by law enforcement officers due to the George Floyd protests against police violence last year. While there was a large increase in officer retirements between April 2020 and April 2021, the *Times* reports that the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows no change in the total number of people employed by local police departments during the same period.

The sharp rise in homicides is but one indication of impact of the criminally negligent and homicidal response of the capitalist ruling elite to the coronavirus pandemic on the social crisis facing masses of people in the US. More than 350,000 people died from COVID-19 in 2020, while millions lost jobs and were driven into poverty as the ruling establishment pursued a policy of “herd immunity” and demanded a return to work and school while the virus continued to spread.

The past year also saw a spike in the number of people killed in auto accidents. A preliminary estimate by the National Safety Council found that 42,060 people were killed in car crashes in 2020, up from 39,017 in 2019, the largest single year increase in fatalities in nearly a century. The increase in road deaths took place even though the number of miles traveled by car fell by 13 percent.

According to a report in Vox on September 19, traffic experts said the 2020 fatality spike came as there were “fewer cars on the road during quarantine, traffic congestion was all but eliminated, which emboldened people to drive at lethal speeds. Compared to 2019, many more drivers involved in fatal crashes also didn’t wear seat belts or drove drunk.”

As reported on July 15 by the *World Socialist Web Site*, the pandemic also fueled an all-time high of 93,000 overdose deaths in the US in 2020. Based on a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the number of drug overdose deaths—which translate to an average of more than 250 each day, or roughly 11 every hour—increased by over 30 percent from the already catastrophic numbers from 2019.



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