

Is Trump Fudging Murder Stats to Claim More Power?

Donald Trump appeared deeply confused this week [as the president declared today](#) that “the murder rate in our country is the highest it’s been in 47 years.”

Perhaps Trump confused the word “highest” with “lowest” since he would be far closer to the truth if he said the homicide rate in the US is “the *lowest* it’s been in 47 years.”

On the campaign trail, Trump *repeatedly* claimed that crime and murder rates are at historic highs in spite of all evidence to the contrary. Trump is likely able to get away with this because, although homicide rates have declined substantially over the past twenty years, Pew [reports](#) that 45 percent of Americans polled think that crime and homicide are *increasing*.

Nevertheless, in 2014, [the homicide rate in the United States hit a 51-year low](#), coming in at 4.5 per 100,000. To experience a lower homicide rate than this in the US, one would need to travel back in time to 1957 when the homicide rate was 4.0 per 100,000.

Trump *may* be reacting to the fact that homicide statistics show an increase from 2014 to 2015 (the last year with year-long data available).

However, even [with the increase from 2014 to 2015](#) – a sizable increase of 11 percent – 2015's rate of 4.9 per 100,000 still puts it at approximately half of where it was in 1991 (9.8 per 100,000) and less than half of where it was in 1980 (10.2 per 100,000).

In other words, it's extremely difficult to see how these numbers could be spun to look like homicides are at a 47-year high.

But, perhaps Trump is talking about homicides in Chicago?

After all, Trump has fixated on Chicago homicides and has suggested [he'll send in federal officers](#) to take over local law enforcement in Chicago is the government there cannot reduce homicides. But [even in the case of Chicago](#), homicides

[are near \(at least\) 20-year lows](#). They are increasing, however.

Given Trump's usual *M.O.*, it may be that the whole affair is just another case of Trump attempting to pander to a specific interest group. These remarks came in a speech to the National Sheriff's Association, a lobbying group for sheriffs. In addition to claiming that homicides are at historical highs, Trump also vowed to seek retribution against a Texas legislator who has introduced legislation to curtail the government's power to seize private property without due process (i.e., "asset forfeiture"). [Trump declared](#): "We'll destroy his career."

These comments suggest that Trump, like much of the American population, is hysterical over crime and homicides when there is no indication that these problems are at unusually high levels. This doesn't mean all is perfectly well, of course. As noted in [this](#) article, the homicide rate is increasing, but is driven by only a handful of cities. Homicide rates in some cities remains alarmingly high, even if most of the country enjoys very low rates by nearly any measure one can muster.

If the growth in 2015 represents the beginning of a new trend, it is cause for concern. Needless to say, Trump doesn't exactly capture the nuance of this situation, nor is it likely he even knows anything about the situation other than the bullet point some staffer fed to him before today's meeting.

Leftwing and Rightwing Attempts to Exploit Crime Stats

Trump is not alone in attempting to play homicide data for political gain. The Left has long hinted or implied that crime is surging as part of the left's efforts to increase gun control. To its credit the left knows how to use Google – unlike Trump, apparently – and so never claimed that homicide rates are at historically high levels. The furthest the Left has generally been willing to go is to suggest that "mass

shootings” are increasing the homicide rate and that homicide rates are higher in the US than in the rest of the so-called “developed” world.

Both of these claims are themselves extremely sketchy and rely on twisting the data or conveniently ignoring data that contradicts their position. In this US, a nation of 320 million people, the odds of being a homicide victim in a mass shooting are so vanishingly small as to be essentially zero.

Whereas the left exploits homicides to increase federal gun control powers, it seems Donald Trump seeks to exploit homicides to increase federal powers to engage in [asset forfeiture](#) and to increase federal anti-immigrant legislation.

Whatever the politician’s agenda, the fact remains that homicide rates are low by historical standards, and this is in spite of [rapid increases in gun ownership over the past twenty](#)

[five years](#), and in spite of continued immigration.

Trump's behavior on this matter demonstrates a continued knee-jerk preference for increasing government power to address every perceived problem. In the case of Chicago crime, he advocates sending in federal agents to take over. He advocates the use of Presidential power to destroy a legitimately elected state legislator who wishes to rein in the abuse of law-enforcement power. He has repeatedly advocated increasing federal immigration power – [a power not granted to the federal government in the Constitution](#) – to address what Trump sees as some sort of immigrant-fueled crime “crisis.”

The national mainstream media, of course, has now suddenly decided to report on just how low homicide totals have been in recent years. The media was AWOL on this matter all those times national pundits and President Obama declared there was a homicide crisis thanks to private gun ownership. It's too bad that Donald Trump has apparently adopted the mainstream media narrative on crime over the past decade.

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