



Missing Persons in Montana: Analyzing the Numbers

May 2020

The missing persons issue, especially regarding indigenous peoples, has received increased attention over the past several years. High-profile cases, social media, and low-level statistical analysis have all contributed to the heightened awareness.

Attorney General Tim Fox and his team at the Montana Department of Justice (MTDOJ) believe the data can be evaluated more thoroughly to help law enforcement agencies locate missing persons, inform policymakers to craft better solutions, and help communities prevent people from going missing in the first place.

The MTDOJ is uniquely positioned to access key lists and data sets, including the missing persons clearinghouse, records from the Department of Public Health and Human Services' Child and Family Services Division (CFSD), autopsy reports from the state crime laboratory, and more.

For this project, the MTDOJ gathered and reviewed data from 2017-2019. The results were important and instructive for two key reasons.

First, the data confirms general beliefs or low-level statistical analysis on several fronts: indigenous persons are more than four times as likely to go missing as non-indigenous persons; and underreporting of these issues from tribal areas has been an issue for years (although it is showing signs of improvement).

Second, the data reveals new information that can be incredibly helpful in assisting law enforcement, policymakers, stakeholders, and Montana communities in addressing missing persons issues.

Key Observations

- 1. Nearly 81% of individuals who went missing in 2017-2019 were under the age of 18.**
- 2. There is no significant difference between the number of females and males who go missing.** Amongst the entire missing persons population, females are slightly more likely to go missing most years. However, it is not a significant difference even amongst indigenous populations. In one year (2019), the number of missing males outnumbered females.
- 3. Most missing person reports represent people who have gone missing more than once.** Roughly 60% of reports in Montana's missing persons clearinghouse pertain to 28% of the unique individuals. For example, 28 indigenous juveniles went missing at least once in each of the three years this project reviewed, for a total of 195 entries. Additionally, 30 white juveniles also went missing at least once in each year of the study for a total of 183 entries. Nearly all of the repeats on the list are juveniles.

4. **The Phase I review of missing juvenile data indicates a strong correlation/relationship between childhood trauma and children ages 0 – 17 who were reported missing.**
5. **Big Horn County had nearly double (per capita) the number of missing persons than the next highest county.** Some counties with larger urban centers (Missoula, Gallatin) were inexplicably lower than other counties with larger populations (Yellowstone, Flathead, Lewis & Clark). There are regional missing-person hotspots that are not reservation communities, which could be linked to several factors.
6. **Most autopsied missing persons were adult males.** The number of autopsies conducted on people who had appeared in the missing persons clearinghouse was skewed heavily toward adults: 83% adult (35 of 42 autopsies). Males comprised 69% of those missing persons who had autopsies.
7. **Nearly half of the deaths of those autopsied (19 of 42) were deemed accidental.** Only 17% (7 of 42) were deemed homicides conclusively.
8. **Most people reported missing are found.** An overwhelming number of people who appear in the missing persons clearinghouse are ultimately found or the case is otherwise closed. Out of the 3,277 individuals entered in the system in the three-year period of this review, 97.7% of the individuals were located/recovered.
9. **Tribal reporting has become more accurate.** With several tribal communities, it appears more accurate reporting on missing persons began around 2019, which is why there is a spike in cases reported for that year compared to the previous two years.

Next Steps

The analysis in this report represents the most comprehensive missing persons inquiry by any state in the country. This is only Phase I of the MTDOJ's deep-dive into the issue of missing persons, especially missing indigenous persons. Rather than hastily craft solutions based upon data that can be further developed and analyzed, the MTDOJ will use this information as the basis for determining the direction of Phase II.

Immediate next steps include sharing this information with tribal entities, the Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force, and state and federal policymakers. Further steps during Phase II may include, but would not be limited to, looking deeper into active cases from the past three years, education records, youth court records, as well as looking at how substance abuse, crime, and poverty may contribute to the issue.

A Note on Terms

The terms and definitions used throughout this project mirror those used in state and federal law, search terms in databases, and other sources.

Missing Persons Data Analysis 2017-2019

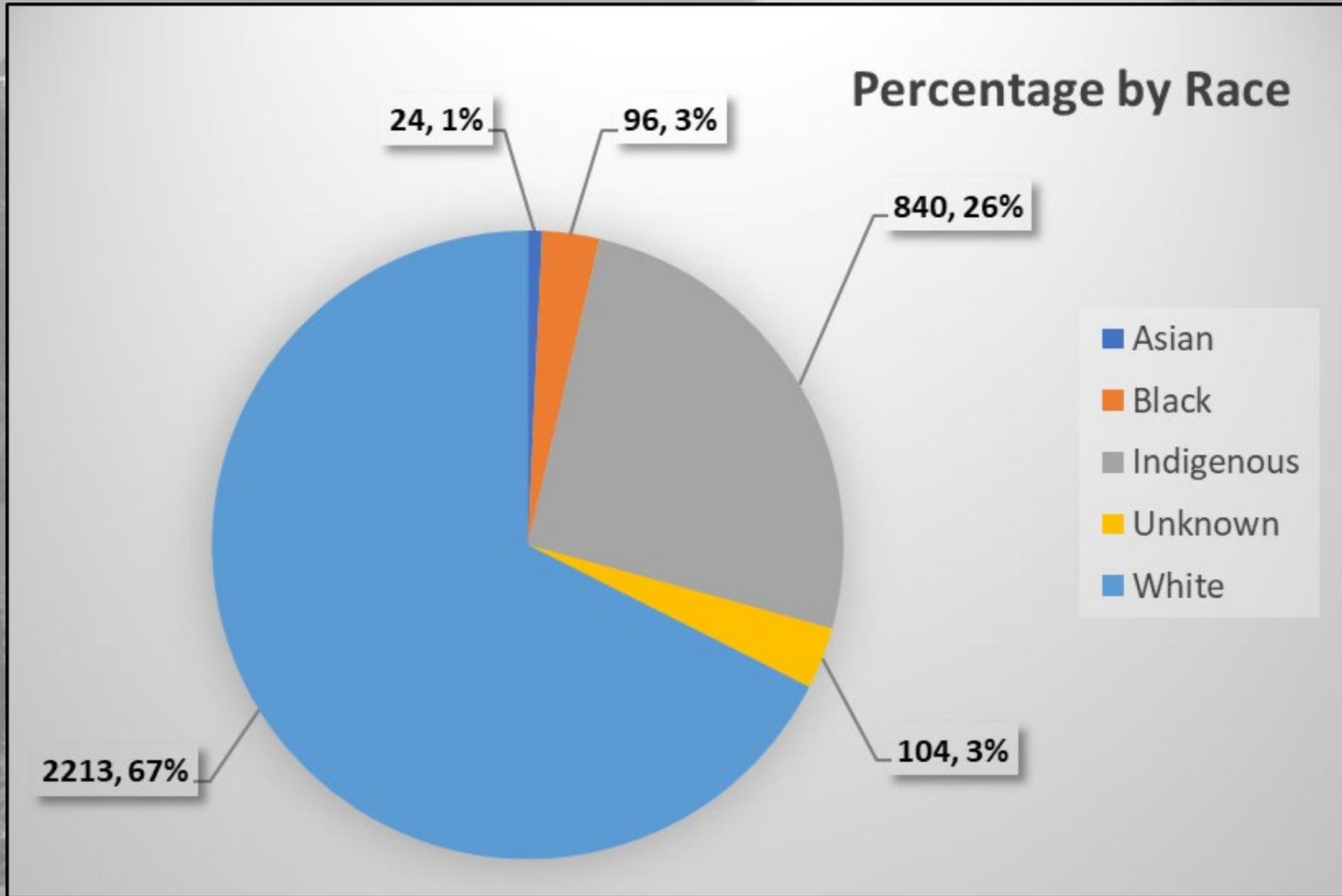
Prepared by the Montana Attorney General's Office



Montana Department of Justice

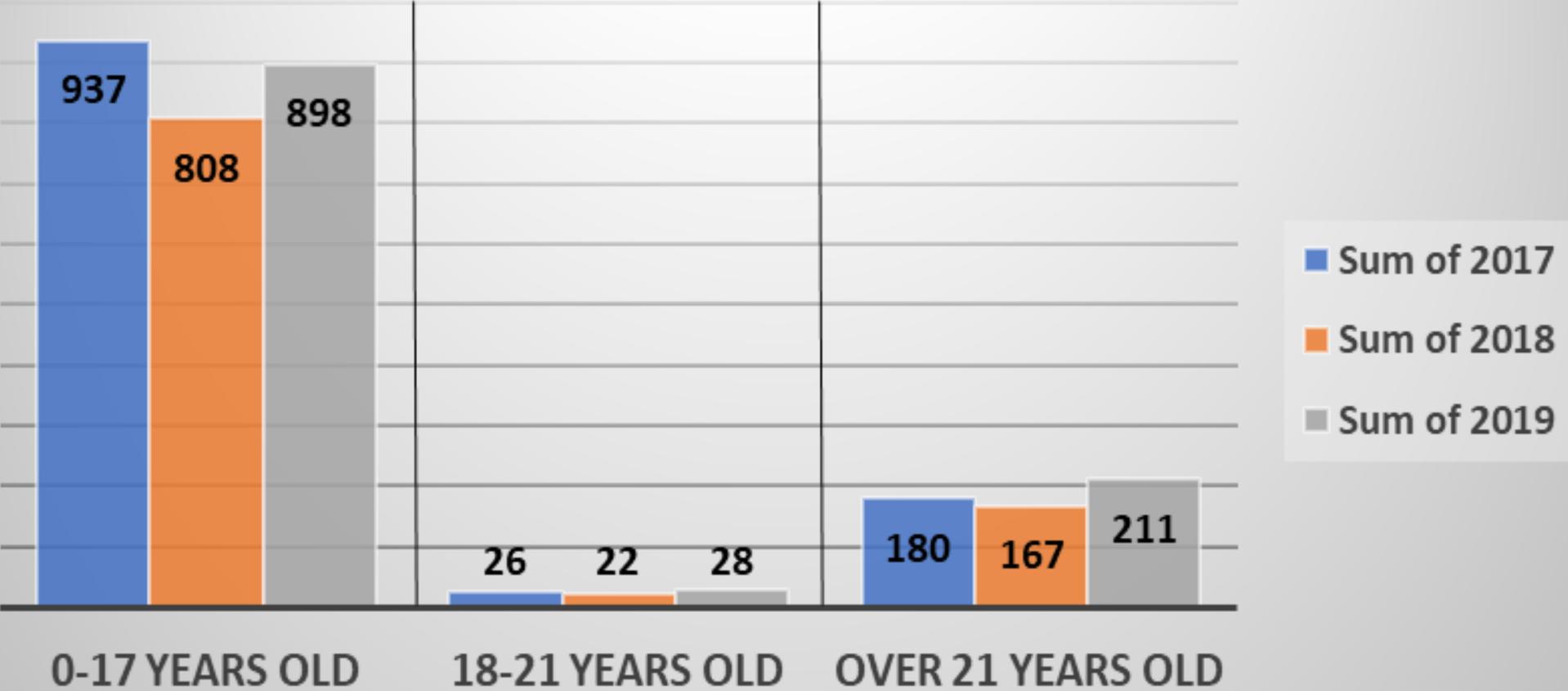
2017-2019	
Total Overall Entries	5571
Total Unique Individuals	3277
0-17	2643
18-21 years old	76
Over 21 years old	558

Percentage by Race



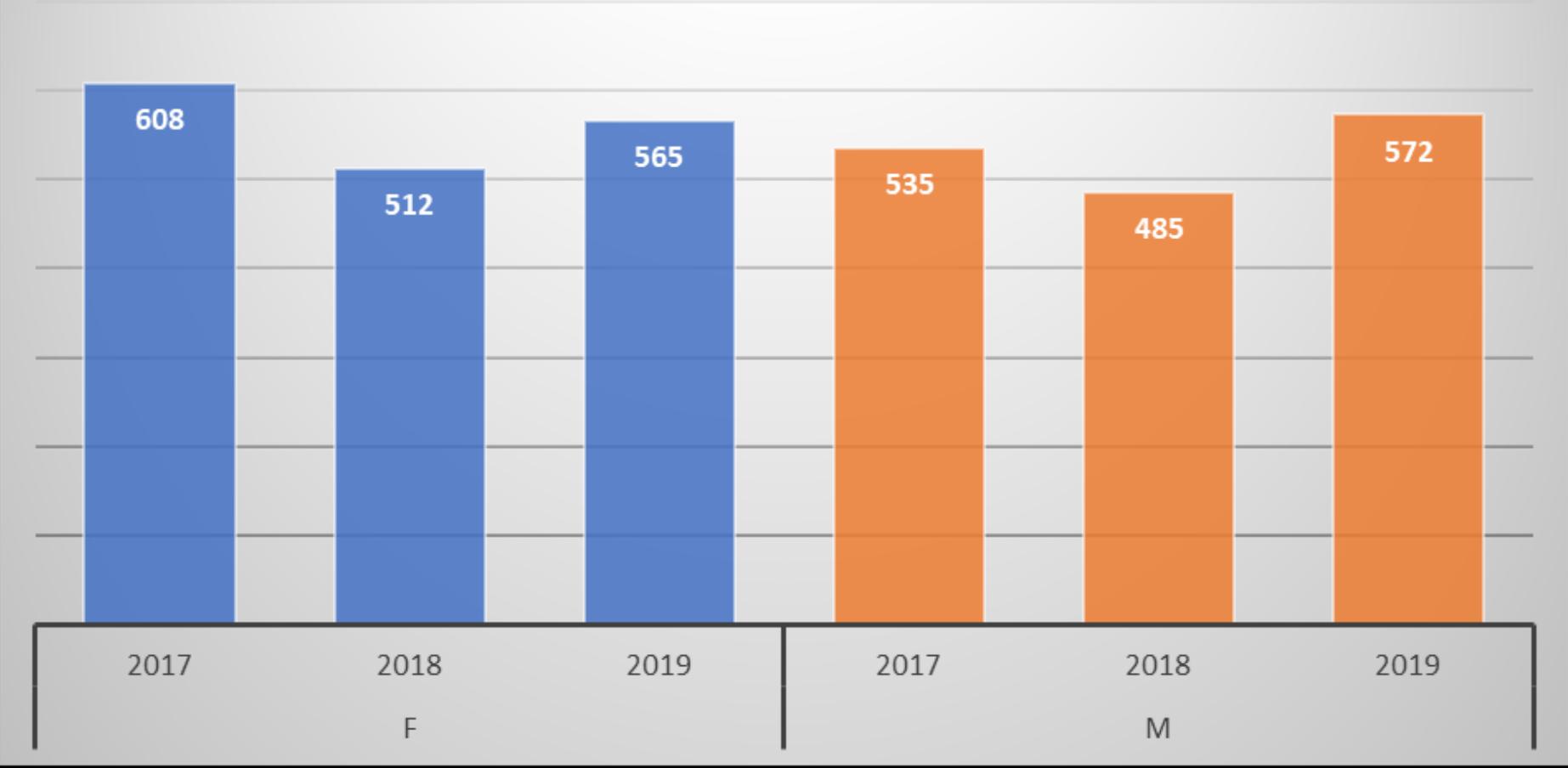
Data from the Montana Missing Persons Clearinghouse – www.app.doj.mt.gov/enforcement/missingpersons/

Entries by Age



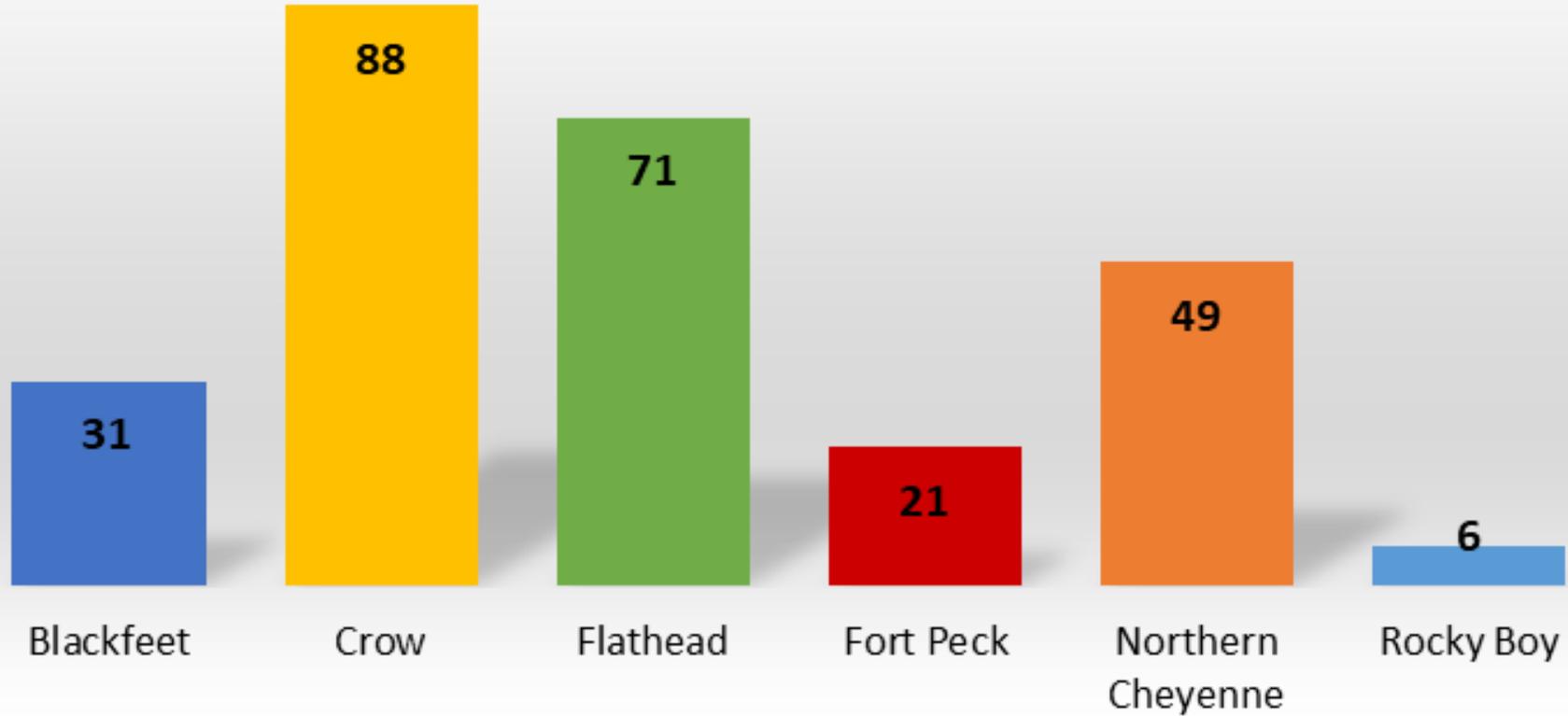
Data from the Montana Missing Persons Clearinghouse – www.app.doj.mt.gov/enforcement/missingpersons/

Entries by Gender



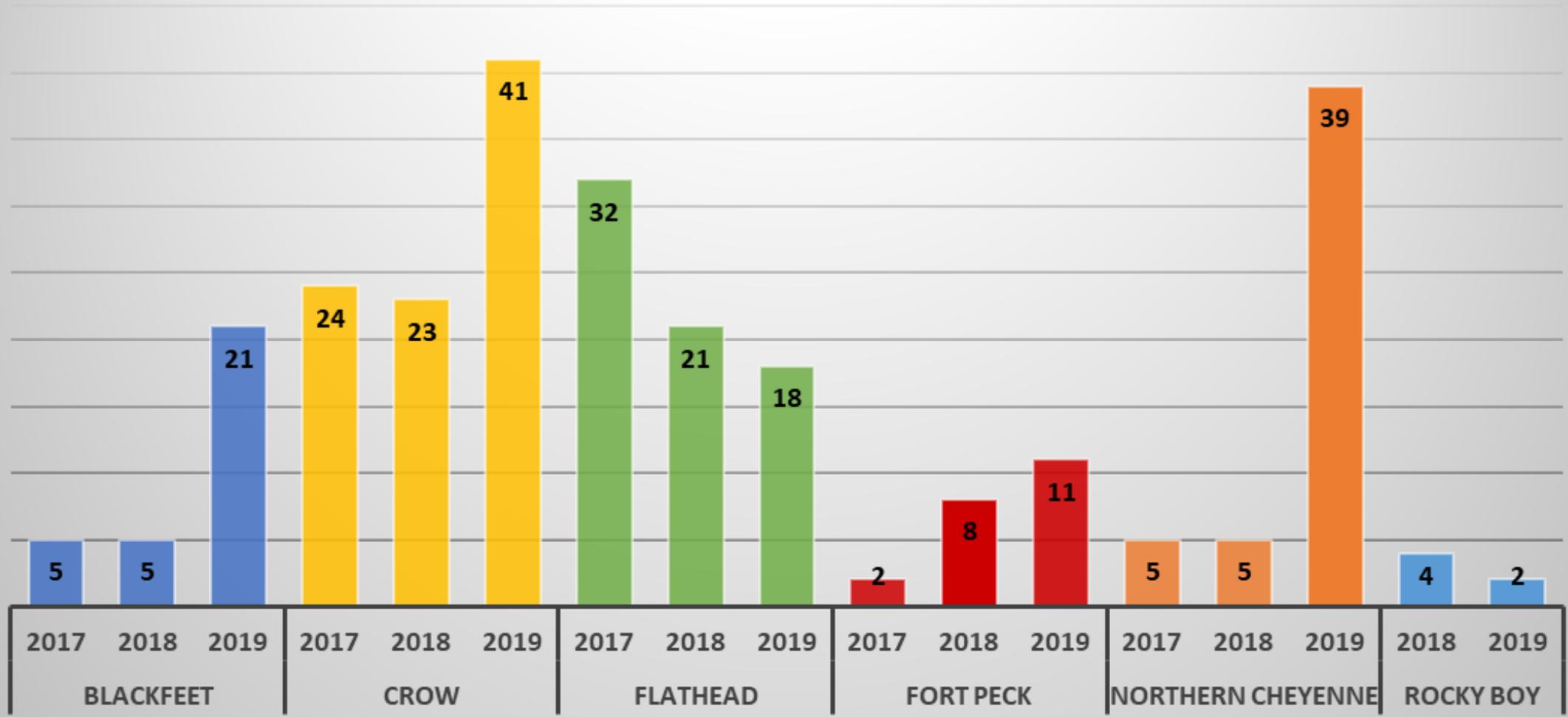
Data from the Montana Missing Persons Clearinghouse – www.app.doj.mt.gov/enforcement/missingpersons/

Total Entered by Tribal Police/BIA



Fort Belknap works with Blaine Co. Sheriff's Office and is not included in this chart.
Chart does not represent all Native Americans entered missing, just those reported to Tribal Police or BIA.

By Reservation and Year



BIA reported on Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Fort Peck, Blackfeet during the three-year period.

Individuals Entered More Than One Time in the Clearinghouse Over the Three-Year Period

	2017-2019
Total Entries	5571
Total Unique Individuals	3277
Individuals Entered More than 1 time	922
0-17	2643
18-21 Years Old	76
Over 21 years old	558

Missing Persons Data and Child and Family Services Division Connection

Definitions

Adjudication of Youth In Need of Care:

A Montana District Court found that the youth had been or was at risk of abuse/neglect at the time that youth was entered into the Missing Persons Clearinghouse.

Child and Family Services Division (CFSD) History:

Means that there was an investigation of suspected abuse/neglect by CFSD at some point in that missing juvenile's life prior to the date they were reported missing.

Montana Missing Persons Clearinghouse Statistical Analysis

**3,277 Individuals Entered Missing by
Law Enforcement Agencies**

3,202 Individuals located/recovered

Locate/Recovery Rate 97.7%

Results of Autopsies on Missing Persons 2017-2019

Deceased Missing Persons with Autopsy – 42

Male – 29

Female – 13

Adult – 35

Juveniles (0-17) – 7

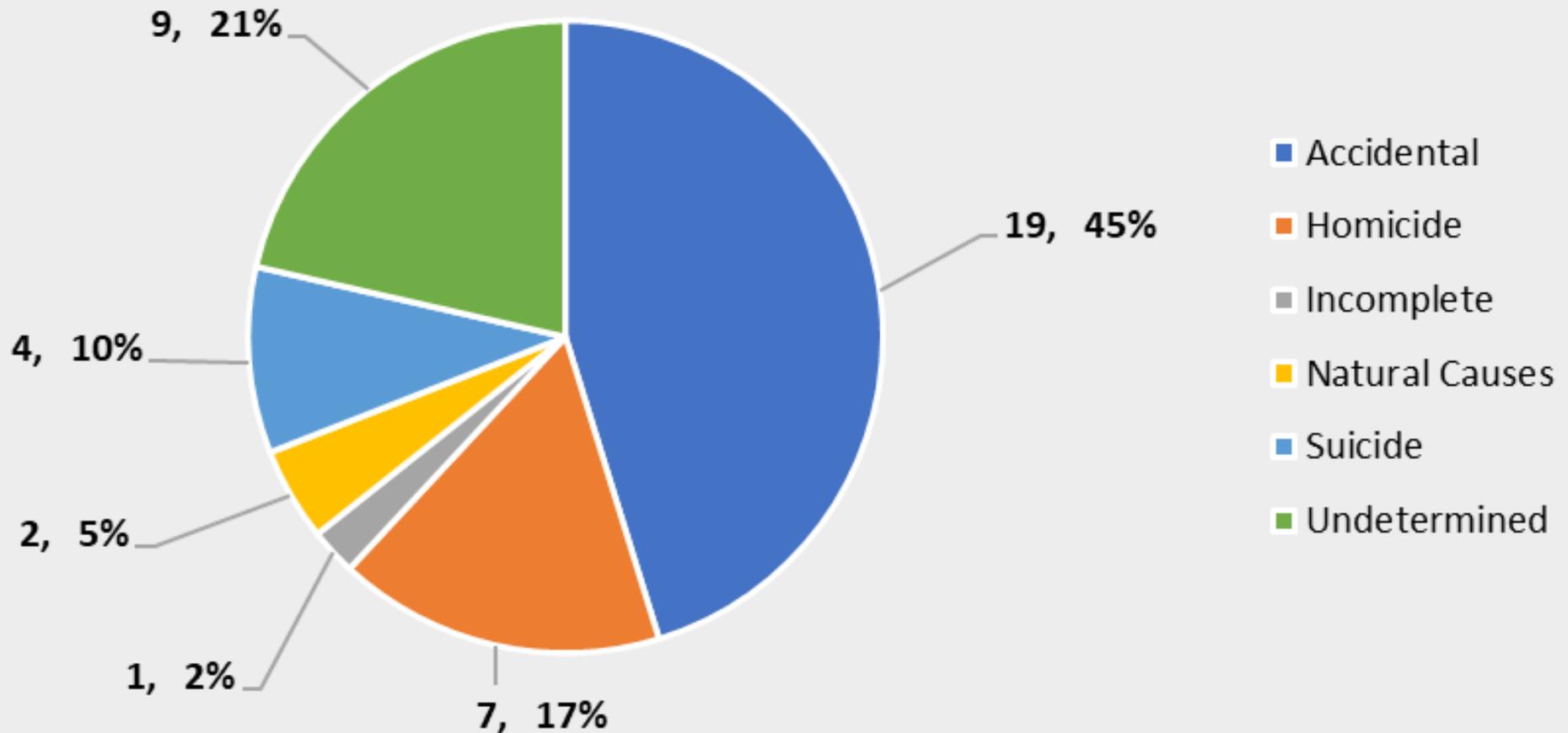
White – 26

Indigenous -10

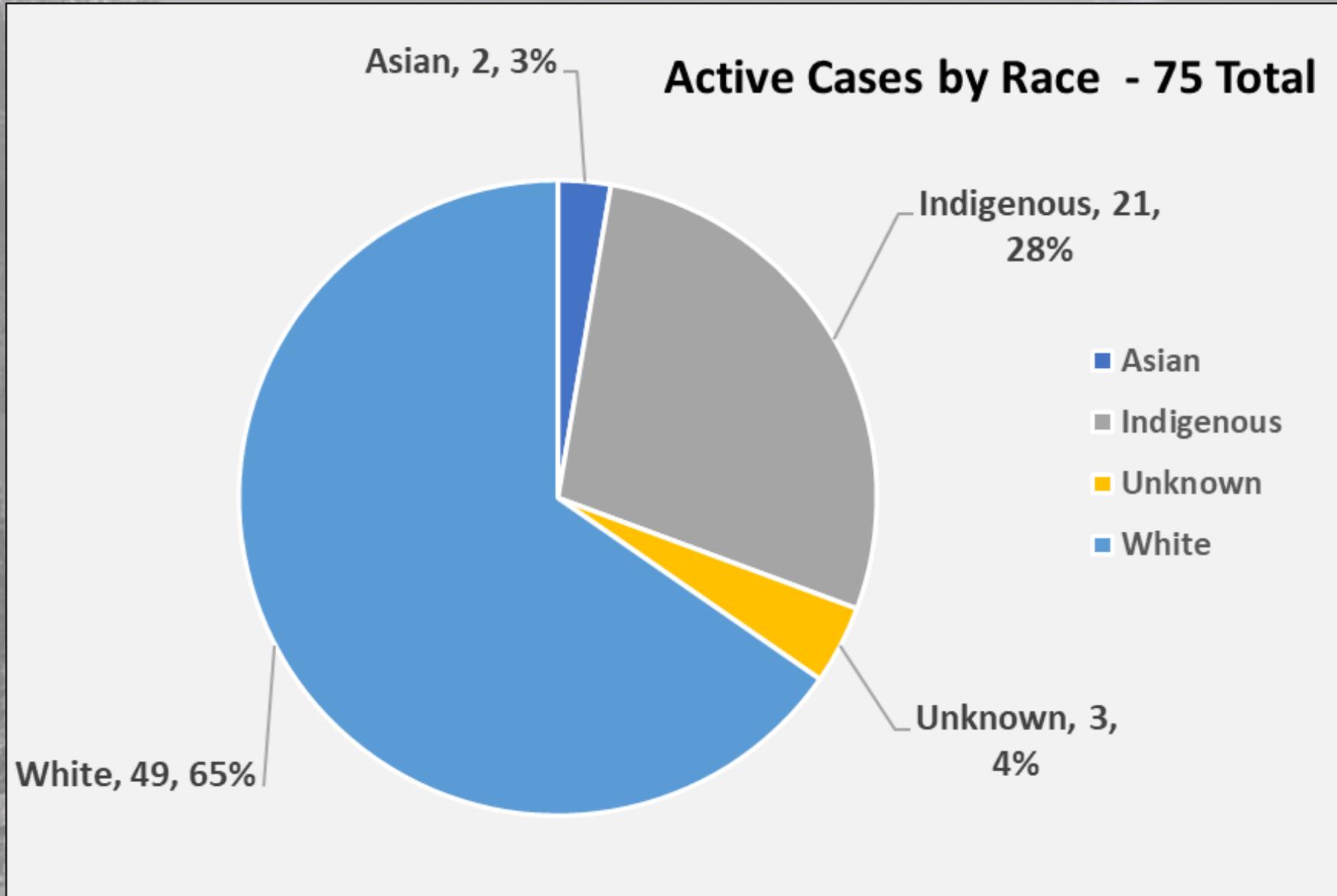
Other – 6

Results of Autopsies on Missing Persons 2017-2019

Autopsies on Missing Persons from 2017-2019

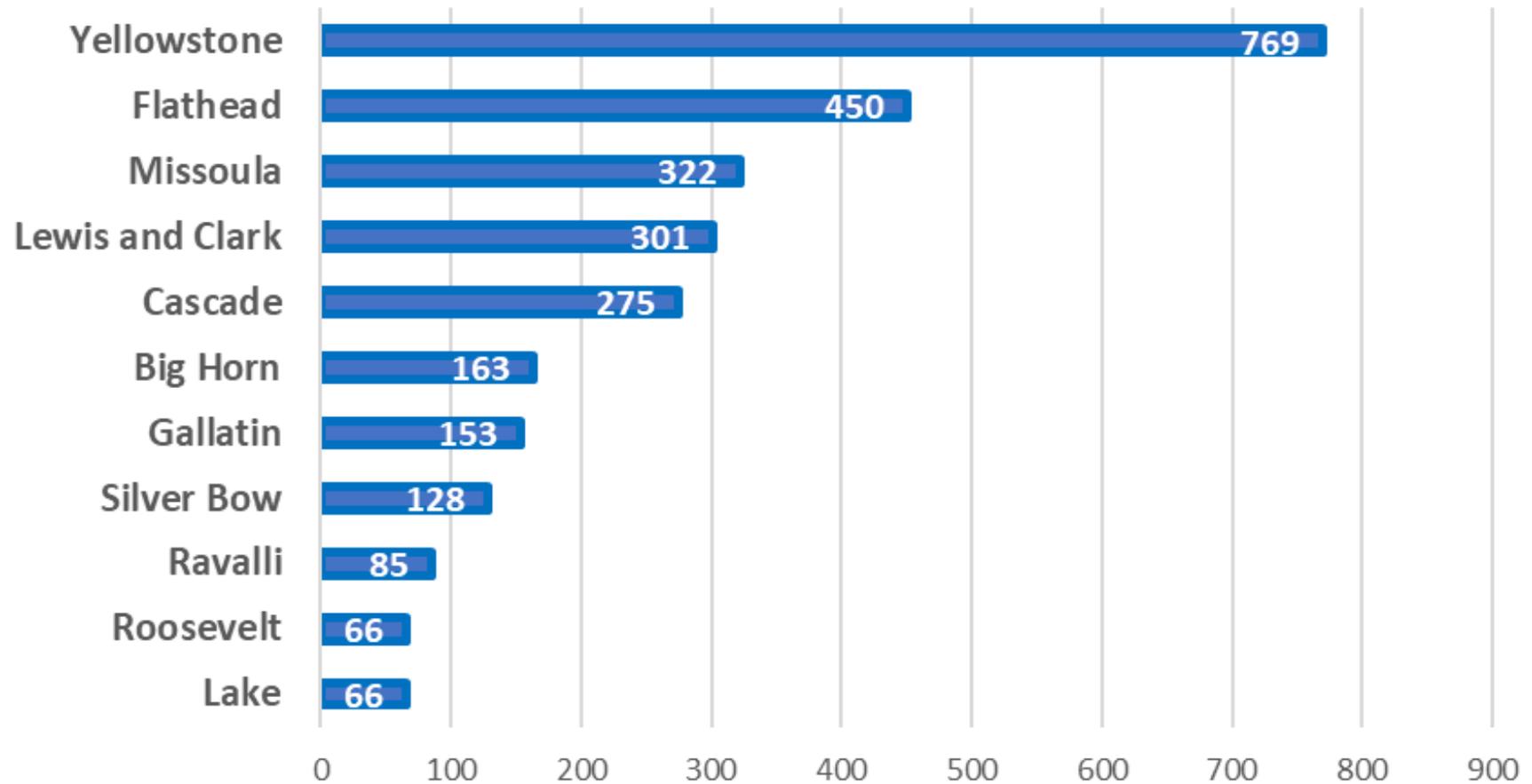


Active Cases by Race of 12/31/2019



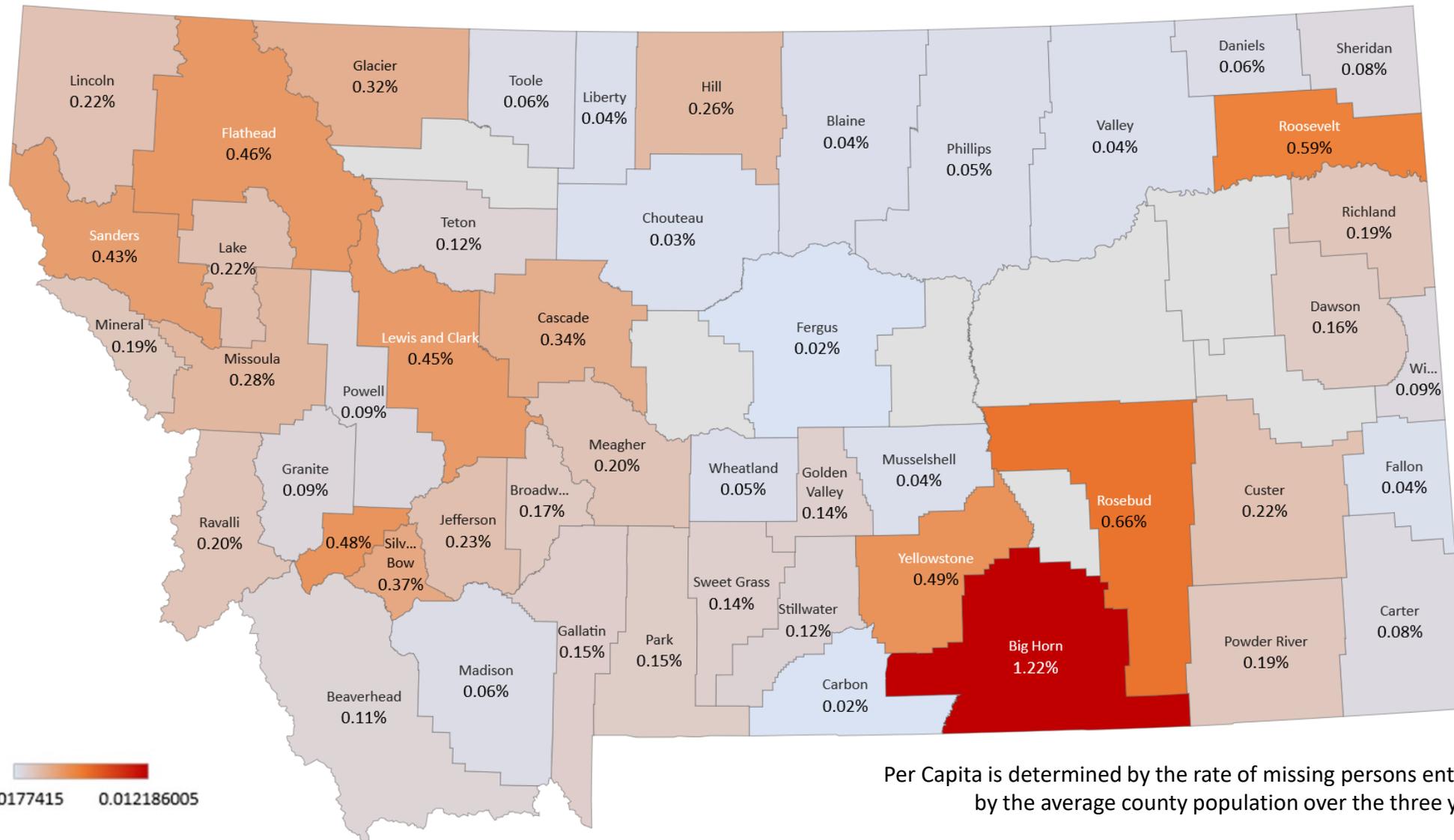
The Landscape of Missing Persons Across Montana

Top 10 Counties by Entries 2017-2019



The Landscape of Missing Persons Across Montana

Per Capita Missing Persons Reports by County



A black and white photograph of a mountain landscape. In the foreground, there is a dense forest of evergreen trees. In the middle ground, a large, calm lake reflects the sky. In the background, several rugged mountain peaks are visible, some with patches of snow. The sky is filled with soft, diffused light, suggesting an overcast day. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

Montana Missing Persons A Call to Action