

## Topic Page: [Murder](#)

Definition: **murder** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Unlawful killing of one person by another. In the USA, first-degree murder requires proof of premeditation; second-degree murder falls between first-degree murder and manslaughter.

In British law murder is committed only when the killer acts with malice aforethought, that is, intending either to kill or to cause serious injury, or realizing that this would probably result. It is punishable by life imprisonment. It is the most serious form of homicide.

### essays

Ethics in Medicine

Euthanasia

Gun-Control in the UK and USA



Image from: [France, Murder of Duke de Guise in Apartments of King Henry III in Castle of Blois in Bridgeman Images: DeAgostini Library](#)

### Summary Article: **Murder**

From *Encyclopedia of Social Problems*

Generally defined, *murder* is the unlawful killing of one human being by another. Although precise legal definitions may vary somewhat across jurisdictions, murders are usually classified into two categories: first-degree murder and second-degree murder. First-degree murder is unlawful killing involving malice aforethought (i.e., intent to kill) and premeditation. Killings also may be classified as murder in the first degree if they occur during the commission of another felony (e.g., a robbery or burglary). Second-degree murder involves malice aforethought but lacks premeditation or other aggravating circumstance (such as killing in the act of another felony). Murder is a subcategory of a broader umbrella term, *homicide*, which also includes manslaughter (killings lacking malice and premeditation) and killings that are considered excusable (i.e., accidental) or justifiable (e.g., police killing of a suspect who threatens life of the officer or another citizen).

Murder is generally considered to be the most reliably reported and recorded serious crime. Thus, it often serves as a barometer for the broader crime problem in the United States. For example, a modest spike in murder during the mid-1980s to early 1990s received a great deal of public attention and led many citizens to believe that the crime problem was progressively worsening. In reality, most types of serious crime had been in fairly steady decline since the 1970s.

Although a large share of murders have fairly mundane origins—resulting from arguments between acquaintances or family members—the frequent depiction in popular culture of rare but sensational murders has created a mystique and aura around murder that many people find intriguing.

Like many social problems, murder is not randomly dispersed in the population. Rather, specific demographic, social, and geographic patterns exist that have remained fairly consistent over time. For example, murder rates tend to be higher in larger cities and in places characterized by high rates of

concentrated disadvantage (e.g., poverty, unemployment, school dropout, racial segregation). Murder offending and victimization rates also are several times greater for males than for females, for African Americans than for whites, and for young adults (e.g., ages 18–34) than for older adults (e.g., 55+). In addition, murder has shown a long-term regional pattern with higher rates occurring in the southern parts of the United States. The majority of murders occurring in the United States are committed with handguns or other firearms.

*See also*

Lynching; Serial Murder; Vigilantism; Violent Crime

**Further Readings**

- Alvarez, Alex; Ronet Bachman. 2002. *Murder American Style*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Best, Joel. 1999. *Random Violence: How We Talk About New Crime and New Victims*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Fox, James Alan; Jack Levin. 2005. *Extreme Killing: Understanding Serial and Mass Murder*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fox, James Alan; Marianne Zawitz. 2006. *Homicide Trends in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved January 2, 2007 (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/homtrnd.htm>).
- Miethe, Terance D.; Wendy C. Regoeczi; Kriss A. Drass. 2004. *Rethinking Homicide: Exploring the Structure and Process Underlying Deadly Situations*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, M. Dwayne; Margaret Zahn. 1998. *Homicide: A Sourcebook of Social Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Graham C. Ousey

**APA**

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

---

Ousey, G. C. (2008). Murder. In V. N. Parrillo, *Encyclopedia of social problems*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/murder>

---

 Copyright © 2008 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

 Copyright © 2008 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

## APA

Ousey, G. C. (2008). Murder. In V. N. Parrillo, *Encyclopedia of social problems*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/murder>

## Chicago

Ousey, Graham C. "Murder." In *Encyclopedia of Social Problems*, by Vincent N. Parrillo. Sage Publications, 2008. <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/murder>

## Harvard

Ousey, G.C. (2008). Murder. In V.N. Parrillo, *Encyclopedia of social problems*. [Online]. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. Available from: <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/murder> [Accessed 14 November 2019].

## MLA

Ousey, Graham C. "Murder." *Encyclopedia of Social Problems*, Vincent N. Parrillo, Sage Publications, 1st edition, 2008. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/murder>. Accessed 14 Nov. 2019.