

## **2018 Homicide/Murder Numbers w/Questions and Answers**

The department often receives inquiries about crime data at the start of the year. This typically includes requests for information about the number of homicides committed compared to previous years. We believe it's important to put this information in context including an explanation of the numbers, the terminology we use, and the suspected motivation for the murders committed in our community.

### **Are homicides and murders the same thing?**

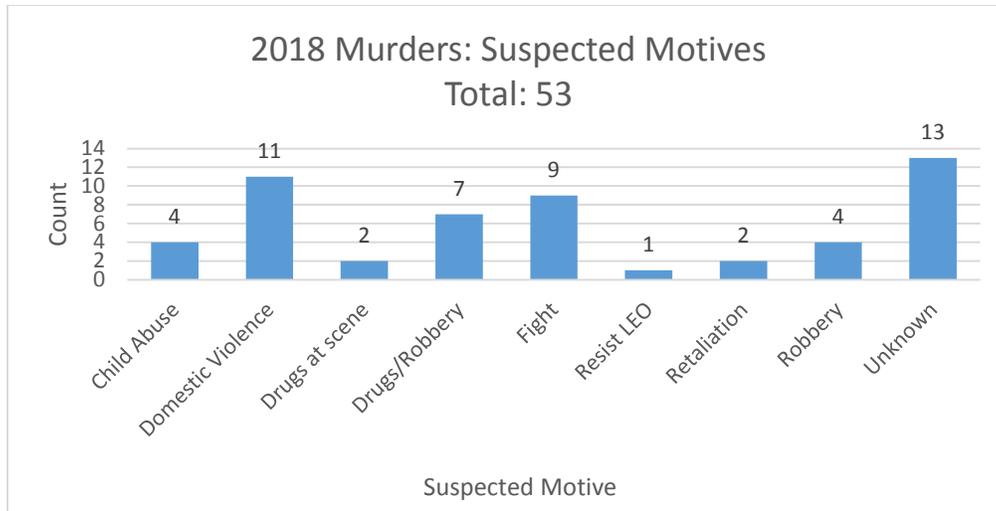
No. A homicide is typically defined as one person killing another but not all homicides are murders. Murders are the deliberate and unlawful killing of another person. We report all homicides to the FBI, but those numbers are broken down to include lawful and unlawful killings. For example, officers from the department were involved in 6 homicides in 2018—all which were deemed to be lawful acts of self-defense (or the lawful defense of others) by the Pima County Attorney's Office. One other homicide that did not involve the police was also determined to be lawful self defense. Therefore, while there were 60 *homicides* in the City of Tucson in 2018, there were actually 53 *murders*.

### **Why did murders increase in 2018?**

There were 53 murders in Tucson in 2018 (47 in 2017), an increase of 6 over the prior year. Why did murders increase? We don't know. Even in cities where homicides decreased in 2018, no one can say with certainty why it happened. Police departments often rush to take credit when homicides go down and blame factors "beyond their control" when the numbers go up.

Most homicides are very difficult to predict and therefore to prevent but we believe some types of homicides can be influenced by certain policing strategies more than others. For example, if the majority of a city's homicides are related to gang violence—especially when such violence occurs in specific areas—efforts can be targeted toward reducing retaliatory gang violence, going after known shooters, strengthening relationships between police and residents in high gang-activity neighborhoods, and enlisting partners to engage gang members in alternatives to gang life. We're doing all of these things to some level (and intend to do more) but gang activity is not the primary cause of homicides in Tucson.

Frustratingly, there is no primary cause of murders in our city. In addition, there is no one geographic area where most murders take place, no predominant type of murder, and no common profile of a murder suspect in Tucson.



One thing we can say with certainty is that murder is rarely a random act between a victim and someone who is a complete stranger to them. There are isolated cases where the parties involved in these crimes have no connection to each other but this is uncommon. That said, any life lost, no matter what the circumstances or relationship between victim and suspect, is entirely unacceptable. One of the challenges we face, however, is to help people avoid or get out of circumstances that are likely to place them at greater risk to become the victim of a violent crime, including murder.

We're pleased that violent crime in Tucson actually decreased by approximately 3% compared to the prior year and that our homicide clearance rate remains high (76%)—well above the national average. But over the last several decades there have consistently been spikes and declines in the number of murders—sometimes significantly from year to year. These increases and decreases have not been demonstrated to meaningfully correlate with things like the economy; any particular crime-fighting strategy; the political make-up of the federal, state, or local government; the size of the police department; or even the size of Tucson's population.

### **What are we doing to reduce the number of murders in our city?**

Just because there is no simple way to predict murders or a proven strategy for reducing murders doesn't mean we intend to throw up our hands and do nothing. In fact, we are more committed than ever to try new things or even to utilize promising strategies from the past if they can help us save lives. Here are some of the things we will be working on in 2019 to drive down the murder rate in Tucson:

For domestic related murders:

- Continue our implementation of the lethality assessment tool with victims of domestic violence so we can better determine which victims are at greatest risk for potentially deadly assaults
- Strengthen our partnership with Emerge and the Pima County Attorney's Victim Services Unit so we can engage as effectively as possible with high-risk DV victims in order to minimize their likelihood for involvement in future domestic violence
- Engage in more effective outreach to, and follow-up with, Spanish-speaking victims of domestic violence through our recent grant from the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW)

- Facilitate more training to service providers in identifying and providing services to victims of domestic violence that involves choking and strangulation utilizing the grant from OVW

For murders associated with other crimes (such as robberies, drug transactions, etc.):

- Fully engage our newly formed Crime Analysis Unit to better identify areas and locations where violent and drug crimes are occurring
- Utilize crime analysis resources to better target key individuals involved in violent crimes
- Maximize our new partnerships with UA and ASU to improve our data gathering, crime analysis, and research capabilities
- Partner with the Vera Institute, the Police Foundation, the Laura & John Arnold Foundation, and others to implement new crime reduction initiatives that include COMPSTAT 360, pre-arrest deflection, and more
- Increase sector ownership in all geographic divisions to more closely engage the community with the department and maximize opportunities for crime prevention
- Increase the department's CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) program, which works to help businesses and neighborhoods prevent crime through improved lighting, cameras, locks, physical layout, and neighborhood awareness

Generally speaking:

- Continue our intensive efforts to recruit and hire new officers
- Free up as much time as possible for patrol officers to engage in proactive and prevention-oriented policing by utilizing alternative call response strategies, increasing the number of Community Service Officers (CSOs), expanding our department volunteer program, improving our use of technology, and more

We hope this information will answer some of the many questions we receive about this topic.