

# The Most Common Methods of Murder



By Alex Berezow — August 2, 2018



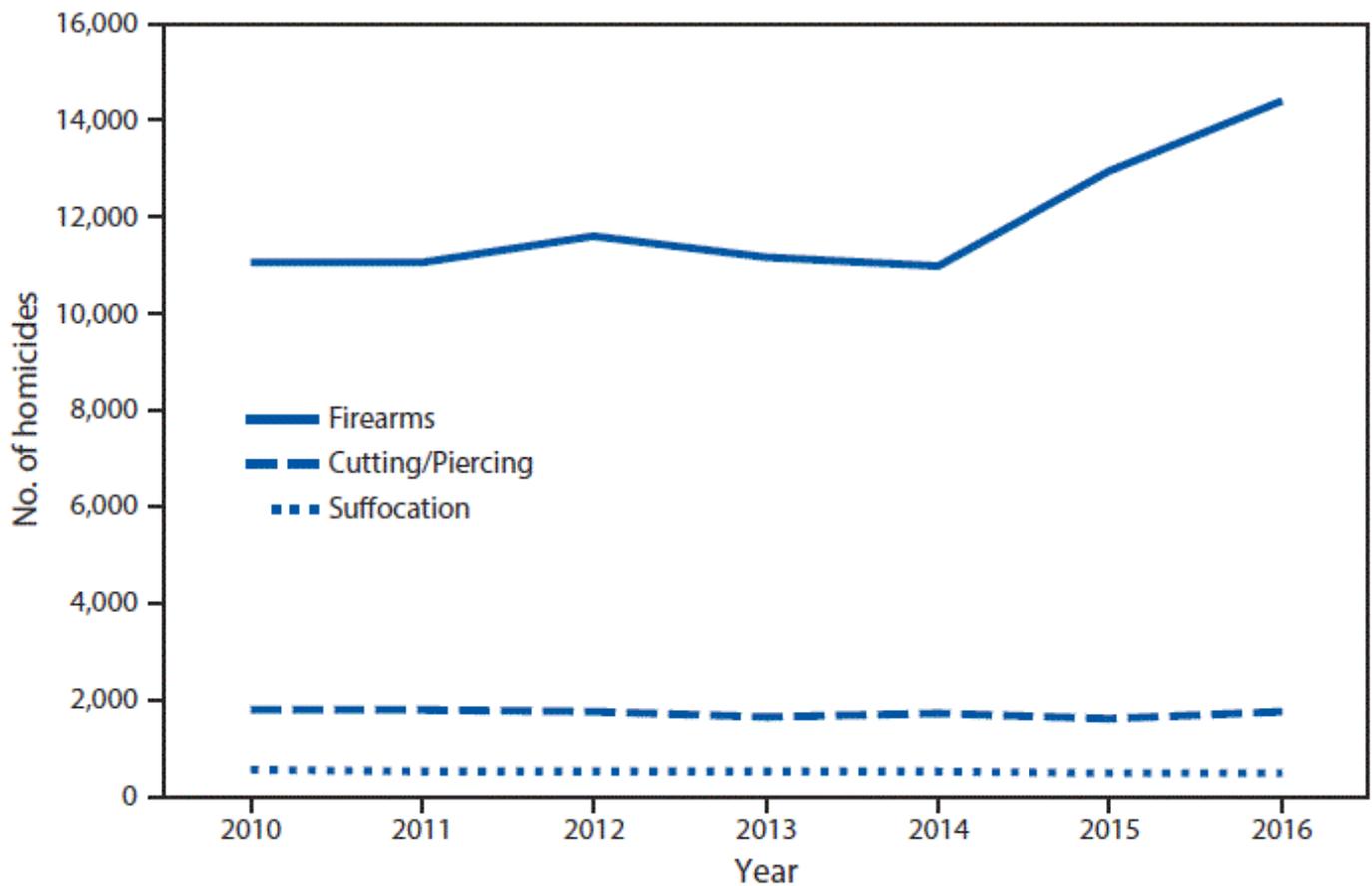
Credit: Public Domain/Wikipedia [1]

The board game *Clue* taught us that murder weapons could be diverse. My favorite version of the game, *Clue Master Detective*, featured eight potential weapons: candlestick, lead pipe, wrench, horseshoe, poison, rope, knife, and of course, the revolver.

For Americans, that's six weapons too many. Blunt trauma to the head is not a popular method of homicide, so that rules out the candlestick, lead pipe, wrench, and horseshoe. Indeed, the top three choices for murder are firearms, knives (or something sharp), and suffocation. (Perhaps the next rendition of *Clue* should include a pillow?)

The age-adjusted homicide rate in the U.S. has gone up in the last two years by more than 20%. The CDC's WISQARS database shows an increase from 5.05 murders per 100,000 people (in 2014) to 6.13 (in 2016).

This was due almost entirely to a surge in gun violence. The latest report from the CDC shows that gun homicides have increased by more than 30% during that time period, from 11,008 (in 2014) to 14,415 (in 2016), while the number of homicides by cutting/piercing and suffocation remained stable. (See figure.)



### How Americans Committed Murder in 2016

The top 3 methods of homicide only accounted for 86% of murders in 2016. What were the other 14%? For that, we must consult the CDC's WISQARS database. The results are as follows:

Firearms	14,415	
Cutting/Piercing	1,781	
Suffocation	502	
Striking	217	
Poisoning	135	
Fire/Burning	131	
Drowning	44	
Motor vehicle	27	
Fall	5	
Other/Unspecified	2,105	

Regardless of method, 19,362 Americans were murdered in 2016. Striking, which is a fatal blow to the body, is the 4th most common method of homicide, while poisoning was 5th. Perhaps the most curious one is "fall," which likely means "pushed off of something."

Maybe *Clue* had it right.

[Source](#) [2]: "QuickStats: Number of Homicides Committed, by the Three Most Common Methods —

United States, 2010-2016." *MMWR* 67 (29): 806. Published: 27-July-2018. DOI: 10.15585/mmwr.mm6729a4.

[Source](#) <sup>[3]</sup>: CDC WISQARS

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**Links**

[1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes#/media/File:Strand\\_paget.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes#/media/File:Strand_paget.jpg)

[2] <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6729a4.htm>

[3] <https://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate.html>