The not-so-surprising details of nationwide homicides

By Justin Price

The Federal Bureau of Investigations collects homicide data from police agencies throughout the U.S. each year. The agency's logs are incredibly detailed, making for a highly useful reference in showing how the manner in which people commit the deadly crimes are rarely unique.
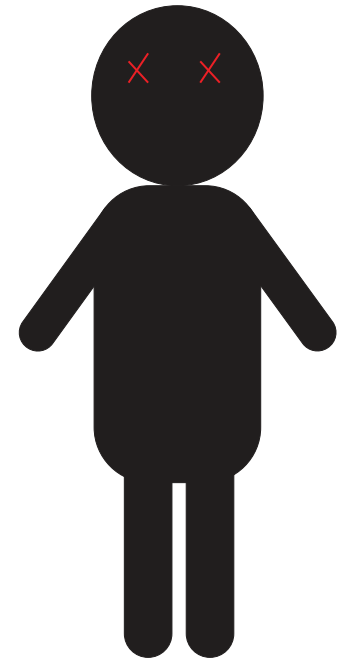
421:

Number of homicides investigated by the Chicago Police Department -- more than any other police agency.
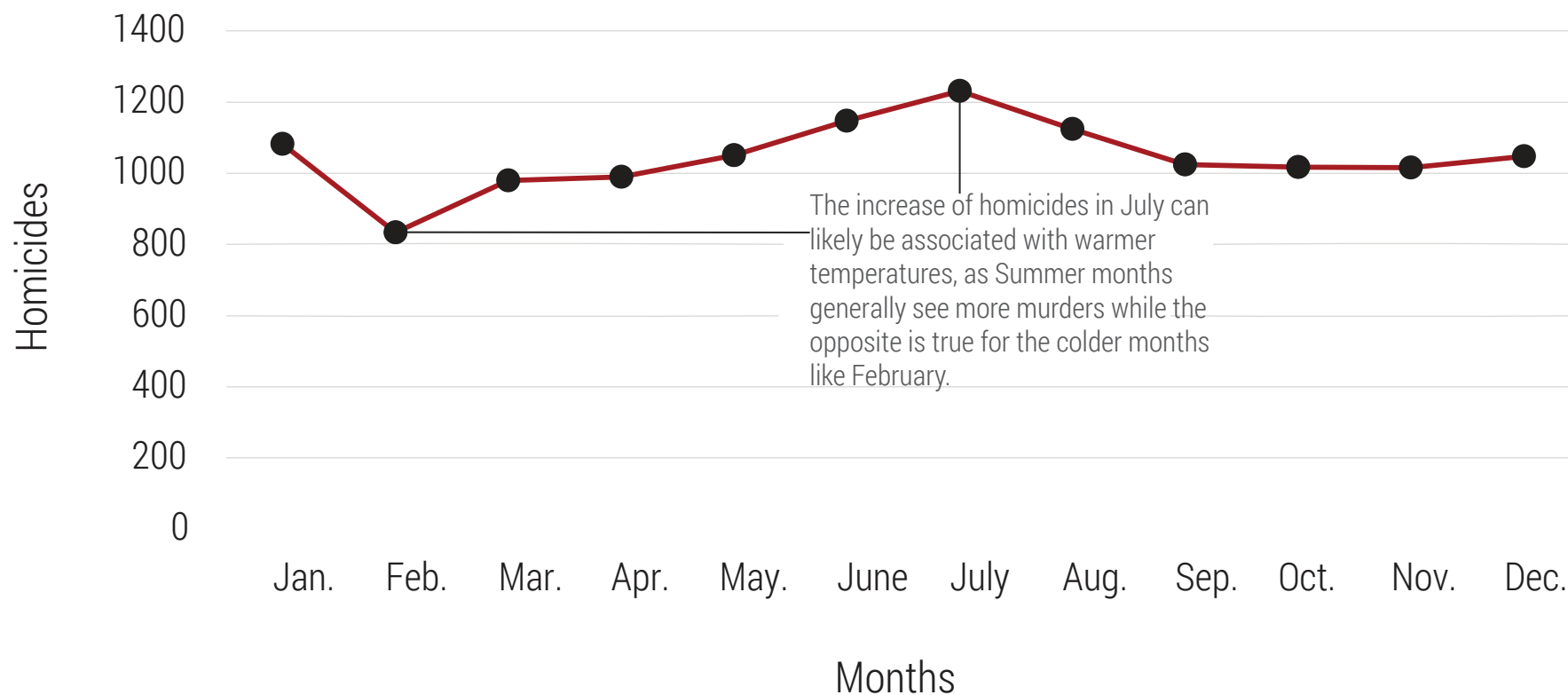
1/2:

Ratio of all reporting agencies that investigated only one murder.
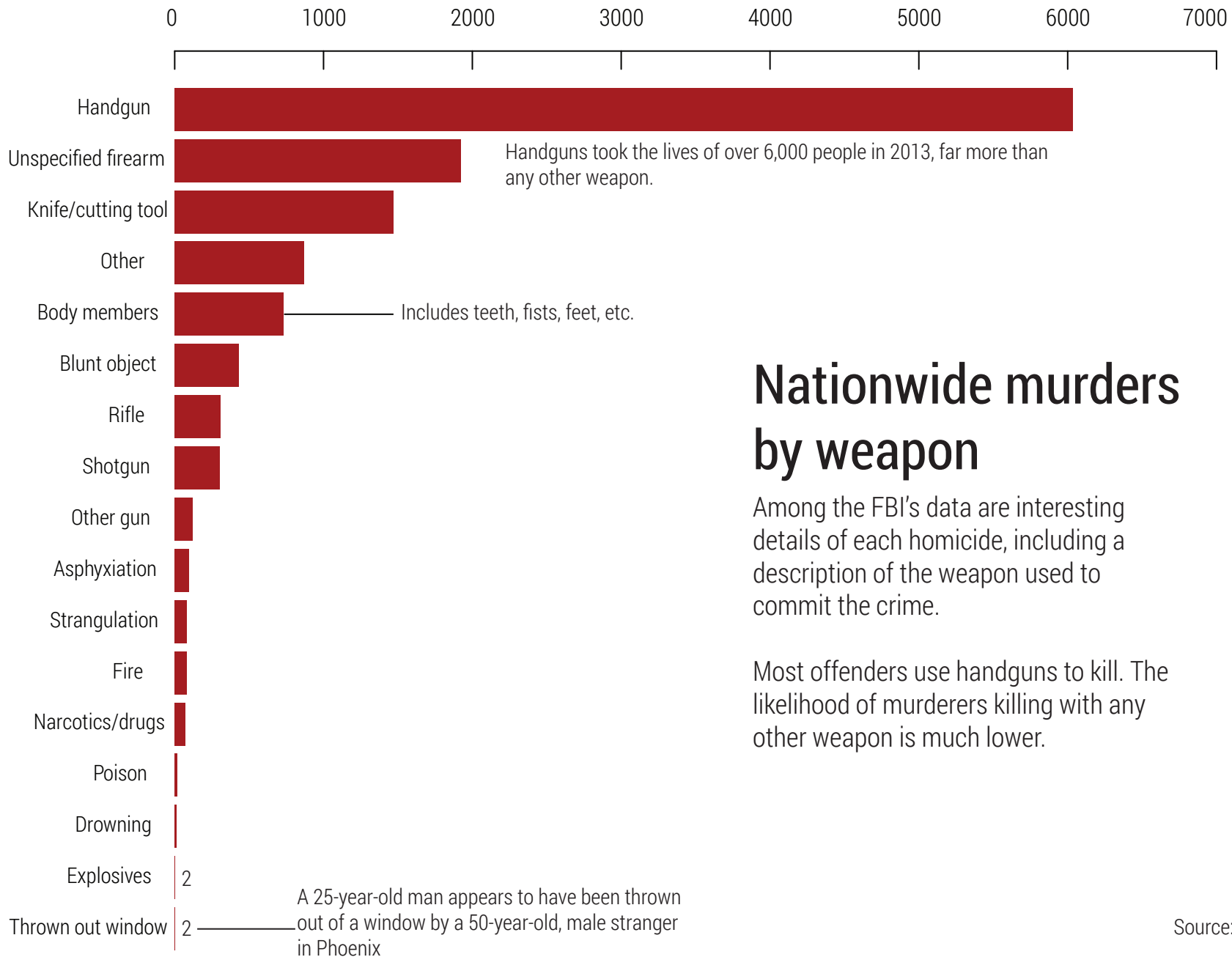
Disclaimer: Florida is not included in the FBI's data.

National homicides for 2013

The FBI Crimial Justice Information Services division is responsible for compiling annual homicide data reported by police agencies throughout the nation. The latest data available covers 2013. The distribution of homicides throughout that year is shown below.

The increase of homicides in July can likely be associated with warmer temperatures, as Summer months generally see more murders while the opposite is true for the colder months like February.

Homicides

1400
1200
1000
800
600
400
200
0

Jan. Feb. Mar. Apr. May. June July Aug. Sep. Oct. Nov. Dec.

Months

Source: FBI, CJIS division

Murders

0	1000	2000	3000	4000	5000	6000	7000

Handgun

Unspecified firearm

Handguns took the lives of over 6,000 people in 2013, far more than any other weapon.

Knife/cutting tool

Other

Body members ———— Includes teeth, fists, feet, etc.

Blunt object

Rifle

Shotgun

Other gun

Asphyxiation

Strangulation

Fire

Narcotics/drugs

Poison

Drowning

Explosives 2

Thrown out window 2 ———— A 25-year-old man appears to have been thrown out of a window by a 50-year-old, male stranger in Phoenix

Nationwide murders by weapon

Among the FBI's data are interesting details of each homicide, including a description of the weapon used to commit the crime.

Most offenders use handguns to kill. The likelihood of murderers killing with any other weapon is much lower.
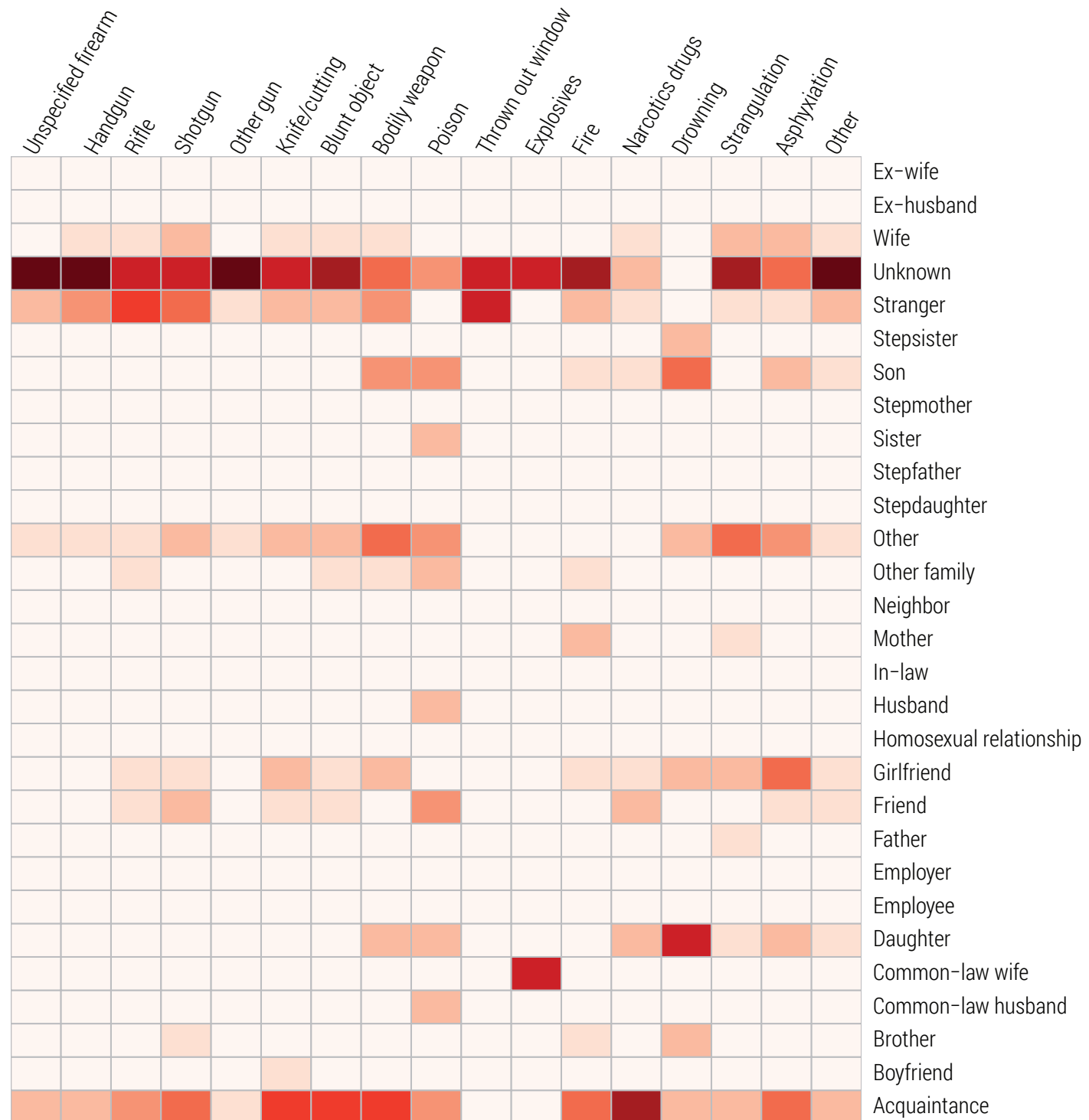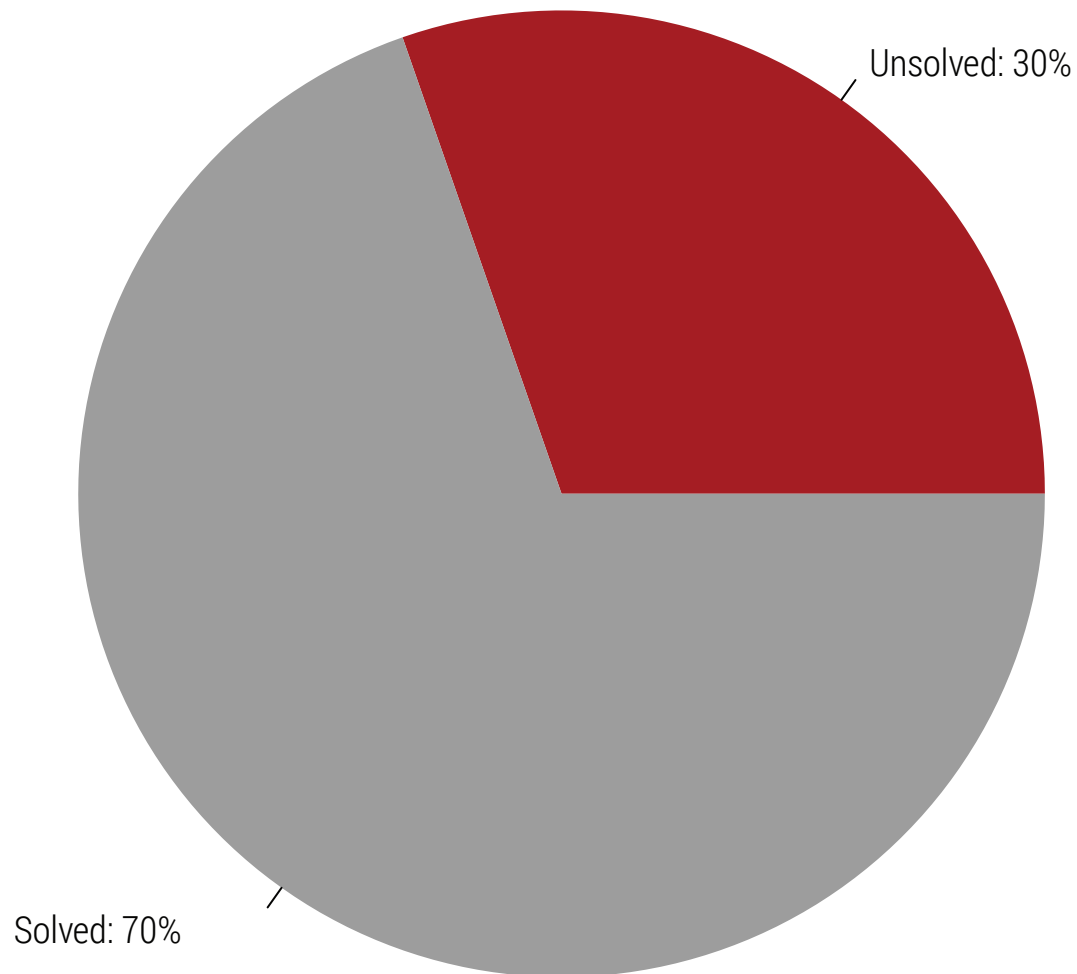
Victims and the weapons that kill them

The heatmap to the right shows the weapons with which offenders used to kill their victims. The FBI tries to identify the relationship of the victim to the offender, as shown in the far right column.

The clear outlier in these data is the unknown relationship. This category can consist of murders that were unsolved or where police were simply unable to determine the killer's relationship with the victim or victims.

The takeaway: The people with whom you're acquainted or unfamiliar with are much more likely to kill you than your mother.

How many cases go cold?

Unsolved: 30%

Solved: 70%

The only way the FBI classifies whether a case was solved is by detailing offender information. When that information is labeled as unknown, the case was unsolved at the time of the report.

Many police agencies manage to solve most of their homicides, but not all. In Phoenix, Arizona, only half of all homicides are solved.

Unsolved: 3,806
Solved: 8,740
Total: 12, 546