

CHAPTER 4

LINKS TO ORGANIZED CRIME, TERRORISM AND OTHER FORMS OF CRIME

Chapter overview

This chapter takes a step back to analyse the bigger picture of linkages between firearms trafficking and a range of other crimes and social issues. Firearms trafficking often takes place to satisfy demand from criminals who need the arms for use in various unlawful activities. Drug trafficking and violent crime – including its starkest manifestation, homicide – are among the key crimes associated with the circumstances of firearms seizures.

There seems to be a relationship between the level of certain crimes registered by countries and the share of firearms that are seized in those criminal contexts. Although there are some variations, in general, the higher the homicide rate or rate of illicit drug seizures, the larger the share of firearms seized in those criminal contexts. In addition, illicit drugs are the most common non-firearms-related commodities seized together with firearms, followed by counterfeit goods, cultural property and natural resources.

In several countries, the use of firearms is particularly pronounced in organized crime or gang-related homicides. While the majority of homicide victims globally are men, this trend is typically even more acute when considering homicides perpetrated by firearms. However, data for a limited number of countries related to homicides of intimate partners and family members – in which most victims are women – show other gender-related patterns. Men were more likely than women to use a firearm when killing their female partners, while women were more likely to resort to a sharp object.

More than half (54 per cent) of all homicides in 2017 were carried out with firearms, and the availability of firearms seems to have an impact on homicide rates. An increase in the rate of possession of firearms broadly corresponds to an increase in the homicide rate. This can best be observed when comparisons are made within relatively homogeneous country groupings, for example in terms of geography or socio-economic characteristics. Comparing firearms seizures and homicide rates can also help to identify countries with better firearms interdiction capacity and stronger rule of law. Countries with higher levels of firearms seizures relative to the number of homicides committed with firearms are those where higher seizure levels may be related to the capacity of law enforcement rather than firearm supply. These countries tend to have lower overall levels of homicides, possibly reflecting an overall strong rule of law situation. Data also show some correlation between firearm ownership and firearm homicide. Statistical models suggest that a 1 per cent increase in the rate of firearm civil possession can bring a 1.13 per cent increase in the homicide rate in the case of developing countries and 0.74 per cent in the case of developed countries.

In order to adequately explore the links with various forms of crime, this chapter draws substantially on data sources which go beyond the Illicit Arms Flow Questionnaire. This includes other data collection exercise administered by UNODC—namely the Annual Report Questionnaire (for data on drug seizures) and the Crime Trends Survey (for data on homicide)—specific data collection initiatives, published studies (including the UNODC *Global Study on Homicide*) and estimates of civilian holdings of firearms published by Small Arms Survey.

Forms of crime linked to firearms

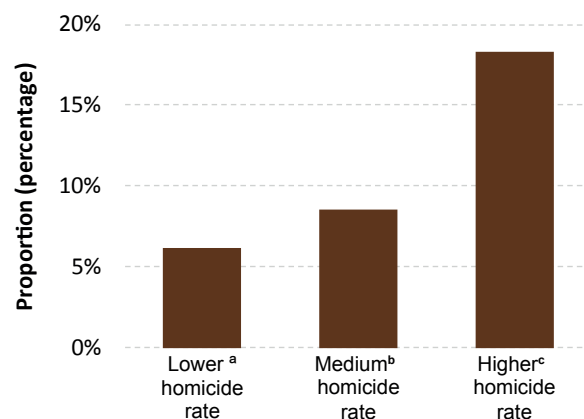
As discussed in Chapter 1, reported data confirm the link between crime and firearms, since the criminal context of seized firearms extends well beyond firearms-related offences.¹ Given that these data are based on recorded suspicions of non-firearms-related offences, they likely underestimate the real extent of the incidence of such offences in the context of firearms seizures. Nevertheless, from these data, drug trafficking and violent crime emerge as the more prominent types of criminal activity associated with the circumstances of seized firearms outside of firearm-related offences.

Regional variations can be observed in the different kinds of criminal context seen in these data. As a context for arms seizures, violent crime is most pronounced in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is in line with the relatively high levels of violent deaths (conflict-related or otherwise) in these regions, including intentional homicide and specifically firearm-related homicides.² Drug trafficking is also prominent in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the links between this phenomenon and violence are also well-documented.³ Relative to other kinds of criminal context, drug trafficking is also prominent in Europe, closely followed by violent crime, while terrorism is most pronounced in the case of Africa (see Figure 4 in Chapter 2).

The association between violent crime as a context for firearms seizures and violence in general can be corroborated with UNODC's homicide statistics. Similarly, data on drug seizures corroborate an association between drug trafficking as a context for firearms seizures and drug trafficking in general (see Figures 1 and 2). The countries especially affected by violent crime and drug trafficking are reflected in a correspondingly higher share of arms seized in this context.

Furthermore, data on significant cases of firearms seizures also corroborate the strong link between drug trafficking

FIG. 1 Average proportion of arms seized in the suspected context of violent crime, by rank of homicide rate of reporting countries, 2016*



^a 6 countries with homicide rate of less than 1.05 per 100,000 population.

^b 6 countries with homicide rate in the range of 1.05-6 per 100,000 population.

^c 6 countries with homicide rate of more than 6 per 100,000 population.

* In the case of one country, the homicide rate for 2016 was not available, and the corresponding rate for 2015 was used as a proxy.

Note: Reported values of 0 arms seized in the context of violent crime are not included.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ; UNODC Homicide Statistics (UN-CTS and other official sources).

and seized weapons. Aside from weapons-related items such as ammunition, parts and components, and explosives, drugs emerge as the most common commodity seized together with firearms, followed by counterfeit goods, cultural property and natural resources.

Some countries also provided contextual information which provide further insight into the circumstances of weapons seizures and the links to various forms of organized crime.

Albania reported three significant seizure cases (among others), over the period 2016-17, that involved the seizure of large quantities of cannabis in conjunction with several rifles. North Macedonia reported on the procurement of weapons, ammunition and explosive devices by individuals or groups connected with various criminal activities, including property crimes, violent crime, illegal hunting and the illegal drug trade. In particular, North Macedonia reported a significant seizure of 13 weapons, including 3 rifles as well as a hand grenade and two chemical bombs, which was linked to an organized crime group connected to migrant smuggling and drug trafficking. Moreover, weapons were often found in small numbers in apartment and house searches related to the detection of crimes such as drug trafficking, attempted homicide or acts against public safety. Illegally held firearms were found in the possession of individuals who had committed offences including homicide, extortion, grand theft and robbery.

1 See Figure 3 in Chapter 2.

2 UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide*, 2019.

3 UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide*, 2019; UNODC, *World Drug Report*, 2016.

Denmark reported that firearms were often trafficked in conjunction with, or in return for, illicit drugs. A number of firearm-related cases exhibited the involvement of street gangs or motorcycle groups. On several occasions, authorities observed the pooling of firearms and ammunition, stored in neutral locations known only to key gang members and used in multiple shootings.

Peru reported on the involvement of cartels in the illegal importation of firearms by air to be delivered to criminals in areas affected by illicit coca bush cultivation, such as the Valle de los Ríos Apurímac, Ene y Mantaro. The intended recipients included terrorists as well as drug traffickers seeking weapons as a way to enhance their own “safety” and to enable their confrontations with law enforcement. Moreover, corrupt officers in the National Police and Armed Forces diverted weapons from their holdings. Firearms diverted from the armed forces of other countries also entered Peruvian territory to be used in various forms of crime, including organized crime and drug trafficking.

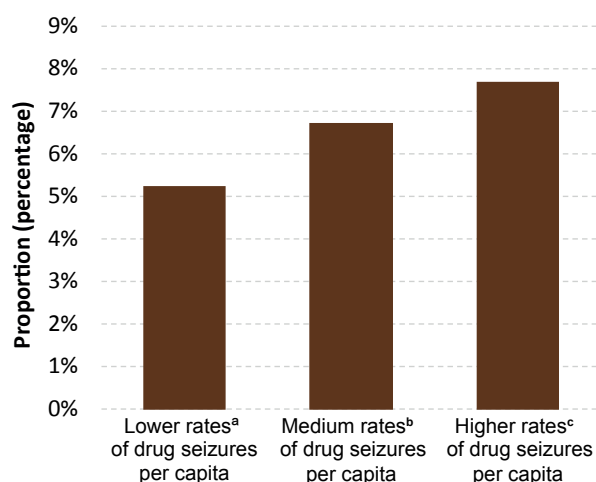
Brazil reported on the parallel trafficking of drugs and firearms along two main routes: across the land border from Paraguay (where marijuana is trafficked along with cocaine); or on small planes from the Plurinational State of Bolivia to the countryside of states in the southeast of Brazil, such as São Paulo or Minas Gerais, from where some of the illegal goods were further trafficked to Rio de Janeiro.

Ultimately most of the trafficked firearms were intended for big cities such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. In the case of Rio de Janeiro, one of the main drivers of demand for firearms was their use in maintaining control of areas for drug dealing. The criminal groups who received the firearms in São Paulo tended to manage the illicit circulation and further distribution of these firearms by renting, lending and selling them, for the purpose of committing crime such as bank robberies.

In general, there were people specialized in the transport of drugs, contraband goods and firearms from the land border to the urban centres, via the Brazilian highways. Some criminal groups based in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro involved in importing drugs from Andean countries had also set up cells in Paraguay to manage the firearms trafficking from this country. Although in many cases criminal groups sent firearms together with drugs in their illicit shipments, there were also groups dedicated mainly to firearms trafficking.

Libya reported a certain overlap in the routes used for firearms trafficking and migrant smuggling. These included routes through several areas on or close to the borders with Algeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan and Egypt. Kenyan authorities, in reporting on the context of significant cases of firearms seizures, referred to armed robberies, carjacking, cattle raids, terrorism and inter-community clashes.

FIG. 2 --- Average proportion of arms seized in the suspected context of drug trafficking, by rank* of drug seizures per capita of reporting countries, 2016



^a 7 lowest-ranked countries (among 20).

^b 6 medium-ranked countries (among 20).

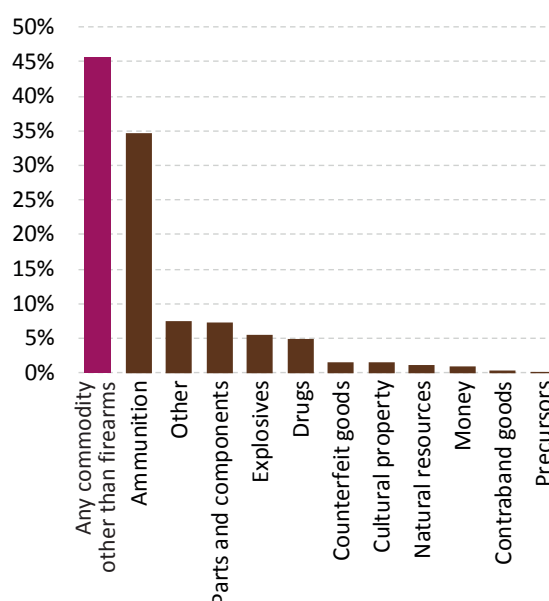
^c 7 highest-ranked countries (among 20).

* Based on the average of 4 separate rankings for each of the four major drug classes: amphetamine-type stimulants; cannabis; cocaine-type; and opiates. Within each drug class, aggregate weights per capita were based on representative drug types of roughly interchangeable weight, chosen as follows: amphetamine and methamphetamine for amphetamine-type stimulants; marijuana and cannabis resin for cannabis; all forms of cocaine (including base, paste and salts, but excluding coca leaf and coca bush) for cocaine-type; heroin and morphine for opiates.

Note: Reported values of 0 weapons seized in the context of drug trafficking are not included.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ; UNODC Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ) and other official sources (drug seizures).

FIG. 3 --- Proportion of significant firearm seizure cases involving other commodities, by type of commodity, 2016-17



Source: UNODC IAFQ.

Weapons as a nexus between crime and terrorism (cooperation between criminal and terrorist actors in weapons exchange)

Both criminals and terrorists rely to a large extent on weapons for their activities; thus the procurement of firearms is potentially a natural area of cooperation between the two types of actors.

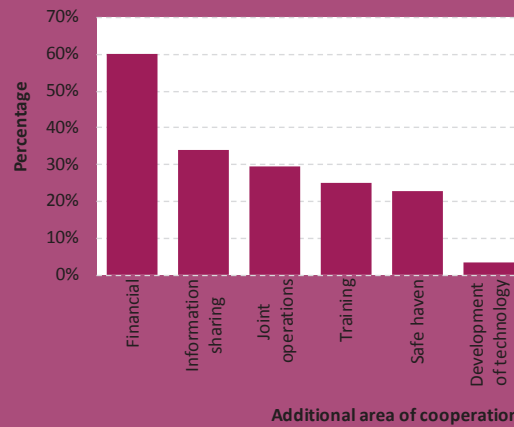
An initiative of the University of Massachusetts Lowell documented instances of cooperation between crime and terror networks (on a global basis), of which 88 instances included cooperation specifically in the area of weapons exchange. Among these instances, several other areas of cooperation were observed, notably (in more than half the cases) financial support but also information sharing, joint operations, provision of training and provision of a safe haven.

With respect to certain specific areas of cooperation - namely financial support, provision of training, provision of a safe haven, as well as weapons exchange itself - the initiative also documented the "direction" of assistance, that is, whether it was the crime network providing support or assistance to a terror network, or the other way around. From this information it clearly emerges that terrorist organizations rely heavily on criminal organizations to support their operations, including in the provision of firearms.

In about three quarters of cooperation initiatives, it was a crime network which provided weapons to a terror network. Moreover, even among these instances, other forms of support also tended to occur in the same direction; for example, there were about three times as many cases of financial support from a crime network to a terror network as there were the other way around, despite the fact that financial support might be expected to compensate for the provision of weapons.

The acquisition of firearms by terrorists was also explored, in the European context, in a study* conducted by the Flemish Peace Institute which drew on interviews with more than a hundred criminal justice practitioners from eight European countries. The study confirms that terrorists' access to the criminal milieu is key for the acquisition of firearms, especially in the case of religiously-inspired terrorist attacks (as opposed to separatist organizations or extremist groups with a political inspiration). The study observes that most perpetrators of recent religiously-inspired terrorist attacks in the European Union appear to have been involved in low-level criminality rather than organized crime, and, in order to procure their firearms, tended to leverage the connections to the criminal underworld—along with the familiarity with firearms—acquired prior to their radicalization. The criminal suppliers often may not have been aware of the intentions of the terrorists; indeed, the study suggests that criminals, especially organized crime

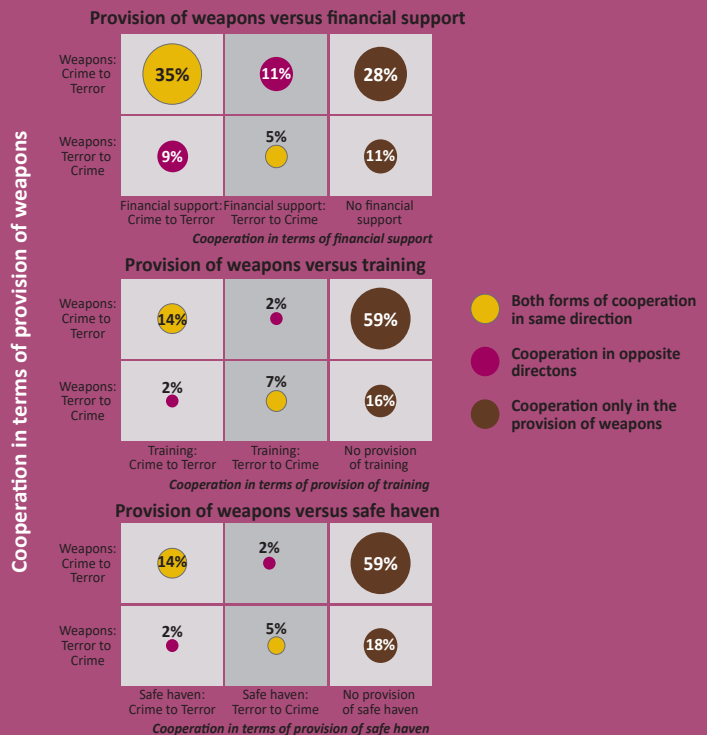
Instances of additional areas of cooperation between crime and terror networks, among instances of cooperation in the provision of weapons



Note: Based on 88 documented instances of collaboration between a crime-network and a terror network, all of which included collaboration in the provision of weapons.

Source: University of Massachusetts Lowell, Crime-Terror Collaboration Database.

Breakdowns of instances of cooperation between crime and terror networks in the provision of weapons, according to additional type of support and by direction of provision



Source: University of Massachusetts Lowell, Crime-Terror Collaboration Database.

Note: Based on 88 documented instances of collaboration between a crime-network and a terror network, all of which included collaboration in the provision of weapons.

groups, may be averse to supplying terrorist groups with firearms due to the attention it may draw from law enforcement authorities.

* Flemish Peace Institute, *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe. Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*, Flemish Peace Institute, Brussels, April 2018.

Japan reported a total of 8 significant cases of firearms seizures, all of which were made from members of various Japanese organized crime groups (“Boryokudan”).

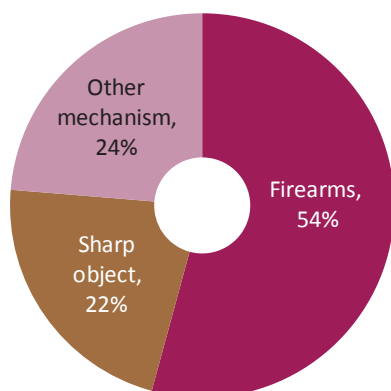
Firearms as a mechanism for homicide

Firearms play a prominent role as an instrument used in the perpetration of homicide. Globally, UNODC estimates that, in 2017, a majority of homicides (54 per cent) involved firearms, and this proportion is even higher in certain countries, reaching around three quarters in the Americas overall. Some countries with high proportions of firearms-related deaths tend to have high rates of homicide, suggesting that firearms are key enablers of high homicide levels.

Triangulating data from different collection streams, a pattern can be discerned by expressing the number of firearms seized in relation to the number of homicides committed by firearms. Higher rates of firearm seizures versus firearms homicides can be observed in countries with low homicide rates, while low rates of firearms seizures versus firearms homicides are observed in countries experiencing high levels of homicide (see Figure 5). This pattern suggests that relative higher levels of vigilance exercised in intercepting firearms go along with low homicide levels. It doesn't suggest a direct causal relationship between seizures and homicide but it highlights a possible underlying explanation with the rule of law maintaining a low homicide rate and ensuring high vigilance on firearms.

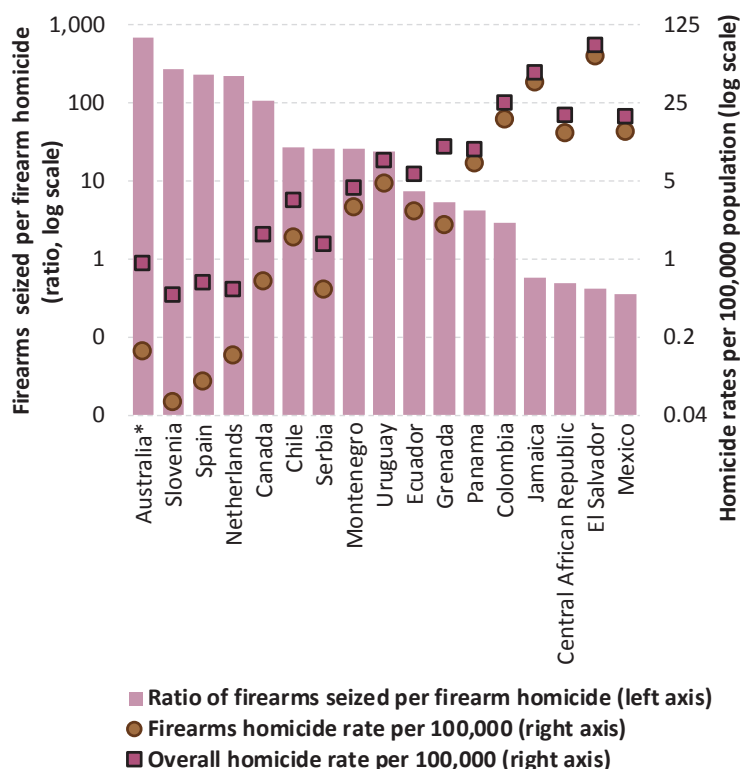
Homicides occur in a variety of contexts, ranging from family settings to property crime and organized crime, and firearms as a mechanism for the perpetration of homicide may in principle be more or less closely associated with a given situational context. For example, whether a homicide is a crime happening in a domestic setting, as opposed to a homicide occurring in the context of organized crime, will probably impact on the likelihood of a firearm having been used (or not).

FIG. 4 Estimated breakdown of intentional homicide worldwide, by mechanism of perpetration, 2017



Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics 2019 (CTS and other official sources).

FIG. 5 Firearm seizures per firearm homicide, in comparison with homicide rates, 2016



* Seizures for Australia include cases of an administrative nature.

Note: Countries with known incomplete coverage of seizure data are excluded.

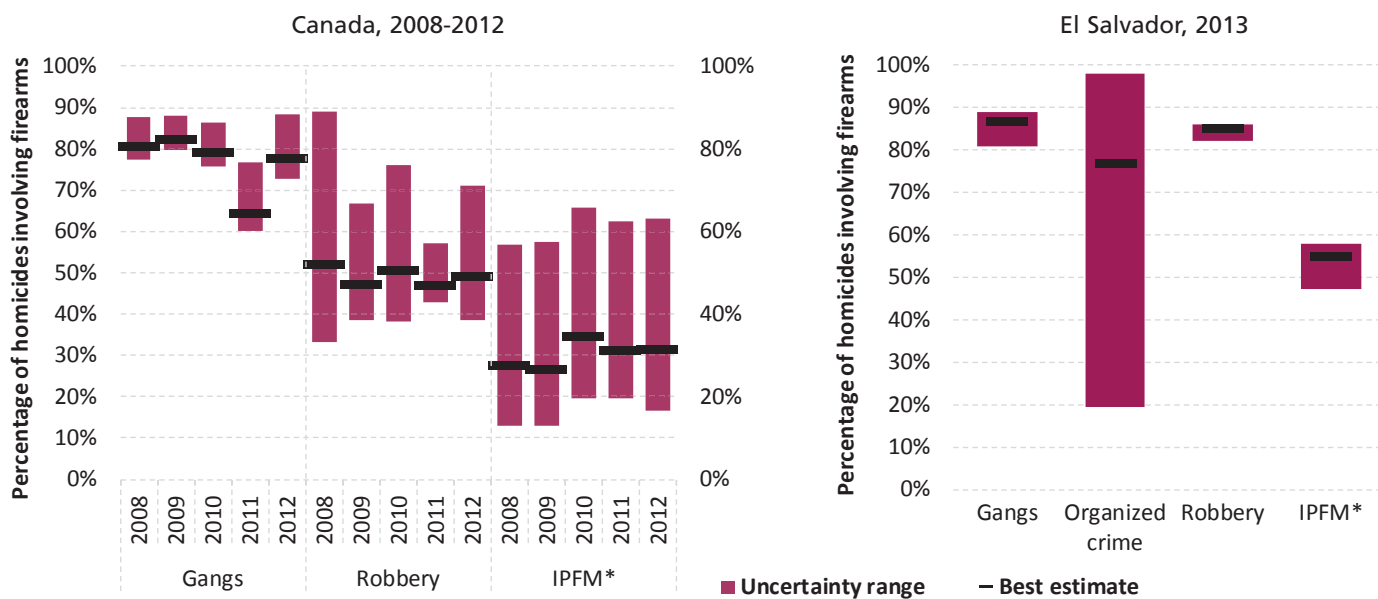
Sources: UNODC Illicit Arms Flows Database (IAFQ and other official sources); UNODC Homicide Statistics 2019 (CTS and other official sources).

The situational context of a homicide is classified in UNODC data into the following four main categories: homicides committed by intimate partners or family members of the victim (IPFM homicides, typically occurring in a domestic or family setting); homicides occurring during the perpetration of robbery; homicides committed by members of an organized group or in the context of organized crime; and homicides related to gang activity.

Although breakdowns of homicide data by situational context are collected by UNODC, the additional layer of detail required in the data to assess the association between firearms and the situational context of homicides was not available on a systematic basis. Nevertheless, data from a limited number of countries do suggest some recurring patterns. For example, data from Canada and El Salvador indicate that the role of firearms was the least marked among IPFM homicides, while homicides related to organized crime or gangs were much more likely to involve firearms.

Some other countries provided parallel breakdowns of homicide, by situational context and by mechanism (including firearm), which were sufficiently comprehensive as to allow to indirectly evince (subject to certain assumptions) estimated breakdowns by mechanism *within* each

FIG. 6 Proportion of homicides involving firearms in Canada and El Salvador, by situational context



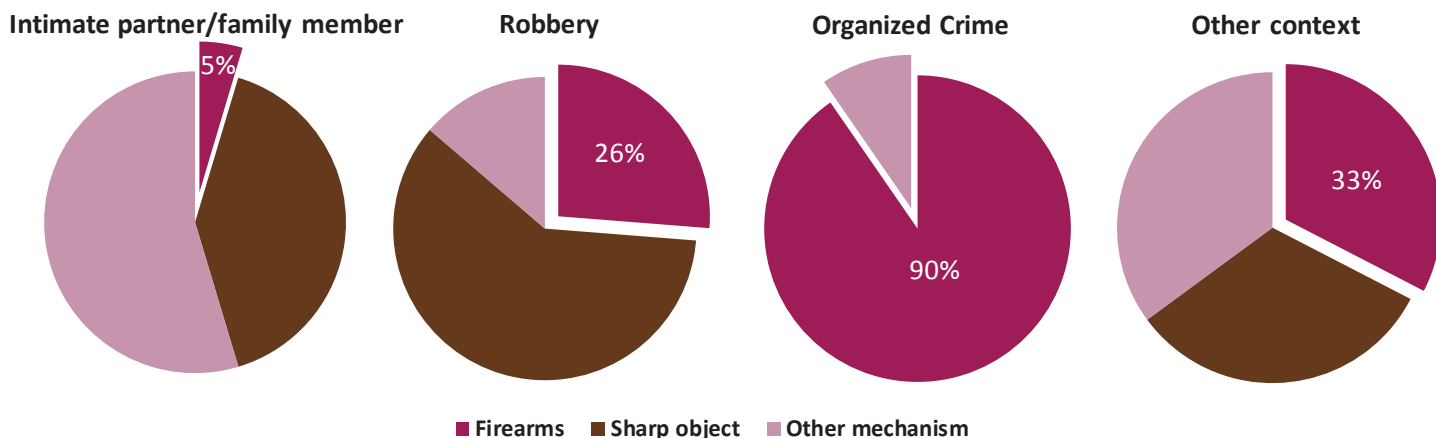
* Intimate partner or family member.
Source: UNODC homicide statistics (2019).

situational context. Two such countries were the Netherlands and Trinidad and Tobago. Once more, in both cases the role of firearms appears to be least pronounced in connection with homicides perpetrated by intimate partners or family members, and much more prominent in connection with organized crime (in the case of the Netherlands) and gangs (in the case of Trinidad and Tobago). Taking into account all four countries, the role of firearms in robbery-related homicide varied significantly but, by and large, stayed within the range defined by IPFM homicides on one hand and organized crime or gang-related homicides on the other.

Some relationships can also be observed between the mechanism used in the perpetration of homicide and the gender of homicide victims, as well as homicide perpetrators. While men are a majority of victims of homicide overall, there are clear differences in the proportion of men among homicide victims depending on the type of mechanism, with the strongest representation of men being found among victims of homicides perpetrated by firearm. Still, this is in a context where men tend to constitute a majority of victims across all three types of mechanism.

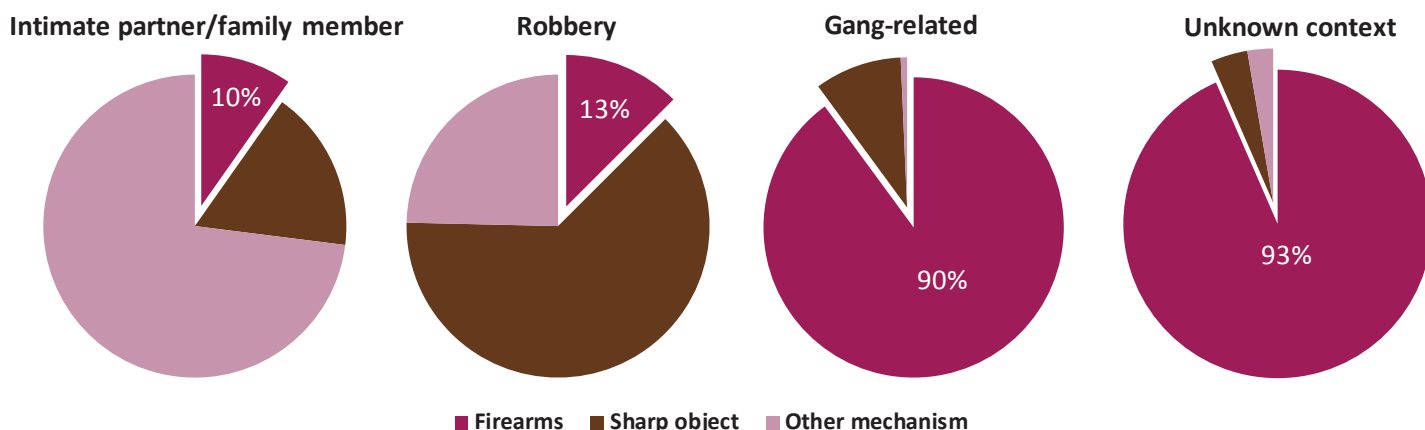
When focusing only on IPFM homicides, however, the picture is very different. It should be noted that women

FIG. 7 Estimated distributions* of homicides in the Netherlands by mechanism, according to situational context, 2007-2015



* UNODC estimates based on independent disaggregations of homicides by mechanism and by situational context and derived using a model which assumes that the distributions remain stable over time. Available data from the Netherlands did not include a cross-disaggregation of homicides by mechanism and situational context.
Source: UNODC, elaboration of homicide statistics (2019).

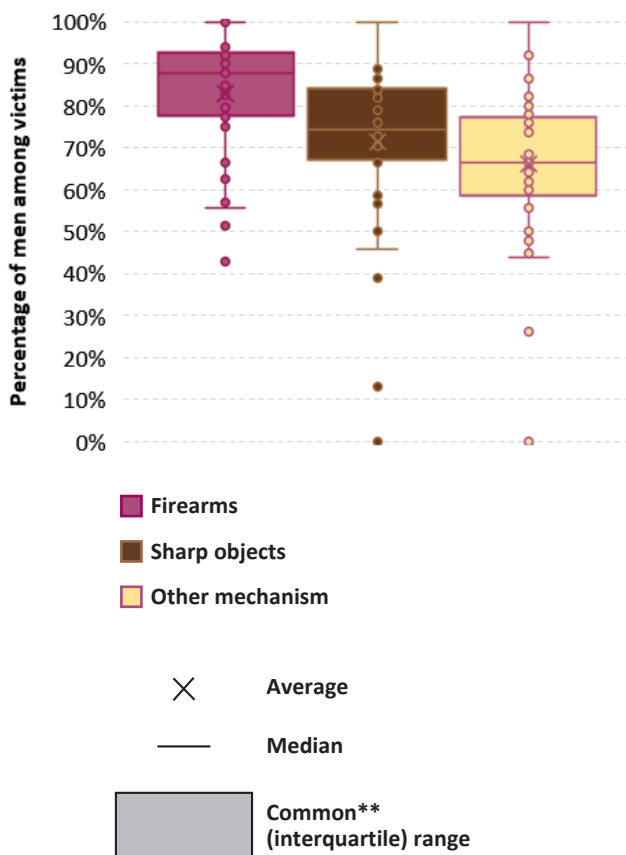
FIG. 8 Estimated distributions* of homicides in Trinidad and Tobago by mechanism, according to situational context, 2006-2015



*UNODC estimates based on independent disaggregations of homicides by mechanism and by situational context and derived using a model which assumes that the distributions remain stable over time. Available data from Trinidad and Tobago did not include a cross-disaggregation of homicides by mechanism and situational context.

Source: UNODC, elaboration of homicide statistics (2019).

FIG. 9 Proportion of men among homicide victims, by type of mechanism, common range among countries with available data,* 2015-2016



* 45 countries.

** The common range (interquartile range) represents the “middle half” of the datapoints; in other words, it excludes data from the lowermost and topmost quartiles.

Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2019).

constitute a majority of victims of IPFM homicides, largely due to the subset of intimate partner (IP) homicides. Although data enabling a cross-disaggregation of IPFM homicides by mechanism and sex are very limited, country-specific data suggest that, in a context where women make up the great majority of victims of IPFM homicide, the proportion of women tends to be consistently higher among victims of firearm-related IPFM homicides, in comparison with those IPFM homicides perpetrated by means of sharp objects.

Indeed, the pattern that emerges from the limited data suggests that an IPFM homicide is more likely to be perpetrated using a firearm, and less likely to be perpetrated by means of a sharp object, when the victim is female. Considering that the majority of IPFM homicide is IP homicide, and that the victim and perpetrator are not of the same sex in the vast majority of IP homicides, this suggests that men are more likely than women to use a firearm when killing their female partners, while women are more likely to resort to a sharp object; this is despite the “equalizing” effect of a firearm, which renders physical strength largely irrelevant. The reasons for this pattern are unclear; one possible explanation could be that men are more likely to kill with premeditation, while an alternative explanation could be that women may tend to have less access to and less familiarity with firearms than men.⁴

Civilian holdings

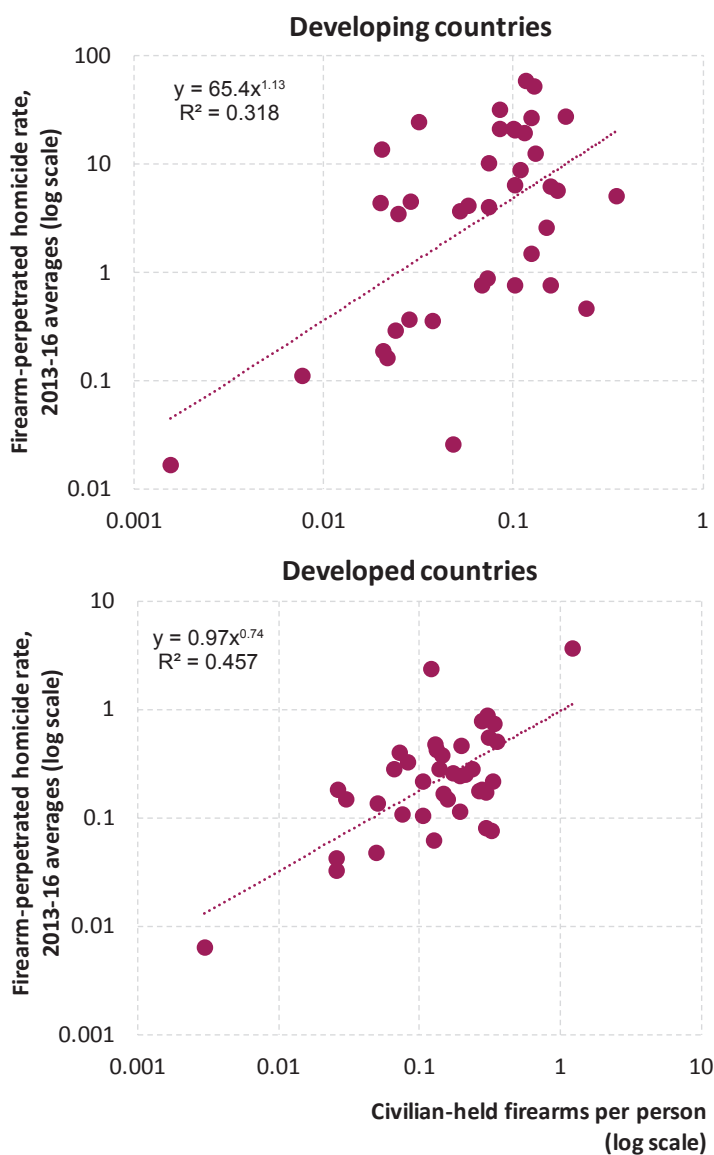
Although firearms account for a significant component of homicides in most countries worldwide, the level of firearms-related homicide, as well as the relative share (proportion) of firearm-related homicides among homicides

4 See UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide*, 2019. Booklet 3, Figure 62.

generally, both vary greatly from country to country. The factors which explain the variation in homicide rates across countries are multiple and complex, and include socio-economic characteristics such as inequality as well as the age composition of a country's population.⁵

Some of these factors can be expected to impact homicide generally, independently of the mechanism of perpetration; in contrast, one aspect which may impact firearms-related homicide specifically is the availability of firearms in the licit market and their ready accessibility to the general population. This aspect is itself complex to measure, but one metric which may be used is the rate of holdings of firearms among the civilian population.⁶

FIG. 10. ... Firearms homicide in relation to civilian holdings of firearms



Sources: UNODC Homicide database (2019); Small Arms Survey.

5 See UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide*, 2019. Booklet 4.
6 Alternative measures would be, for example, the proportion of individuals among the population who hold a firearm, or the proportion of individuals who have access to a firearm within their household.

When this metric is used, alongside other indicators, to model homicide rates at a global level, its role in explaining homicide-related firearms, although statistically significant, appears to be secondary to other factors of a socioeconomic character, factors which may themselves be linked, for example, to the underlying level of development.⁷ However, when considering countries in more homogenous groups, in particular by distinguishing between developed and developing countries,⁸ the impact of civilian-held firearms can be observed more clearly.⁹

Indeed, considering developed and developing countries separately, and using estimates of civilian holdings of firearms published by Small Arms Survey,¹⁰ statistical models suggest that a 1 per cent increase in the rate of possession of firearms (number of civilian-held firearms per person) can be expected to correspond, all other relevant factors being equal, to an increase of 1.13 per cent¹¹ in the homicide rate in the case of developing countries (based on 39 countries determined on the basis of data availability) and 0.74 per cent¹² in the case of developed countries (based on 39 other countries)¹³ (see Figure 10).

7 See UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide*, 2019. Booklet 3, Figure 58.
8 Based on the designation of "developed" and "developing" countries in the standard country or area codes for statistical use maintained by the United Nations Statistical Division.
9 See UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide*, 2019. Booklet 3, page 84.
10 Small Arms Survey, *Estimating Global Civilian-held Firearms Numbers*. Briefing Paper, June 2018 (Annex).
11 95 per cent confidence interval: 0.58-1.68 per cent.
12 95 per cent confidence interval: 0.47-1.00 per cent.
13 See UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide*, 2019. Booklet 3, page 84.