



## Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

### Murder spike is an aberration

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Newton's Law of gravity applies just as well to the typical swings in crime statistics: What goes up, must come down.

According to today's lengthy [Globe story](#) about intimate-partner homicide, the authorities are apparently scratching their heads about the recent spike in such killings. But the surge is likely nothing more than a statistical aberration, which in time will dissolve as the level drops back to its norm.

The figure below displays the annual count of female homicide victims killed by intimate partners (husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends) here in Massachusetts from 1976 through 2008 (the most recent year for which systematic data are available). The previous spikes in 1995 and 2007, both of which prompted a flurry of news stories speculating over the causes, were followed by immediate downturns to more typical levels.

Each murder is a tragedy in itself, and certainly there remains much room for improvement in our efforts to combat intimate-partner violence. However, there is no reason to think that the problem has spiraled out of control. Over the long-term, the numbers have remained largely stable. And in all likelihood the spike witnessed in recent weeks will soon pass.

