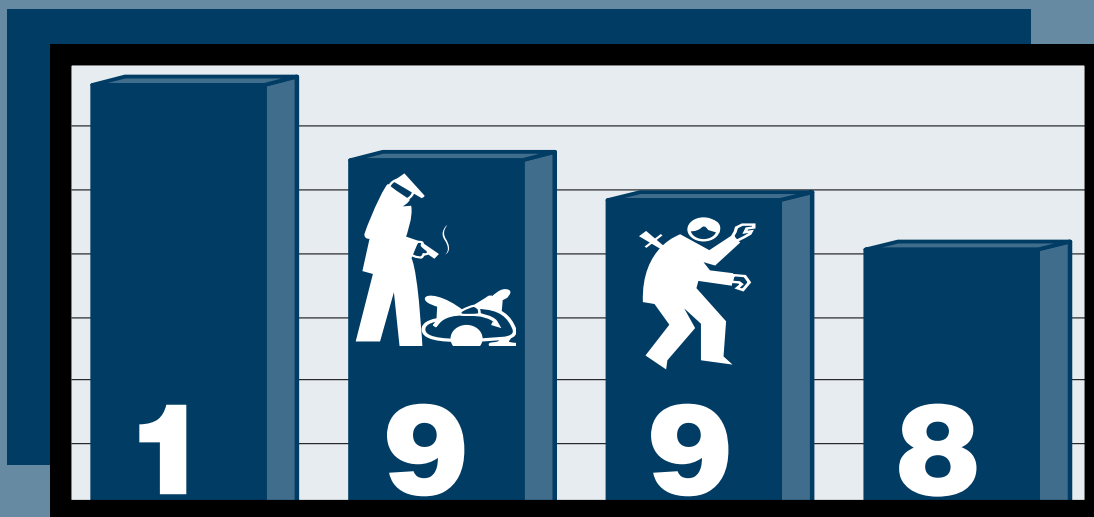


HOMICIDE IN CALIFORNIA



Bill Lockyer, Attorney General
California Department of Justice
Division of Criminal Justice Information Services

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Could we perfect human nature,
we might also expect a perfect state of things.
GOETHE, quoted in Johann Peter Eckermann's
Conversations with Goethe, February 25, 1824

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The role of the Criminal Justice Statistics Center is to:

- Collect, analyze, and report statistical data which provide valid measures of crime and the criminal justice process;
- Examine these data on an ongoing basis to better describe crime and the criminal justice system;
- Promote the responsible presentation and use of crime statistics.

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introduction

Homicide in California, 1998 contains information about the crime of homicide and its victims, demographic information about persons arrested for homicide, and information about the response of the criminal justice system. Information about the death penalty, the number of peace officers killed in the line of duty, and justifiable homicide is also included.

Most data displayed in this publication come from three data bases maintained by the California Department of Justice's Criminal Justice Statistics Center (CJSC). The Homicide File captures willful and justifiable homicide crime data; the Monthly Arrest and Citation Register captures the race/ethnic group, age, and gender of persons arrested for homicide; and the Offender-Based Transaction Statistics system captures information about types of dispositions and sentences. Because of differences in the type of data collected, and the methods used to collect these data, the reader is cautioned against comparing data from these three collection systems.

This year's edition of *Homicide in California* incorporates several changes: narrative highlight statements have been expanded; California counties with the highest and lowest 1998 homicide rates have been identified (see Page 13); homicide clearance rates for the period 1989 through 1998 have been charted and are now included within the narrative (see Chart 37, Page 23); and, homicide rates for the general population have been compared to homicide rates for peace officers killed in the line of duty for 1989 through 1998 (see Chart 53, Page 45). As in last year's edition, CJSC publications available in either printed or electronic format (via the Internet) are listed on the inside of the back cover. Customized statistical reports or additional statistical information may be requested by contacting CJSC at the numbers provided.

HOMICIDE CRIMES (see Pages 2-23)

- From 1997 to 1998, homicide crimes decreased 16.7 percent in rate per 100,000 population (7.8 to 6.5). From 1989 to 1998, the homicide crime rate decreased 40.9 percent (11.0 to 6.5).
- Since 1989, homicide rates have decreased for all gender and race/ethnic groups shown. Blacks experienced the highest rate of decline (down 53.7 percent) but continue to maintain substantially higher homicide victimization rates compared to whites and Hispanics.
- The homicide rate for victims aged 30-39 decreased 45.3 percent from 1989 to 1998 (13.9 to 7.6).
- In 1998, most white victims fell into the "aged 40 and over" category (42.4 percent). Most Hispanic and black victims fell into the "aged 18-29" category (55.0 and 45.0 percent, respectively).
- From 1989 to 1998, the majority of homicide victims knew their assailant.
- Proportionately, females were eighteen and one-half times more likely to be killed by their spouses than were males.
- Generally, homicides occurred most often during the summertime.
- In 1998, males were most likely to be killed on streets or sidewalks and least likely to be killed in their residences; the inverse was true for females.
- Since 1989, more homicide victims have been killed by firearms than by all other types of weapons combined.
- In 1998, 40.0 percent of homicide victims aged 5-17 were killed as a result of gang-related activities.
- In 1998, 63.1 out of every 100 homicides were cleared by an arrest; this is the highest clearance rate for the 1989 to 1998 period.

HOMICIDE ARRESTS (see Pages 26-29)

- From 1997 to 1998, homicide arrests decreased 2.3 percent in rate per 100,000 population at risk (8.6 to 8.4). From 1989 to 1998, the homicide arrest rate decreased 44.4 percent (15.1 to 8.4).
- From 1989 to 1998, the majority of homicide arrestees and victims were male.
- In 1998, the largest proportion of homicide arrestees and victims were Hispanic (46.6 and 44.7 percent, respectively). The majority of homicide arrestees were aged 18-29 (58.8 percent) and the largest proportion of homicide victims were aged 18-29 (43.5 percent).

DISPOSITIONS OF ADULTS ARRESTED FOR HOMICIDE (see Pages 32-37)

- Over 70 percent of adults arrested for homicide, for which dispositions were received, were convicted of homicide or some other offense.

DEATH PENALTY SENTENCES (see Pages 40-41)

- By the end of 1998, 516 persons were under sentence of death in California. Of these, 32 were sentenced in 1998.

PEACE OFFICERS KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY (see Pages 44-45)

- Since 1989, 64 peace officers have been killed in the line of duty. Seven were killed in 1998.
- Since 1989, the homicide crime rate for peace officers killed in the line of duty has increased 20.9 percent per 100,000 respective population (8.6 to 10.4).

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