Chapter 4

UNDERSTANDING HOMICIDE

Homicide typologies explained

To improve understanding of fluctuations in homicide trends and help design targeted homicide prevention policies, it is important to disaggregate homicides into different typologies. Previous editions of the Global Study on Homicide have highlighted the prominence of different types of homicide in different countries.1 In some countries, most homicides are related to disputes between individuals who know one another, including members of the same household, while in other countries, a large share of homicides is associated with criminal activities, including those of organized crime groups or gangs. In recognition of these differences, the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS) provides a typology for disaggregation according to the “situational context” of homicides.2 This typology is reflected in the way UNODC collects data from Member States through the United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and the Operation of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS),3 which divides homicide into three broad categories (figure 1):

1. Homicide related to criminal activities
2. Interpersonal homicide
3. Sociopolitical homicide

Each of these three broad categories of homicide types is further subdivided:

a. Homicide related to criminal activities is divided into homicide related to organized criminal groups and gangs, on the one hand, and homicide related to other criminal activities (for example, robbery), on the other.

b. Interpersonal homicide is divided into homicide perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members and other interpersonal homicide perpetrated outside the family context (for example, killings perpetrated by acquaintances or neighbours).

c. Sociopolitical homicide is divided into homicide related to social prejudice, political aims, civil unrest and other sociopolitical agendas (for example, vigilante killings, unlawful killings by the police, or killings resulting from communalism, casteism and class conflict).

This chapter looks at the three main categories of homicide separately and unpacks them in order to analyse their respective importance in the different regions of the world, as well as the trends in and levels of the selected types of homicide included within them (for example, terrorist killings in sociopolitical homicide).

Data limitations related to homicide types

Producing global estimates of homicides by type is challenging due to several interrelated data limitations. First, data on homicide types remain very limited in regions other than the Americas and Europe: of the 66 countries with at least one data point on organized crime-related homicides, 25 are in the Americas and 22 are in Europe, jointly amounting to 70 per cent of the sample. The low coverage in other regions means that regional estimates are skewed towards the homicide characteristics of the few countries that have data in those regions.

Second, many countries report large shares of homicides as “unknown” or “other (unspecified)” types of homicide, which adds considerable uncertainty to national figures on homicide by type. Finland, for example, a country with a robust crime data collection system, reports roughly 50 per cent of its homicides as “unknown” types of homicide. This issue means that regional and global aggregations of homicide by type come with a considerable degree of uncertainty.
Third, countries may have different reasons for focusing their recording and reporting on specific types of homicide (such as intimate partner or organized-crime homicides) as they may be particularly relevant in the national context. This creates selection bias and reduces the representativeness of the available data. It also means that it is difficult to make assumptions about the distribution of homicide types among “unknown” homicides, as this distribution may differ substantially from the distribution of homicide types among all “known” homicides.4

Fourth, national classifications of homicide by situational context may not always neatly correspond to the international classification proposed in ICCS and the frame used by UNODC to collect the data (UN-CTS). In India, for example, the National Crime Records Bureau reports on 28 different “motives of murder”, some of which, such as “dacoity/robbery”, are not readily mapped onto the international classifications of homicide types.5 This means that many countries will only report at the international level on those categories that are more easily mapped onto the international classification, such as intimate partner/family-related homicide, and leave other categories blank.

Globally, the most comprehensive and comparable data on homicide by type are available for intimate partner/family-related homicide (103 countries with at least one data point).6 Data on homicide related to other criminal activities and organized crime are available for a more limited number of countries (80 and 66 countries respectively).

**Homicide types at the global and regional levels**

The available data suggest that, in 2021, at least one in five homicide victims globally (19 per cent) were killed by intimate partners or other family members (figure 2), while at least 1 in 10 victims were killed as a result of another form of interpersonal homicide, such as a means of resolving a conflict or following a dispute between neighbours. Crime-related activities were responsible for at least a quarter of all homicides worldwide in 2021. This includes homicides related to organized criminal groups or gangs, which accounted for at least 13.9 per cent of all homicides. Homicides linked to other crime-related activities, such as robbery, accounted for at least 10.3 per cent of all homicides. However, information on situational context is lacking for 36 per cent of all homicides. When exclusively considering homicides with such information, the share of organized crime/gang-related homicides increases to 22 per cent and the share related to other types of crime to 16 per cent.
Sociopolitical homicide, which includes terrorist killings that meet the ICCS criteria¹ and homicide related to civil unrest, accounted for at least 9 per cent of all homicides globally in 2021. Unlike other categories of homicide, sociopolitical homicides are recorded by a much more limited set of countries and they are much more difficult to estimate at the global level. As highlighted by the examples of Mali and Nigeria later in this chapter, however, they can represent an important share of homicidal violence in countries subject to political instability and/or facing the threat of terrorism.²

The data in figure 2 on the share of homicide by situational context out of all homicides (including unknown) are based on roughly two thirds of homicides globally. The share of homicide by situational context is calculated by dividing the number of homicides reported for each situational context by the total number of homicides, giving an indication of the lowest plausible share of all homicides that can be attributed to each type at the global level. This method gives a conservative estimate of the respective share of different homicide types as it assumes homicides with an “unknown” situational context do not belong to any of the categories of “known” situational context.³ Indeed, homicides with “unknown” situational context represent slightly more than one third of all homicides in countries with data.

The best estimates shown in figure 3 are obtained by redistributing homicides with an “unknown” situational context under the assumption that they are as likely to fall under one of the “known” categories as the homicides that have information on the situational context. This may not be true for all categories, however, as it may be more difficult to find information on homicides committed by organized criminal groups or gangs than by intimate partners/other family members, thus making the former more likely to be categorized as having an “unknown” situational context. For this reason, figure 3 also includes “upper bounds” for all categories, which correspond to the theoretical situation that all “unknown” homicides correspond to one category only.

The situational context of homicides varies significantly between the different regions of the world, as highlighted in figure 3 by the two regions with good coverage of homicides by situational context, namely the Americas and Europe. The lack of sufficient coverage of homicides by situational context in Africa, Asia and Oceania means that regional estimates of homicide by situational context are not reliable enough to be published for those regions.⁴

Intimate partner/family-related homicide is by far the most common type of homicide in Europe, accounting for about 7 out of 10 homicides for which a situational context
Around 7,500 such killings (1.4 per 100,000 female population) were recorded in the Americas in 2021, while around 2,500 such killings (0.6 per 100,000 female population) were recorded in Europe.

Homicide types at the national level

Global and regional estimates of different types of homicide mask considerable variations across countries, including within the same region or subregion. However, a distinct pattern is clearly visible when considering country-level homicide typologies together with country-level homicide rates: countries with a relatively high overall homicide rate, such as Belize, El Salvador and Jamaica, also tend to have a larger share of organized crime-related or other crime-related homicide (figure 4).

By contrast, countries with a relatively low homicide rate, such as Germany, Spain and the Republic of Korea, tend to have a larger share of intimate partner/family-related homicide (figure 4), a pattern that appears to hold across regions and countries with available data. Many countries, regardless of whether they have a low or high homicide rate, report large shares of homicides in the "unknown" category (figure 4). This suggests there is a need to improve national methodologies for classifying homicide and to align them more closely with the international standards of ICCS.
Nigeria: homicide estimates by homicide type using population surveys

Collaboration between UNODC and National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) of Nigeria culminated in two editions of the National Survey on Quality and Integrity of Public Services, the findings of which were described in detail in two published reports. The surveys were major collections of data from representative samples of the residents of Nigeria (33,067 in 2016 and 32,689 in 2019) on topics such as their experiences with public services, their attitudes to government, and crime victimization. As a key part of the surveys, UNODC and NBS developed and implemented an innovative methodology for estimating homicide victimization. Specifically, respondents were asked a series of questions about homicide victimization involving their household members in the three years preceding the data collection. In addition, the survey contained follow-up questions about the legality and context of such killings, which enabled their alignment with the ICCS definition of intentional homicide to be verified.

The year 2016 reflects a yearly average between May 2013 and April 2016, while 2019 is a yearly average between June 2016 and 2019. Confidence intervals are at a confidence level of 95 per cent.

It is estimated that the total homicide rate in Nigeria in 2016 was 34.4 per 100,000 population. A comparatively high rate that placed Nigeria among the countries with the highest homicide rates in the world. The estimated rate declined in the 2019 edition of the survey, however, to 21.5 per 100,000 population; while still high, some 37.5 per cent lower than in the 2019 edition of the survey, however, to 21.5 per 100,000 population; while still high, some 37.5 per cent lower than in 2019, from 20.9 to 10.1 per 100,000 (-51.8 per cent). Killings defined as intentional homicide fall under three possible categories in relation to their situational context. Killings stemming from criminal attack include killings related to another crime such as a robbery, assault, gang fight, illegal ritual, etc. Killings stemming from criminal attack include killings related to another crime such as a robbery, assault, gang fight, illegal ritual, etc. The rate of this type of homicide increased slightly (13.7 per cent) from 2016 to 2019, from 9.1 to 10.3 per 100,000. In 2019, such attacks were actually the most common situational context for homicides in Nigeria. Sociopolitical killings, such as those resulting from political disputes, inter-ethnic violence and terrorist attacks underwent a steep decline from 2016 to 2019, from 20.9 to 10.1 per 100,000 (-51.8 per cent). Killings stemming from personal conflict (for example, revenge or questions about the legality and context of such killings, which enabled their alignment with the ICCS definition of intentional homicide to be verified.

The figure below disaggregates the total homicide rate across each of Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones. Since the sub-samples by zone are relatively small, the estimates are more imprecise, nonetheless, point-estimates indicate a decrease in the homicide rate in the North East (-42.6 per cent), North West (-32.7 per cent) and, most intensively, North Central (-75.3 per cent). By contrast, the picture is mixed in the south, with a steep decline in the South East (-69.5 per cent) but with an increase in South South (31.9 per cent) and South West (283.2 per cent), which includes Lagos. The decrease in the estimated homicide rate, in particular in the northern zones of Nigeria, mirrors a decline in the number and lethality of terrorist incidents attributable to Boko Haram, Fulani extremists and other armed groups. One factor contributing to the decreasing fatalities in the period covered by the surveys is that Boko Haram shifted from highly lethal bombings towards armed assault and hostage taking. As a result, the lethality of Boko Haram’s attacks fell dramatically, from 15 deaths per attack in 2014 to 4 per attack in 2019.

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family-related), the least prevalent of the three in 2016, also declined, from 4.4 to 1.1 per 100,000 in 2019 (-74.9 per cent).

When looking at the rate of intentional homicide by mechanism of killing in Nigeria in 2016 and 2019, the most prevalent were killings committed using firearms, at a rate of 16.5 per 100,000 in 2016, although firearm homicides underwent a steep decline to 8.7 per 100,000 in 2019 (-47.3 per cent). Homicides committed using an explosive or another non-specified means were much less prevalent than firearm homicides in 2016, at 4.5 and 9.6 per 100,000, respectively, but they also underwent a steep decline in 2019, when homicide by explosives decreased to 3.2 per 100,000 (-28.8 per cent) and homicide by another non-specified means decreased to 4.7 per 100,000 (-51.2 per cent). The single homicide mechanism that increased between 2016 and 2019 was homicide committed using knives, which increased from 3.8 to 4.9 per 100,000, an increase of 29.3 per cent.

FIG. 4 Share of homicides by type, selected countries, 2021 or latest available year

Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

Note: Countries and territories with fewer than 100 homicides in 2021 or latest available year, or with more than 85 per cent of all homicides recorded as having “unknown causes” have been removed.
If gender-related killings of women and girls are to be prevented and brought to an end, the full extent of this crime needs to be grasped and its complexity untangled. Gender-related killings often go unrecorded as such and when they are, often lack consistency and completeness. Improving the availability, quality and timeliness of data on this phenomenon helps assess progress and setbacks in reducing such killings and support evidence-based policymaking and an effective criminal justice response. Identifying and recording gender-related killings of women and girls and producing statistics on them require a granular system of data collection and reporting in which all data providers follow a standardized approach when collecting and integrating the data.

In March 2022, at its fifty-third session, the United Nations Statistical Commission approved a statistical framework that guides countries in the development of such a system. The process that resulted in the approval of the framework started in 2019, when the Commission stressed the need to improve data on the characteristics of victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence and to measure and monitor the effectiveness of State responses to the phenomenon. Following a request by the Commission, UNODC and UN Women jointly launched a global consultation to assess the validity of the characteristics for determining the gender-related motivation of crime, their relevance to the development of evidence-based prevention policies and their feasibility in terms of the technical and operational capacity of national institutions to produce corresponding data. Some 54 countries responded to the call and participated in the global consultation.

Based on the results of the global consultation, in 2022, the United Nations Statistical Commission endorsed the “Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killings of women and girls (femicide/feminicide)” developed by UNODC and UN Women, with support from the UNODC-INEGI Center of Excellence on Statistical Information on Government, Crime, Victimization and Justice and the UN Women-INEGI Global Centre of Excellence on Gender Statistics. The Statistical framework recognizes the structural causes resulting in gender-related killings, including unequal power relations, and acknowledges that “femicide/feminicide” may take place both in the private and public spheres, or even when there is no existing relationship between victim and perpetrator. Moreover, the framework ensures the international comparability of data on “femicide/feminicide”, since it provides a standard statistical definition of gender-related killings of women and girls (femicide/feminicide) and identifies the “data blocks” that can characterize killings that are gender motivated, independently from the specific national legislation related to such killings. The framework builds on the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS) by disaggregating variables on the victims, perpetrators, contexts and mechanisms of killings.

The Statistical framework is aimed at assisting national statistical offices, institutions within the criminal justice and public health systems, mechanisms for the advancement of women and gender equality, civil society organizations and academia in harmonizing data collection both within countries and across countries and regions.

### Data blocks for collecting and aggregating statistics on gender-related killings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women and girls killed by intimate partners</th>
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<tr>
<td>Women and girls killed by family members</td>
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Based on the evidence that killings by intimate partners or other family members are to a large extent based on gender-related factors.

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Women and girls killed by other known/unknown perpetrator where the homicide modus operandi meets at least one of these criteria

- Previous record of harassment/violence
- Illegal deprivation of her liberty
- Use of force and/or mutilation
- Body disposed of in a public space
- Hate crime
- Sexual violence was committed before
- Victim was working in the sex industry
- Victim of forms of illegal exploitation

Operational criteria to capture the gender-related factors

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Trends in homicide types

Relatively limited national time series data on homicide types mean that a global trend analysis is not possible. Nevertheless, available time series data on homicide types from several countries in the Americas and Europe suggest both commonalities and differences across the two regions. In the Americas, the available data suggest that trends in homicide related to organized crime and gangs are significantly more volatile than trends in homicide perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members. In the sample of countries in the region with complete time series data for the period 2015–2021 (six countries), the average rate of homicide related to organized crime and gangs dropped significantly, from roughly 12 victims per 100,000 population in 2015 to 7 victims in 2020 (followed by an uptick in 2021 to 9 victims). Much of the decline can be attributed to a reduction in organized crime-related homicides in countries in Central America such as El Salvador and Jamaica up until the end of 2019 (figure 5). By contrast, the average rate of intimate partner/family-related homicide remained comparatively stable in the six countries in the Americas with complete time series data.

FIG. 5  Trends in homicide types in six countries in the Americas with available data, 2015–2021

In Europe, trends in organized crime-related homicide exhibit less volatility than in the Americas and trends in intimate partner/family-related homicide are comparably stable (figure 5). In the sample of European countries with complete time series data (six countries), the average rates of intimate partner/family-related homicide remained relatively stable over the period 2015–2021, at around 0.4 victims per 100,000 population per year. The average rate of organized crime-related homicides also remained relatively stable over the period, albeit with an increase around 2016, which was driven by an increase in such killings in France and Italy, and thereafter declined until 2020 (figure 6).

FIG. 6  Trends in homicide types in six countries in Europe with available data, 2015–2021

The main difference between Europe and the Americas in terms of trends in homicide by type is that, in European countries with available trend data, intimate partner/family-related homicide consistently accounts for a significantly larger number of victims (by a factor of five) than organized crime-related homicide. By contrast, in the Americas, organized crime-related homicide consistently accounts for a larger number of victims than intimate partner/family-related homicide, despite the highly volatile trend exhibited by the former (figure 5).

Interpersonal homicide

Interpersonal homicide manifests itself in the context of violent interactions between people, be they intimate partners, family members, acquaintances or even strangers. The defining characteristic of interpersonal homicide is that the intentional killing of another person is a means of resolving a conflict and/or punishing the victim rather than of pursuing a secondary goal such as another crime or political agenda. The relationship between victim and perpetrator can be used to distinguish between different types of interpersonal homicide, specifically between interpersonal homicide within the family – committed by intimate partners or other family members – and interpersonal homicide outside the family – committed, for example, by neighbours, acquaintances or people unknown to the victim.

The global availability of data on interpersonal homicide perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members has improved in recent years, but the extent of other types of interpersonal homicide perpetrated outside the family remains difficult to assess because of the limited coverage and comparability of data. Moreover, national homicide recording systems and classifications can vary...
considerably across countries, meaning that, within the broader category of intentional homicide, it is not always possible to distinguish victims of interpersonal homicide perpetrated outside the family sphere from, for example, victims of sociopolitical or crime-related homicide.

**Interpersonal homicide within the family**

Interpersonal homicide occurring within the family has a clear gender dimension. Although roughly 8 out of 10 homicide victims worldwide in 2021 were men and boys (81 per cent) and 2 out of 10 were women and girls, the available data show that women and girls are disproportionately affected by homicidal violence within the family, perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members (figure 7). Out of all female homicide victims worldwide in 2021, some 56 per cent were killed by intimate partners or other family members, clearly indicating that the most dangerous place for women and girls remains the home. Moreover, since there is no information on the victim-perpetrator relationship in around 4 out 10 killings of women and girls, the share could be much larger.

By contrast, men and boys are primarily at risk of being killed by someone outside their family. Out of all male homicide victims in 2021, around 11 per cent were killed by intimate partners or other family members, although the share could also be larger as in many cases there is likewise no information on the victim-perpetrator relationship in killings of men and boys.

Women and girls being disproportionately affected by homicidal violence in the family is a pattern observed in all regions of the world, although some regional differences are observable in the female and male burdens of homicidal violence within the family. In regions with overall lower levels of intentional homicide (both within and outside the family sphere) such as Europe and Asia, the share of male homicides related to violence within the family is larger, at nearly 20 per cent, than in regions with very high levels of homicidal violence such as Africa, where the share is less than 10 per cent (figure 8).

The gender dimension of lethal violence within the family is even more apparent when exclusively considering homicides committed by current or former intimate partners and excluding those committed by other family members. In such cases, women and girls bear an even more disproportionate burden, accounting for an average of 7 out of 10 (71 per cent) of all victims of intimate partner homicides in the 75 countries and territories with available data.
The killing of women and girls by intimate partners and other family members is used as an indicator for gender-related killing of women and girls, also known as “femicide/feminicide”. Gender-related killings are committed in a variety of contexts by different perpetrators, but available data only allow for an estimate of killings perpetrated by family members and intimate partners.¹⁷

**Unpacking intimate partner and family-related homicide**

Distinguishing between female homicides committed by intimate partners and those committed by other family members (including siblings, parents, etc.) reveals both important commonalities and differences across regions and countries (figure 9). In general, countries that record higher rates of female intimate partner homicide also tend to record higher rates of female family-related homicide.¹⁸ However, rates of female intimate partner homicide exhibit much greater variability across countries in various regions than rates of female family-related homicide (figure 9). In Latin America and the Caribbean in particular (11 countries), women and girls are significantly more likely to be killed by intimate partners than by other family members, whereas the shares of female intimate partner and family-related homicides tend to be more equal in countries in other regions. Notable exceptions are several countries in Asia and Eastern Europe with available data, where the rate of female family-related homicide exceeds that of female intimate partner homicide. These findings suggest that, depending on the region or country, interventions aimed at reducing killings of women and girls in the family need to target different types of perpetrators.

**Trends in female intimate partner/family-related homicide**

Since the availability of data on intimate partner/family-related homicide of women and girls is greater than for men and boys, trends in female intimate partner/family-related homicide can be analysed in greater depth than those in male intimate partner/family-related homicide. The greater availability of data on female homicide perpetrated in the family sphere may be attributed to the greater attention paid by Governments, researchers and civil society organizations to the problem of gender-related killings of women and girls (also referred to as “femicide” or “feminicide”),¹⁹ with female intimate partner/family-related homicides making up the largest proportion of such gender-related killings.²⁰ Moreover, the recently developed international statistical framework by UNODC and UN Women (discussed above) for improving the standardization and comparability of...
Belief in witchcraft or sorcery, understood here as the ability of people to intentionally cause harm through supernatural means, remains widespread across the globe. Witchcraft or sorcery is often used to explain misfortune such as sickness, death, natural disaster and financial ruin, and in some contexts can lead people to accuse and attack those perceived as being witches. This can lead to their torture, banishment, forced public nudity, cutting of body parts and amputation of limbs, burning and killing. Intentional killings of people accused of witchcraft or sorcery have been reported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) across 60 countries during the past decade, with most victims recorded in Africa, Asia and the Pacific Islands, but there have also been some cases in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France and the United States of America. The Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killing of women and girls counts killings of this type as “femicide.”

According to OHCHR, 5,250 killings were reported in online sources during the period 2009–2019, the exact number is unknown and is likely to be significantly higher owing to under-reporting. In addition, there have been reported rapes, mutilations and killings of individuals for the purposes of using their body parts in witchcraft practices or rituals. Killings of individuals accused of being witches and ritual attacks are highly secretive crimes and the community is often complicit in their perpetration, making official reporting to authorities irregular at best. In Malawi, for example, perceived impunity has been reported in court sentences for crimes against people with albinism that do not reflect the gravity of the crimes committed, decreasing the deterrent effect of the law. This perceived impunity can indirectly contribute to such attacks.

The United Nations independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, reported that in some countries, people with albinism are killed for their body parts due to the belief that they can be used to produce talismans or potions that will bring about financial success, cure illness or provide some other form of good luck. The inadequacy of data means that trends in this type of homicide are not clear, although the numbers of victims are clearly not diminishing in many parts of the world. Some data suggest that this type of homicide is even contagious and is spreading to environments such as refugee communities and diaspora communities, and affecting new classes of victims, including children. Extensive historical, anthropological and sociological literature has demonstrated that anxiety, precarity and uncertainty provoked by sudden social and environmental change lend themselves to the scapegoating of individuals through accusations of witchcraft.

Because of the difficulties involved in reporting cases, often the most comprehensive data available comes from local print-based newspapers. An analysis based on the two main local newspapers in Papua New Guinea from 1996–2021 found a total of 655 reported deaths following accusations of sorcery (see figure below). The incomplete nature of the data means that drawing conclusions from such trends is not easy, as reporting is heavily contingent on where reporters are stationed and their interest in the issue. However, the main message from the data is that the issue is continuous and significant rather than merely sporadic. Moreover, an additional study of sorcery accusation-related violence in four provinces of Papua New Guinea found that most incidents are committed by large groups, with 34 per cent of incidents committed by groups of more than 20 people and 40 per cent committed by groups of 5 to 20 people.

In many countries, including India and countries in Africa, women and girls are the main targets of such accusations and killings, but men and boys also fall victim to them in some locations, such as Kenya and parts of Papua New Guinea. The age of victims also varies and tends to depend on where such killings take place: in some societies, widowed older women...
include the role played by the church. The Pan African Parliament, United Nations General Assembly, Resolution adopted by the Human Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on the elimination of harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft and sorcery have only recently started to receive international attention.

Despite the extreme forms of harm involved, the human rights abuses carried out as a result of a belief in witchcraft and sorcery have only recently started to receive international attention. In 2021, for example, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on the elimination of harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks. Furthermore, in 2022, the Pan African Parliament adopted guidelines on eliminating harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks.

Cases of sorcery accusation-related murders reported in newspapers in Papua New Guinea

![Graph showing cases of sorcery accusation-related murders reported in newspapers in Papua New Guinea](image)

Source: Newspaper reporting of Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence (SARV), Australian National University SARV project.

are common targets while children are targets in others, especially those living in step-families. In Africa in particular, revised understandings of witchcraft that increasingly focus suspicion on children have recently emerged. A study carried out in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, revealed the related dynamics, including the role played by the church.

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Despite improvements in the availability and comparability of disaggregated data on female intimate partner/family-related homicide over the past decade, significant data gaps remain, especially in countries in Africa, Asia and Oceania. In some cases, these data gaps can be attributed to a lack of reporting mechanisms among subnational, national and international data producers. In other cases, such homicides are simply not recorded by or reported to the police or other competent authorities. In light of these data limitations, Europe and the Americas are currently the only two regions where data availability allows for the estimation over time of trends in female intimate partner/family-related homicide. Even in those two regions, however, it is possible that the actual number of female intimate partner/family-related homicides is higher, as data on the victim-perpetrator relationship is not available in all cases.

The overall picture that emerges is one of relative stability in the absolute number of annual killings at the regional level. Between 2010 and 2021, Europe experienced a decrease of 21 per cent in the number of female intimate partner/family-related homicides, albeit with different patterns between subregions and with signs of reversals in the downward trend since 2020 in some, including Western and Southern Europe. By contrast, the Americas saw an increase of 6 per cent over the same period, although in South America the trend moved in the opposite direction. Population growth in Europe and the Americas, led to a decline in the rate of female intimate partner/family-related homicide in both regions between 2010 and 2021, although more markedly in Europe, at more than more than 20 per cent, than in the Americas, at less than 4 per cent. A detailed analysis of patterns and trends in female intimate partner/family-related homicide including 2022 data is provided in a separate research brief, published in tandem with the Global Study on Homicide 2023.

**Trends in male intimate partner/family-related homicide**

Europe and Northern America are currently the only regions where data availability allows for the estimation of trends over time in male homicides perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members. In Northern, Southern and Western Europe, the annual number of men and boys killed by partners or other family members remained relatively stable between 2010 and 2021 and at relatively low levels, typically fewer than 200 killings, in each region (figure 10). By contrast, there was a steady increase in the number of male intimate partner/family-related homicides in Northern America from 2012, with a noticeable uptick
since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (figure 11). Meanwhile, the annual number of male intimate partner/family-related homicides fluctuated in Eastern Europe between 2010 and 2021, with a substantial spike in killings around 2015, followed by a decline up until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (figure 11).

The comparison of male and female intimate partner/family-related homicide data in Northern America and Europe suggests that the male and female trends tend to move in tandem over time, with some notable exceptions such as the aforementioned spike in male victims in Eastern Europe around 2015. Nevertheless, the female intimate partner/family-related homicide rate tends to be higher than the male rate, other than in Eastern Europe, where there are usually more male victims than female victims. The difference in Eastern Europe can be explained primarily by a pattern observed in the Russian Federation, where the number of male homicides committed by other family members (not intimate partners) tends to exceed the number of female homicides committed by other family members by a factor of roughly two.

**Interpersonal homicide outside the family**

In comparison to homicide perpetrated within the family, interpersonal homicide outside the family is more difficult to record and quantify systematically. This is because in many cases the necessary information on both the victim-perpetrator relationship and the situational context of the crime is not readily available. Certain forms of interpersonal homicide outside the family occur in situations in which the livelihoods of communities are threatened and relations between the inhabitants of those communities are consequently under strain. For example, interpersonal homicide may occur because of disputes over access to land and competition over other resources that are essential for human survival such as water. Insecure land tenure in particular can provoke disputes and result in violence.

Data on interpersonal homicides that can be attributed to land disputes are not widely available, but in selected countries with available data, some insights can be gained. In Kenya, for example, deaths resulting from cattle rustling and stock theft incidents have been on the rise since 2017, with the number of killings increasing sharply (by 170 per cent) from 2020 to 2021 (figure 12). Such incidents take place primarily among pastoralist communities in the North Rift counties. In recent years, the increasing occurrence of drought has led to greater competition for water and grazing land for animals, which has led to an increase in raids and violence.

In India, violent deaths caused by disputes over property or land accounted for some 16 per cent of all interpersonal murders between 2019 and 2021 (figure 13). In general, land conflicts in India are spread among activities such as infrastructure, forestry and land use, and can involve conflicts over both common and private land. Indeed, land laws and land accusation were also found to make up a substantial proportion of the Supreme Court’s caseload between 1993 and 2011.
Disputes over access to water are a prominent driver of interpersonal homicide outside the family. In recent years, population growth, economic expansion and climate change have impacted water security in many regions of the world, which in combination with other societal and political factors has led to increased violence associated with water disputes.\(^3\) Data from the Pacific Institute show that the number of incidents of violence associated with water resources has risen substantially since 2015, with most incidents reported in Southern Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Central America.\(^3\) Although systematic and cross-national data on the number of homicides related to this type of dispute are unavailable, country-specific data can highlight the potential gravity of the issue. Between January and September 2018, for example, over 1,700 violent deaths resulting from violence between farmers and pastoralists over the scarcity of water and land resources were reported in western and central Nigeria.\(^3\) Moreover, 0.5 per cent of all interpersonal murders recorded in India in the period 2019-2021 can be attributed to conflict over water (figure 13).

**Crime-related homicide**

Crime-related homicide, both linked to organized crime and other crimes such as robbery, accounts for almost 4 out of 10 homicides with a known typology worldwide (figure 3). From 2015 to 2021, organized crime was responsible for close to 700,000 deaths, as many as those resulting from armed conflicts during the same period (figure 14).\(^3\) Although about four out of every five of those deaths occurred in the Americas, organized-crime related homicide is prevalent in all regions.

The following section examines the specific ways that organized crime contributes to homicidal violence, with a focus on Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean. The majority of organized crime-related homicides worldwide take place in the Americas, where roughly half of all homicide victims in 2021 were linked to organized crime (figure 3). In Europe, available evidence suggests that organized crime-related homicide is on the increase as a result of drug trafficking.

Organized crime-related homicide also occurs in other regions. In the case of Africa, however, a lack of data makes a quantitative analysis similar to that of the Americas and Europe a challenge. Nevertheless, this section includes two short analyses that focus on South Africa and the Sahel region, which illustrate the type of organized crime-related

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**FIG. 12** Deaths resulting from cattle rustling and stock theft incidents in Kenya, 2014–2021


**FIG. 13** Interpersonal murders by type in India, 2019–2021

Source: National Crime Record Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, India.

*Note: The other interpersonal category includes murders related to honour killing, love affairs, illicit relationships, personal vendetta or enmity, dowry, witchcraft, psychopath or serial killers, lunacy, road rage and rape.*

**FIG. 14** Organized crime-related homicides and armed conflict deaths, 2015–2021

Source: Organized crime-related homicide estimates based on UNODC homicide statistics. Conflict death estimates are from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute Oslo (UCDP/PRIO) Armed Conflict Dataset (available at https://ucdp.uu.se/exploratory ) and include deaths from state-based violence, non-state violence, and one-sided violence.
violence that may affect other parts of Africa. The level of homicidal violence is generally much lower in Asia than the global average and the limited available data indicate that organized crime is responsible for a small share of homicides in that region. Asia is discussed in greater detail in the sections on interpersonal and sociopolitical homicide in this chapter.

**Organized crime as a driver of homicide trends: a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean**

Nowhere is homicidal violence caused by organized crime more prevalent than in Latin America and the Caribbean, the subregion with the highest homicide rate worldwide. Although absolute numbers and rates vary across subregions, countries and cities, comparatively high levels of lethal violence are persistent in Latin America and the Caribbean. One reason for this is the dynamic and dense ecosystem of organized criminal groups, including hundreds of drug trafficking organizations, mafia syndicates, gangs and militia, that alternately cooperate, collude and compete for the control of illegal markets. The incidence of lethal violence has also been attributed to other factors such as illicit drug markets, the proliferation of firearms and militarized crime control interventions. Across Latin America and the Caribbean, homicidal violence also correlates with structural risks such as weak rule of law, high levels of impunity, social and income inequality and youth unemployment.

The intensity and scale of homicidal violence is unevenly distributed in Latin America and the Caribbean. Countries, states and cities that register comparatively high and volatile rates of homicidal violence also experience disputes between rival criminal factions, public security forces and local communities. Notwithstanding high levels of intimate partner and interpersonal violence across the subregion, rapid surges in lethal violence are often a result of competition involving armed groups, as well as military and police action. Moreover, countries, states, cities and border areas with a high concentration of rival criminal factions typically experience high rates of lethal violence. Likewise, prisons and detention facilities housing members of multiple criminal organizations tend to have a high risk of outbreaks of lethal violence.

Homicidal violence is a result of multiple risk factors, at least three of which contribute to above-average homicide rates across Latin America and the Caribbean. First, record-breaking drug production and trafficking lead to changes in the geography of lethal violence, as criminal organizations may use violence to protect plantations, transhipment routes and retail outlets. Second, the proliferation and fragmentation of heavily-armed criminal groups and subsequent responses to crime influence the scale and scope of homicidal violence. Depending on whether criminal organizations dominate, form pacts or splinter, they may be inclined to resort to lethal violence. Third, the use of firearms increases the risk of lethal outcomes in violent disputes between rival criminal groups. Weak gun control and/or poor enforcement in supply and destination markets can result in high-calibre weapons falling into the hands of criminal organizations. When these three factors converge, homicide is more likely to increase.

**FIG. 15** Homicide rates (per 100,000 population) and share of homicide by type (percentage) in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021 or latest year

Source: UNODC homicide statistics.
Subregional homicide trends

Homicide rates have been high in Latin America and the Caribbean for decades and remained so, even increasing in some areas, during the COVID19 pandemic,
\(^{46,47}\) despite declines in other forms of violent and non-violent crime.\(^{48}\) Latin America and the Caribbean not only consistently has the highest homicide rate of any subregion, but also had the highest proportion of homicides involving organized crime worldwide in 2021 (figure 3). Moreover, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean reported the highest proportion of homicides involving both male victims and firearms.\(^{49}\) In 2021, 8 of the 10 countries with the highest homicide rates\(^{50}\) worldwide were located in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Notwithstanding the high subregional homicide rate, there is considerable spatial and temporal variation across Latin America and the Caribbean. Homicide trends have fluctuated between and within the different parts of the subregion since 2010, including during the height of the COVID19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 (figure 16). In the Caribbean, annual changes in the number of homicide victims fluctuated between +12 per cent and -13 per cent between 2010 and 2021. By comparison, the fluctuation in Central America was between +11 per cent and -8 per cent during the same period and in South America, between +7 per cent and -12 per cent. More recently, at the national level, 13 countries registered increases in homicidal violence between 2021 and 2022 (most notably Ecuador and Haiti) and 11 countries reported decreases (most notably El Salvador and Mexico).

The Caribbean has experienced the most dramatic increase in homicidal violence in recent years, largely because of intense competition between gangs over drug markets. In 2022, the number of homicides in the Turks and Caicos Islands, a transit point between the Bahamas, Colombia and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), climbed to 28 in October 2022, compared with 13 during the whole of 2021.\(^{51}\) In Jamaica, the homicide rate reached 53.3 per 100,000 in 2022, with about 70 per cent of homicides being connected to organized criminal groups or gangs in 2021. Saint Lucia recorded a homicide rate of 36.7 per 100,000 in 2022, a slight decrease from the previous year, while Saint Vincent and Grenadines reported a homicide rate of 40.4 per 100,000. Meanwhile, the homicide rate in Trinidad and Tobago rose to 39.5 per 100,000 in 2022, an increase of more than 30 per cent from the previous year, largely due to the splintering of large gangs into smaller violent factions. The homicide rate reached 31.2 per 100,000 in the Bahamas in 2022, and in Haiti, it surged to 18 per 100,000 in 2022, an increase of more than 35 per cent from 2021, due in large part to deepening tensions associated with gang-violence.\(^{52}\)

By contrast, the homicide rate stabilized and decreased in several countries in Central America. Despite continuing to experience the highest level of lethal violence in the subregion, Honduras saw its homicide rate decline to 35.1 per 100,000 in 2022 after crackdowns led to the dismantlement of over 38 gangs, according to national police media statements.\(^{53}\) This represents a decrease of 8.1 per cent from 2021 and the lowest homicide rate in the country since the beginning of the century. Belize and Panama also experienced a decrease in the homicide rate from 2021 to 2022, from 31.3 to 27.9 per 100,000 in the case of Belize, and from 12.6 to 11.3 per 100,000 in the case of Panama. By far the most significant decline occurred in El Salvador, however, where there were 7.8 homicides per 100,000 in 2022 compared with 106.8 in 2015. Anti-gang crackdowns\(^{54}\) and the imprisonment of more than 72,000 alleged gang members since the implementation of the state of emergency in March 2022\(^{55}\) are credited by the Government for the sharp decline in the homicide rate in El Salvador.\(^{56}\) Elsewhere, Mexico's high homicide rate of 26.1 per 100,000 decreased slightly from 2021 to 2022.\(^{57}\) An exception to the decreasing trend in Central America is Costa Rica, which has experienced an uptick in the homicide rate in recent years, reaching 12.8 per 100,000 in 2022 as organized crime groups have been fighting for control of the port of Limón, a key distribution node to Europe.

Homicide trends have been more heterogeneous in South America, with countries long associated with a high homicide rate registering decreases and those with low levels of lethal violence registering increases. The homicide rate of Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), for example, declined from 41 per 100,000 in 2019 to 19.3 in 2021. Colombia also experienced a slight decline in the national homicide rate in recent years. Citing decreases in other forms of violent and non-violent crime.\(^{48}\)
### Table 1: Homicide level in the Caribbean, 2019–2022 (total and rate per 100,000 population)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>Homicide rate</td>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>Homicide rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antigua and Barbuda</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayman Islands</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>#N/A</td>
<td>#N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominica</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>1,026</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti*</td>
<td>#N/A</td>
<td>#N/A</td>
<td>1,280</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>1,333</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Kitts and Nevis</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Lucia</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Vincent and the Grenadines</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Box Provisional data for 2021 and 2022 from the Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Planning and Development, Trinidad and Tobago.

Source: Data submitted by countries through the United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS), from governmental sources, or other sources reviewed by countries.

### Table 2: Homicide level in countries in Central America, 2019–2022 (total and rate per 100,000 population)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>Homicide rate</td>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>Homicide rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica*</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>2,398</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>1,341</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>4,387</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>3,292</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras*</td>
<td>4,078</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>3,613</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>36,661</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>36,773</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>#N/A</td>
<td>#N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data from Costa Rica Observatorio de la Violencia, “Homicidio doloso”.

Box Data for 2022 from Honduras Secretaría de Seguridad Policía Nacional, “Comportamiento de los homicidios en Honduras año 2022”.

Source: Data submitted by countries through the United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS), from governmental sources, or other sources reviewed by countries.
### Table 3: Homicide level in countries in South America, 2019–2022 (total and rate per 100,000 population)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>Homicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>2,308</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2,418</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia (Plurinational State of)</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>44,073</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>47,722</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1,115</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>11,750</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>11,452</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>1,187</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1,372</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guyana</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>2,385</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1,903</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suriname</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)</td>
<td>11,874</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>8,384</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data from Ministry of Health of Brazil, Information Technology Department of the United Health System (DATASUS).
* Data from Paraguay General Directorate of Prevention and Safety, “Estadisticas de homicidios años 2018 al 2022”.

Source: Data submitted by countries with the United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS), from governmental sources, or other sources reviewed by countries.

rate, from 25.7 per 100,000 in 2021 to 25.4 in 2022, with the rate being generally higher in areas where armed groups such as ex-combatants of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) were more active. A slight decrease in the homicide rate, from 4.6 per 100,000 in 2021 to 4.3 in 2022, was also recorded in Argentina. That said, the province of Santa Fe and the city of Rosario in particular have experienced a surge in homicides, reportedly owing to rivalries between two local drug factions, the Monos and Clan Alvarado. In Brazil, the homicide rate remained steady, at roughly 21.3 per 100,000 in 2021. After 2019, the second lowest homicide rate in the country since 2000. However, the north and north-east of Brazil remain violence hotspots owing to tensions between the competing drug factions, Primeiro Comando da Capital and Comando Vermelho.

Conversely, several countries in South America have experienced rising homicide rates of late, linked in large part to tensions between criminal groups. In 2022, Ecuador experienced by far the sharpest rise in the homicide rate in the subregion, to 27 per 100,000, almost double the homicide rate recorded in 2021. This surge in homicidal violence is attributed to intense clashes between rival transnational and local drug factions, in Esmeralda and Guayaquil in particular. Although less dramatic, Uruguay reported a 25.8 per cent increase in homicide to 11.2 per 100,000 in 2022. Chile also experienced an increase in homicide, of 45.1 per cent, from 4.6 per 100,000 in 2021 to 6.7 in 2022, with the increase attributed to criminal gangs involved in trafficking in persons, drug trafficking and the timber mafia. Paraguay, however, reported a slight decrease in homicide, from 7.8 per 100,000 in 2021 to 7.0 in 2022.

**Role of firearms**

A key factor contributing to the disproportionately high rates of lethal violence in Latin America and the Caribbean is access to and misuse of firearms. In contrast to bladed weapons and blunt objects, firearms amplify the speed and scale of intentional and unintentional homicide. It is not necessarily the availability of firearms (for example, ownership) that is the key determinant, but rather weak oversight and control and the impunity associated with their use. Handguns such as revolvers and pistols, and to a lesser extent semi- and automatic rifles of various calibres and makes, are frequently procured and misused by criminal factions to settle disputes. A study of a sample of prison inmates in Belize, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago, for example, described mixed motives for acquiring an illicit firearm, including personal protection, peer pressure, the pursuit of criminal activity and financial considerations.
Drug gangs and surging violence in Ecuador

After years of a comparatively low rate of violent crime, Ecuador is experiencing an unprecedented escalation of lethal violence. Homicidal violence increased by roughly 407 per cent between 2016 and 2022 in the country, and the latest surge in homicides representing an increase of 94.7 per cent from 2021 to 2022 has been linked to increasingly violent competition between rival drug trafficking gangs. For example, a number of criminal organizations are disputing lucrative cocaine routes, including in Guayaquil, home to one of the busiest ports in South America.\(^a\)

The homicide rate has also increased dramatically in other areas where criminal factions are competing, including the cities of Duran and Mahala and the coastal province of Esmeraldas, which experienced an almost fourfold increase in homicide from 23.5 per 100,000 in 2021 to 81.1 in 2022.\(^b\) Indeed, the increase in the homicide rate from 2014 to 2022 was higher in the coastal or neighbouring provinces than elsewhere in the country.

Record-breaking coca cultivation in neighbouring Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia and Peru and increased cocaine trafficking through Ecuador en route to the major destinations markets in Northern America and Europe are driving violence in Ecuador. Drug-related violence began to increase in 2018, most of it related to disputes between local gangs or confined to prisons, but violence has spiralled over the past two years, reportedly owing to deepening tensions between transnational crime groups from Mexico, such as the Jalisco New Generation Cartel,\(^c\) and Clan Farruku from Albania.\(^d\)

Percentage change in the homicide rate in Ecuador, by province, 2014–2022

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\(^c\) See Ferri, P., “Mexican cartels linked to Ecuador violence: ‘criminals have an incentive to say they belong to a renowned group’”, El País, 11 August 2023.

Factors shaping criminal homicides in Latin America and the Caribbean

The present study notes several recurrent patterns with respect to homicide, including in Latin America and the Caribbean.

› Homicides related to organized crime and gangs are significantly more volatile than homicides perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members (figure 5).

› Subregions, countries and cities with a high homicide rate tend to be associated with a larger proportion of firearm-related homicide.

› Settings with a high homicide rate also typically report a large proportion of homicides involving male victims.

› High homicide rates are also usually associated with a proportionately higher number of homicides related to organized crime. Where there is a higher density of criminal organizations, there is a higher risk of homicidal violence.

› Drug markets alone do not predict homicide but they are frequently associated with lethal violence, especially in the context of multiple competing criminal factions.

FIG. 17 Change in the homicide rate and change in the share of homicides perpetrated with firearms, the Americas, 2019–2021 or 2019–2020

Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

Firearms can be acquired by organized criminal groups in multiple ways. With the exception of the Caribbean, where almost all firearms and ammunition are imported, whether legally or illegally,70 firearms and ammunition can often be sourced domestically, either through private dealers, on the black market, or diverted from law enforcement arsenals and military stocks. More often than not, firearms are procured from foreign sources, most notably in Northern America and Western Europe, via both legal and illegal means.71, 72 Weapons are frequently shipped by air and sea, on commercial passenger planes, and by post.73, 74 In this regard, there is growing concern about the “iron pipeline” involving networks of dealers and brokers who smuggle firearms, ammunition, parts and accessories from the United States in particular, to countries in the Caribbean, Central America and South America.75

Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean report the largest proportion of gun-related homicides worldwide. In 2021, there were at least 89,100 gun-related homicides in Latin America and the Caribbean, including 55,100 in South America, 29,900 in Central America and 4,100 in the Caribbean,76 which translates into respective homicide rates of 9.3, 16.9 and 12.7 per 100,000. The share of homicides perpetrated with firearms ranged from 65 per cent in Central America to 67 per cent in the Caribbean and 70 per cent in South America in 2021, compared with 62 per cent in Northern America and 17 per cent in Europe. In general, an increase in the homicide rate is associated with a higher share of homicides perpetrated with firearms, and vice versa in the case of a decrease in the homicide rate (figure 17).

Role of men

All over the world, the perpetrators and victims of homicide are disproportionately male. This is particularly the case in Latin America and the Caribbean, where roughly 91 per cent of homicide victims in 2021 were male while the global average was 81 per cent. The countries with the largest share of male homicide victims in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2021 were the Bahamas (95 per cent), Guyana (93 per cent), Haiti (93 per cent), Colombia (92 per cent) and Brazil (92 per cent).

The men involved in homicidal violence across Latin America and the Caribbean are also disproportionately young. This is partly to be expected since the subregion has a relatively large youth population, although the share of young people has been decreasing over time.77 In the Americas, including Northern America, more than 45 per cent of homicide victims were aged between 15 and 29 years in 2021. Countries that registered the highest share of homicide victims in this age group included the Bahamas (52 per cent), El Salvador (49 per cent), Guatemala (48 per cent) and Colombia (46 per cent). Most victims in this age group were males. In El Salvador, for example,
approximately 43 per cent of all homicide victims were males aged 15–29 even though this age group constitutes just 15 per cent of the country’s population.

The large share of young male homicide victims in Latin America and the Caribbean is also linked to the demography of criminal organizations across the subregion. This is because, while the leadership of organized criminal organizations may be older, on the whole the rank and file of drug trafficking factions, militia groups, street gangs and other criminal entities is typically made-up of young men. There are multiple motivations for joining criminal organizations, ranging from a desire to belong, to the pursuit of economic opportunity, with-young Latin Americans, over 80 per cent of whom live in urban settings, being deeply concerned about their lack of education and employment opportunities. These motivations were apparently exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the risk of recruitment of young people into criminal organizations increased.

Role of criminal groups

Trends in lethal violence are heavily influenced both by collaboration and competition between organized crime groups, drug factions and gangs. When criminal organizations seek to enforce their influence and compete to control drug routes and retail outlets, they often resort to coercive violence. Rival factions may seek to assert control over territory and, if co-optation is not possible, intimidate or eliminate their opponents. Likewise, drug trafficking organizations, militia and street gangs frequently use lethal violence in prisons, many of which face significant overcrowding and other challenges, in order to degrade and dissuade rivals. An example of this emerged following the breakdown of the “non-aggression pact” between two rival drug trafficking groups, the Primeiro Comando da Capital and Comando Vermelho, in Brazil. When the pact came to an end in 2016, waves of brutal prison violence followed in both public and private prisons across the country, including in Boa Vista, Manaus and Altamira in 2017/18, resulting in hundreds of deaths of inmates and sparking violent reprisals.

Criminal pacts – “pax mafiosa”

The presence of organized crime groups does not always translate into a high rate of homicidal violence. In comparison with much of Latin America and the Caribbean and some countries in Africa, Asia and Europe appear to have much smaller shares of organized crime-related homicide, but that does not necessarily mean there is less organized crime in Asia and Europe than in other regions.

Types of organized crime such as large-scale drug trafficking can be managed in ways that may or may not promote violence, as shown by the example of the countries in South-Eastern Europe that lie on the Balkan Route, along which tons of heroin are trafficked every year; yet do not report high homicide rates. Similarly, in some countries in Asia, well known organized crime groups that are apparently important players both at home and abroad, such as the Yakuza in Japan, continue to operate in a country with one of the very lowest homicide rates worldwide (0.23 per 100,000 in 2021).

Indeed, the dominance of a hegemonic organized crime group can have an impact on violent crime, particularly when it successfully exerts control over territory and criminal markets. Moreover, criminal organizations may also enter into “gentleman’s agreements”, including with state authorities, precisely for the purpose of avoiding violent confrontations, even if this effectively leads to the authorities ceding control of some local jurisdictions. Such informal pacts of non-interference can result in a “pax mafiosa”, a relatively low level of violence in territories dominated by criminal groups.

The term “pax mafiosa” has been frequently used in Italy to describe how the leadership of organized crime groups have deliberately reduced the use of overt violence, leading to a drop in the number of mafia-related killings in the country. The same concept has been applied in Mexico, Brazil and other parts of Latin America during the past two decades. In Mexico the concept of “pax narcotica” has also been applied referring to situations of tolerance in the twentieth century towards drug-trafficking activities which maintained low levels of drug-related violence in the country. The leadership of the Sinaloa Cartel reportedly urged its sub-commanders involved in drug trafficking operations in Baja California to reduce homicidal violence because it was attracting too much government attention. Meanwhile, in Sao Paulo, Brazil’s largest city, areas dominated by Primeiro Comando da Capital have reportedly experienced fewer violent crimes, which some studies indicate is because of the group’s monopoly over crime.

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b See for example Ralazione Della, “Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sul fenomeno delle mafie e sulle altre associazioni criminali”, Camera Del Deputati Senato Della, Doc. XXII, N0.38 (February 2018); and “Relazione sull’attivita’ delle forze di polizia sullo stato dell’ordine e della sicurezza pubblica e sulla criminalita’ organizzata”, Senato Della Repubblica, Doc. XXXVIII, No.4 (January 2017).

c Chabat, J., “Combatting drugs in Mexico under Calderon: The inevitable war”, CID, No. 205 (2010).


There is no linear association between violence and the presence of organized crime in a community and Mexico, a country with high levels of organized crime, offers an example of how a greater presence of organized crime does not always translate into a higher level of violence.\textsuperscript{a,b}

Although measuring organized crime remains a challenge,\textsuperscript{c,d,e} survey data\textsuperscript{f} on citizens’ perceptions of safety, trust in public institutions and crime victimization in Mexico, from the National Survey of Urban Public Safety (ENSU), can help improve understanding of the connections between organized crime and violence. Data from the 2021 survey provide a range of indicators that can indirectly assess the presence of organized crime across 75 cities in Mexico and 16 areas in Mexico City and the level of certain crimes:\textsuperscript{g}

1. “Seen gangs” – the proportion of respondents who have heard about or seen violent groups or gangsterism around their homes.

2. “Seen illegal fuel” – the proportion of respondents who have heard about or seen theft of illegal sale of fuel around their homes.

3. “Victims of extortion” – the proportion of respondents who were victims of extortion.

4. “Victims of vehicle theft” – the proportion of respondents who were victims of vehicle theft.

5. “Victims of theft of vehicle parts” – the proportion of respondents who were victims of theft of vehicle parts.

Linking these indicators with homicide, the table below shows that the presence of organized crime, homicide and other violent crimes tends to co-occur within municipalities. Some combinations of crime are more likely to occur than others but, overall, the data suggest that organized crime, in relation to visible gangs in particular, correlates with violent crimes.\textsuperscript{i}

Focusing on the relationship between homicide and the two indicators that measure the presence of organized crime and have the strongest associations with homicides – the proportion of respondents exposed to gangs near their home, and the proportion of respondents who were victims of extortion – suggests that a greater presence of organized crime goes

| Correlation matrix of variables of interest, Mexico, 2021 |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Variable                | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Organized crime indicators |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| (1) Seen gangs           | 1.00 | 0.35 | 0.52 | 0.59 | 0.39 | 0.28 | 0.27 | 0.58 |
| (2) Seen illegal fuel    | 0.35 | 1.00 | 0.17 | 0.18 | 0.15 | 0.03 | 0.23 | 0.29 |
| (3) Victims of vehicle theft | 0.52 | 0.17 | 1.00 | 0.74 | 0.50 | 0.24 | 0.24 | 0.74 |
| (4) Victims of theft of vehicle parts | 0.59 | 0.18 | 0.74 | 1.00 | 0.54 | 0.13 | 0.33 | 0.71 |
| (5) Victims of extortion | 0.39 | 0.15 | 0.50 | 0.54 | 1.00 | 0.31 | 0.20 | 0.41 |
| Homicide, law and order |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| (6) (Ln) Homicide rate   | 0.28 | 0.03 | 0.24 | 0.13 | 0.31 | 1.00 | 0.15 | 0.03 |
| (7) Victims of burglary  | 0.27 | 0.23 | 0.24 | 0.33 | 0.20 | 0.15 | 1.00 | 0.10 |
| (8) Victims of robbery   | 0.58 | 0.29 | 0.74 | 0.71 | 0.41 | 0.03 | 0.10 | 1.00 |

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI), ENSU 2021.

Note: The Pearson Correlation Coefficient measures the linear association between the two variables and ranges between a minimum of -1 (a total negative linear relationship) to a maximum of 1 (a total positive linear relationship; in violet). The value of 0 indicates no linear relationship. The table displays a correlation matrix between each of these organized crime indicators and measures of homicide, law and order at the municipality level in Mexico.


\textsuperscript{f} Mexico, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI), Encuesta Nacional de Seguridad Pública Urbana (ENSG).\textsuperscript{g} These municipalities correspond to those that had at least 100 respondents to ENSU, as well as available homicide data.

\textsuperscript{h} The term refers to the behaviour of gang members and their modi operandi.

\textsuperscript{i} Burglary in this context refers to situations when victims were either present or absent from the property.

\textsuperscript{j} A notable exception is the sale of illegal fuel, which has only modest correlations with most other indicators.
hand-in-hand with a higher level of homicide, although only up to a certain point. When the presence of organized crime reaches a certain level (more than 32 per cent of people reporting having seen gangs in the community) homicide starts to decline. Once organized crime surpasses a certain level, its positive relationship with homicidal violence not only disappears but also turns negative, and the municipalities with the highest levels of homicide were within a middle range of gang exposure, of between 20 and 40 percentage points.

The same pattern can be seen using other indicators that measure the presence of organized crime. The proportion of respondents who were victims of extortion ranged from 1.35 per cent in Boca del Río, Veracruz to a high of 22.38 per cent in Irapuato, Guanajuato. Higher levels of extortion tend to be associated with an expected increase in the homicide rate, but that association plateaus once more than 15 per cent of residents have been victims of extortion.

The association between the presence of organized crime and property crime is similar but not the same as for homicide. As in the case of homicide, greater exposure to gangs has a positive association with robbery victimization rates, and a higher prevalence of extortion is strongly and positively related with a higher risk of public robbery. Increasing the proportion of respondents who were victims of extortion from 1 to 2 percentage points is associated with an increase of 1.568 in the percentage of respondents who were victims of robbery across municipalities.

Like homicide, when organized crime reaches a certain point (more than 18 per cent of residents are victims of extortion), robberies are more contained. Unlike homicide, however, even when the positive relationship weakens as extortions become more prevalent, the association between organized crime and robbery never clearly turns negative.

The decrease in homicide (but not robbery) as the presence of organized crime becomes more visible in a given municipality, suggests the particular role that violence may play in the operations of organized crime groups. Such groups may be more violent when establishing or asserting their presence, but once their operations have been consolidated and become visible, they may need to employ lethal violence to a lesser extent.
Meanwhile, an estimated 200 gang are operating in Haiti at present, some of them operating in federations (for example, G9, 400 Mawozo and G-Pep) with significant territorial control. Several gangs in the country have access to high-calibre firearms from the United States and are heavily involved in a range of criminal activities, from kidnapping and assassination to extortion and sexual violence.\(^{94}\)

Criminal organizations are particularly active in border and coastal areas, partly because of the importance of moving drugs and other contraband across frontiers. Examples of this are the tri-border areas of countries in South America, including Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). A 2023 study detected one or more groups in almost 70 per cent (242 of 348) municipalities in border areas of the eight Amazon Basin countries.\(^{95}\)

Role of drugs

Latin America and the Caribbean is home to countries that are the world’s primary producers of cocaine. The expansion of the transnational drug trade has contributed to the emergence of sophisticated and powerful organized crime organizations, and the surge in cocaine production in the Andean countries in particular, most notably since 2020, has increased competition, and consequently lethal violence, between global organized crime organizations both in the Amazon Basin\(^ {96,97}\) and in neighbouring countries such as Argentina and Chile.\(^ {98,99}\)

The surge in drug trafficking in the Caribbean\(^ {100}\) is associated with increasing homicide rates across the region, which has corrosive implications for sustainable development.\(^ {101}\) The transhipment of drugs through Caribbean countries is hardly new, of course, with more than three quarters of all cocaine seized between South America and the United States during the 1980s being intercepted in Caribbean countries.\(^ {102}\) The creation of the North American Free Trade Association and the temporary void created by the dismantling of some Colombian drug cartels in the first half of the 1990s diminished the importance of the Caribbean cocaine route in relation to the route through Mexico.\(^ {103}\) However, increasing demand in Europe led to the resurgence of large-scale cocaine trafficking in the Caribbean, including via the Dominican Republic.\(^ {104}\)

Among the many victims of organized crime-related homicide are human rights defenders. OHCHR documented the killing of at least 1,921 human rights defenders between 2015 and 2022 in Latin America and the Caribbean alone, over 60 per cent of the global total.\(^ {105}\)
States of emergency

Amid mounting public concern about violent crime and a low level of trust in the police, some Governments in Latin America and the Caribbean have introduced a “state of exception”. In Central America, several countries have issued emergencies to address public security crises, while deploying the military alongside law enforcement and increasing the involvement of citizens in crime control efforts. In 2022, for example, the Honduran authorities declared a state of emergency in over half the country, which was extended in 2023. Following the extension of the state of emergency, OHCHR urged authorities in Honduras to reinforce the internal and external oversight of military operations in the country.

El Salvador also introduced a state of emergency in 2022 to fight the gangs MS-13 and Barrio 18. According to information provided by the Government of El Salvador, through Legislative Decree 333 of 27 March 2022, emergency measures were introduced, and as a consequence, the constitutional rights and guarantees regulated in articles 7, 12 second paragraph, 13 second paragraph and 24 were suspended for an initial period of 30 days. These measures have been maintained with successive extensions issued by the Legislative Assembly, in accordance with article 30 of the Constitution. The Government reported that arrests carried out using these legal tools are made on the basis of evidence that those individuals are members of an organized crime group, which constitutes the crime of illicit association, as regulated by article 345 of the Salvadoran Penal Code, which is punished with a prison sentence, provided that group membership has the characteristics of unlawfulness. According to the Government, more than 72,000 gang members and leaders have been arrested since the introduction of the state of emergency, leading to a reduction in criminal activities. OHCHR has expressed deep concern about the prolonged state of emergency in El Salvador, and reported excessive use of force, detention and ill treatment, as well as amendments to criminal law and procedure. Prior to Honduras and El Salvador, in 2017, Guatemala introduced a state of emergency in municipalities neighbouring Mexico, ostensibly to fight drug trafficking.

In South America, faced with rising lethal violence, including in the country’s prisons, Ecuador recently declared a state of emergency. The country has introduced 10 separate states of emergency since 2021 and deployed the military to tackle the problem. Elsewhere in the subregion, Chile recently enacted a privileged legitimate defence bill (or “Náin-Retamal” law) in order to counter drug trafficking groups, which provides legal certainties and guarantees to the law enforcement authorities when they carry out their duties. Some senators in the country pointed out that the law could be considered a trigger-happy one.

Organized crime-related homicide in Europe

There is growing public concern about expanding and increasingly violent transnational organized crime across Eastern, South-Eastern and Western Europe. Although these subregions register a comparatively low prevalence of homicide, organizations such as the European Union, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) have noted an increasing incidence of violent crime in recent years. In the wake of high-profile killings of prosecutors and journalists, officials from across the European Union have detailed how organized crime is undermining public order and degrading democracy. City leaders have been reported in the media as decrying a “culture of crime and violence” that is contributing to perceptions of insecurity and a growing chorus of analysts has described violent organized crime as a strategic threat for the European Union.

Notwithstanding headlines on organized crime-related violence, European countries report comparatively low levels of homicide when compared with countries in the Americas and Africa. Indeed, the regional homicide rate in Europe was 2.2 per 100,000 population in 2021, as opposed to 15 in the Americas and 12.7 in Africa. Furthermore, some 73 per cent of homicide victims in Europe are male, compared with 81 per cent globally and a relatively modest share of homicides in the region are firearm-related. In 2021, at least 12 per cent of homicides in Europe were attributed to firearms although the actual share is likely higher, since 30 per cent of homicides did not have a recorded mechanism. Nonetheless, unlike in the Americas, firearms are not the most prevalent homicide mechanism in Europe. Furthermore, about 10 per cent of homicides are estimated to be related to organized crime or other crime, a figure much lower than in the Americas and below the global average.

The perceived increase in lethal violence connected to organized criminal groups in the European Union is widely attributed to a boom in drug production in South America and the drug markets in Europe. According to Interpol, drug trafficking and consumption in Europe has increased by an “order of magnitude” over the past five years, together with a corresponding rise in violent crime. There is growing concern in Europe about the use or threat of violence by criminal networks. A spike in serious violent incidents associated with organized crime, in drug markets in particular, has been seen in some countries in the European Union and neighbouring countries in the past few years. As expanding cocaine and cannabis markets in Europe have recently attracted new drug trafficking organizations, drug-related conflicts have resulted in public shootings, bombings, kidnapping and torture.
Organized-crime related violence in Sweden

Sweden has experienced unprecedented levels of gang violence and firearm-related deaths in recent years. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention reported that Sweden had one of the highest levels of firearm-related deaths in a study of over 20 European countries. In 2022, a total of 116 cases of lethal violence were registered in Sweden, with firearms being used in 63 of the observed cases.

Number of firearm-related homicides in Sweden, 2010–2022

![Graph showing the number of firearm-related homicides in Sweden from 2010 to 2022.](image)

Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

This increase in the number of firearm homicides is related to criminal milieux in socially disadvantaged areas in the country. About 8 out of 10 homicides in Sweden occur in criminal milieux. Moreover, a significant share of all reported homicides is committed by young males aged 20–29. Another possible contributing factor is something called the “social contagion effect”, when one shooting leads to another.

Although research has linked the rising level of gun-related violence to conflicts related to illegal drug markets, criminal gangs and a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system, some uncertainties persist about the extent of involvement of organized crime groups in homicide in Sweden. Indeed, Sweden does not submit official estimates to UNODC on the share of reported homicides associated with organized crime or gangs.

An increasing proportion of such violent incidents are reportedly perpetrated by younger and less experienced perpetrators who are more inclined to use violence, including in public spaces. This increasing violence may be related to competition over drug trafficking and distribution networks, shifting power balances between rival groups, and the instrumental use of violence in order to enhance a group’s reputation and retain its market position.

Certain areas are considered by regional law enforcement to be more at risk of violent organized crime than others: specifically, areas in which drug markets are more abundant are associated with a higher risk of lethal violence. Just three countries, Belgium, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Spain, were responsible for approximately 70 per cent of the cocaine seized in Europe in 2021. Areas of particular concern to law enforcement for organized crime-related homicides include coastal cities with ports serving as transit hubs, including Antwerp (Belgium), Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht (the Kingdom of the Netherlands), Hamburg (Germany), smaller ports in Spain and coastal cities in Sweden. Neighbouring cities are also considered potentially at risk owing to their location along drug-trafficking corridors and those for other types of smuggling.

The perception of increasing organized crime-related violence in parts of Europe is associated with a string of high-profile homicides in several countries. Highly visible assassinations targeting members of the political and judicial establishment as well as investigative journalists have been reported in the media in Belgium, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Spain. It is important to underline, however, that the homicide rates in Belgium (1.08 per 100,000 in 2021), the Kingdom of the Netherlands (0.65) and Spain (0.61) are very low. Furthermore, although few European countries disaggregate or publicize organized crime-related homicides, in those where data are made available, the number tends to be extremely small. Assassinations and contract killings tend to be more common where there is a pre-existing presence of organized crime.

The perceived increase in organized criminal violence is spurring responses from regional and national entities across Europe. In 2022, for example, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Spain suggest a growing willingness to use lethal violence, not only in violent disputes between gangs but also in contract killings and assassinations.

Europol, for example, has detected a rising incidence of violent incidents in the European Union, as well as the increasing impact and visibility of acts of egregious violence, including torture. High-profile cases in Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Sweden and Spain suggest a growing willingness to use lethal violence, not only in violent disputes between gangs but also in contract killings and assassinations.
Unpacking organized crime group-related homicides: evidence from incident-level data in South Africa

Many countries are currently unable to provide a comprehensive breakdown of homicides by the situational context of the killing (such as killings related to organized crime, other crimes, interpersonal disputes, or sociopolitical violence). Yet this contextual information is key to improving the targeting of homicide prevention policies and criminal justice responses. For example, organized crime-related homicide may require a coordinated international response, given the cross-border nature of many organized crime groups, while family-related homicide may require a more local operational response. For these reasons, and in the absence at the country level of a classification of homicides by situational context in line with the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS), it is useful to identify a core set of correlates, such as age of victims, mechanism of killing and location of killing, which can help researchers and policymakers predict whether a killing was related or unrelated to organized crime.

The South African Police Service (SAPS) of Western Cape province has provided UNODC with an incident-level dataset on intentional homicides. In addition to containing information about the profile of victims such as their gender, age and race, the dataset also classifies each homicide by “motive of killing”. This variable enables a grouping of all homicides recorded in the dataset into two groups: organized crime-related and non-organized crime-homicides. The date, time, day of the week, place of occurrence and vicinity of the killings are also captured in the dataset, which includes all intentional homicides recorded in the Western Cape from April 2020 to March 2021, amounting to 3,855 victims in total.

Share of murders, by motive of killing, Western Cape province, April 2020–March 2021

While the data from the Western Cape can offer some important insights into the profile of organized crime homicides in South Africa, it is important to highlight that the findings may not necessarily apply to other South African provinces, or beyond. This is because the Western Cape tends to have the largest number (and share) of gang-related murders of all the provinces of South Africa. During the first quarter of 2023, for example, around 72 per cent of all the classified gang-related murders in South Africa occurred in the Western Cape.

Results

The above figure shows the distribution of motives of killing in the dataset. While the “gang-related” category can be used as a proxy for organized crime-related homicides, all the others are considered non-organized crime-related homicides. Non-organized crime-related homicides include, for example, homicides committed in the context of domestic violence or interpersonal disputes. In the case of some 1,204 homicides, or around 31 per cent of all the homicides in the dataset, the motive could not be specified by the police (these observations are omitted from the analysis).

As in many other parts of the world, the victims of homicide in the Western Cape are more likely to be male than female. It is noteworthy, however, that male victimization is significantly more likely when a killing is organized crime-related (96.58 per cent) than when it is non-organized crime-related (89.52 per cent). In terms of age profile, victims are mostly concentrated in the age range 20–39 years, both among organized crime-related homicides and non-organized crime-related homicides (figure below). However, the age distribution among non-organized crime-related homicides is much broader and includes many more victims in the older age ranges. There is also a significant difference in the average (mean) age between the two groups: the mean age of organized crime-related homicide victims is lower (24.7 years) than of those of non-organized crime-related homicide (27.2 years).

Distribution of age of victims of organized crime-related homicide and non-organized crime-related homicide, Western Cape province, South Africa, April 2020–March 2021

Source: South African Police Service.

While the data from the Western Cape can offer some important insights into the profile of organized crime homicides in South Africa, it is important to highlight that the findings may not necessarily apply to other South African provinces, or beyond. This is because the Western Cape tends to have the largest number (and share) of gang-related murders of all the provinces of South Africa. During the first quarter of 2023,

\[\text{Intentional homicides are referred to as “m Murders” in South African Police Service statistics.}\]

\[\text{Some 6,068 murders out of a total of 6,289 murders nationally in the first quarter of 2023 were classified according to motive of killing (“causative factors”). Differences between provinces in terms of the number and share of classified murders may also reflect differences between provinces in their capacity to classify murders. See South Africa, South African Police Service, “Police recorded crime statistics, Republic of South Africa”, 2023.}\]
In terms of the ethnic group of victims, 91.85 per cent of the victims of organized crime-related homicide are “Coloured” as are 24.33 per cent of the victims of non-organized crime-related homicide, with the “Coloured” population making up roughly 5 per cent of the overall population of the Western Cape. Just 6.39 per cent of organized crime-related homicide victims are “Black African”, but “Black Africans” make up significantly larger share of victims of non-organized crime-related homicide (70.81 per cent), with the group accounting for approximately 30 per cent of the total population. “Asian” is the least likely racial group in the dataset to fall victim to both these types of homicide, followed by “White”, with “Whites” accounting for less than 20 per cent of the population of the Western Cape and “Asians” accounting for less than 2 per cent.

In terms of the homicide mechanism, non-organized crime-related homicides are roughly equally distributed between killings perpetrated with firearms (44.65 per cent) and without firearms (55.35 per cent). By contrast, just 6.93 per cent of organized crime-related homicides were conducted without firearms, while the vast majority (93.07 per cent) were perpetrated with firearms.6

In terms of timing, weekends or specific weekdays are not significant predictors of organized crime-related homicide.6 Location and vicinity are significant, however. In terms of location, organized crime-related homicide is less likely to take place inside a building (19.16 per cent) than non-organized crime-related homicide (34.46 per cent).1 In terms of vicinity, the vast majority of organized crime-related homicides are committed in urban suburbs (81.52 per cent) followed by formal/informal residential areas (13.72 per cent). By contrast, almost half (47.05 per cent) of non-organized crime-related homicides were committed in formal/informal residential areas and one in five (19.79 per cent) in urban suburbs, followed by informal settlements/squatter camps (15.56 per cent) and rural suburbs (10.91 per cent).1

Finally, multivariate regression analysis suggests that the sex and ethnicity of victims and the use of firearms are the strongest predictors of organized crime-related homicide in the dataset.4

This exploratory analysis suggests that correlates such as the sex, age and ethnic group of victims, homicide mechanism and location/vicinity of homicide could be used to predict whether a homicide has been committed in the context of organized crime or not. In many countries, such correlates are more readily available than a classification of homicides by “situational context”, and these correlates could in turn be used to draw inferences about the likely share of homicides that are organized crime-related. Going forward, it will be important to replicate this type of analysis using incident-level data from other countries and contexts, so that a core set of predictors of organized crime-related homicide that are applicable across time and space can be established.

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1 Population group shares are based on the 2011 Census, Statistics South Africa, “Statistics by Place”.
2 p < 0.01.
3 p = 0.39.
4 p < 0.01.
5 p < 0.01.
6 The logistic regression model includes victim sex, age, race, mechanism of killing, weekday, place, vicinity, and an inside/outside variable as predictors.

Organized crime-related violence in South Africa and the Sahel: two case studies in Africa

The analyses focusing on South Africa and the Sahel region, in the text boxes on pages 120 and 122 of this chapter, illustrate the type of organized crime-related violence that may also affect other parts of Africa.

Sociopolitical homicide

Sociopolitical homicide is a typology of intentional homicide related to social prejudice, political aims, civil unrest and other sociopolitical agendas, including vigilante killings, unlawful killings by the police and killings due to communalism, casteism and class conflicts. Sociopolitical homicide covers killings by terrorist groups and the targeted killings of individuals, including human rights defenders, environmental defenders, community leaders and vulnerable professionals, such as journalists and humanitarian aid workers. Globally, available data on this homicide type are very limited, with less than a fifth of countries reporting on this homicide type to UNODC through the United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS). As highlighted by the examples of Nigeria and Mali on pages 98 and 128 of this chapter, however, sociopolitical homicides may represent a significant share of all homicides in countries where sporadic or chronic political instability results in many intentional killings.

A key group targeted for sociopolitical motives are human rights defenders, who encompass a wide range of people acting to promote or protect human rights in a peaceful manner.140 They include activists calling for an end to summary executions, torture, arbitrary arrest, discrimination and forced evictions in order to advocate the right to life, food, water and a healthy environment. Although many human rights defenders operate at the global and regional levels when seeking to influence international policy, most work at the local level, where they investigate and report on human rights violations and support victims.

In some parts of the world, human rights defenders face serious threats and vulnerabilities. Since the adoption of the Declaration on human rights defenders in 1998,140 the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders has repeatedly stressed the threats facing human rights defenders in settings where there is armed conflict and severe civil unrest and where legal and institutional protection and guarantees of human rights are not fully assured.141 Particular risks singled out by the Special Rapporteur include executions, torture, arbitrary detention, death threats and restrictions of freedom of movement and expression,142 risks that not only affect human rights defenders but also their families and associates. In general, trends in killings of human rights defenders closely parallel those in killings of environmental defenders and of journalists.
The nexus between organized crime, conflict and violence in the Sahel

Violent incidents in the Sahel countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger resulted in more than 9,300 casualties in 2022. A range of mutually reinforcing factors have contributed to the expansion of both insurgency and banditry in the region, including intercommunal tensions over scarce resources, which have in turn created an environment conducive to the proliferation of organized crime. Other elements that have enabled organized crime and illicit economies to flourish include limited opportunities for communities to sustain their livelihoods and weak law enforcement capacity.

There is no clear delineation between crime and conflict in the Sahel countries and firearms are an enabler of both phenomena. Armed groups of men engage in different types of violent and acquisitive crime in the region, which has known several periods of upheaval since the 1990s (figure below). The following mutually reinforcing factors have contributed to the proliferation of both insurgency and banditry in the Sahel, leading to intercommunal tensions, violence between farmers and herders, violent religious extremism and competition over scarce resources such as water and arable land. The longer the periods of insecurity, the more likely people are to take up arms in order to defend themselves. In such instances, the motivation behind criminal acts becomes blurred, making it difficult to distinguish between criminal or political motives.

Intercommunal violence between agrarian and pastoralist communities in the North West and North Central zones of Nigeria, which is fueled by criminal groups, represents the single greatest source of armed conflict-related violent incidents in West Africa, followed by clashes between armed groups and pro-governmental forces. According to analyses by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), intercommunal violence has killed more people in the North East of Nigeria in recent years than Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP).

Sahelian armed groups have also become involved in various forms of banditry, such as cattle rustling, robberies and kidnappings, which has been fueling violence in the Sahel by escalating existing intercommunal tensions. Armed groups of bandits and traffickers have expanded in the region and are fighting for control over trade routes. All these groups require firearms and ammunition to sustain their illicit activities, and as their numbers have increased, so too have business opportunities for arms traffickers in the Sahel countries.

Number of fatalities in the Sahel countries per year, 1997–2022

Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) for Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger between 1 January 1997 and 17 November 2022.

In this context, the vicious cycle in the Sahel, consisting of firearms trafficking and conflict, becomes apparent, as conflict enables firearms trafficking and firearms trafficking in turn enables conflict. Another enabler of firearms trafficking is limited law enforcement capacity in the Sahel countries, meaning that only a small number of offenders are apprehended, convicted and imprisoned, relative to the size of the countries’ populations.

Evidence suggests that the vast majority of firearms trafficked in the Sahel are procured within Africa, although some weapons are procured along long-range trafficking routes, including by air from France and from Türkiye via Nigeria.

Organized crime and illicit markets generate conflicts and insecurity in the Sahel, which can be an enabling factor in generating other types of conflict and can undermine efforts to resolve conflicts. Yet organized crime structures and any type of illicit economy can also play important roles as livelihood providers in contexts where alternatives are scarce and can therefore act as stabilization and local development drivers. This is true of a range of illicit activities associated with organized crime within the Sahel, including artisanal gold mining and the smuggling of migrants. Violence in the region is also driven by high levels of migration, which have been compounded by ongoing conflicts in some of the Sahel countries.

Refugees and migrants in the Sahel countries are subjected to exploitation and abuse during their migration through the Central Sahel, irrespective of whether smugglers have been involved. As a matter of fact, migrants and refugees are more

* For more information on the differences between intentional homicides and killings related to conflicts/wars, see chapter 2 of the present study.
* “With armed conflict in central and northern Mali, rural banditry appeared to be more closely linked to the proliferation of different non-state armed groups than to terrorist groups specifically.” Postcolonialism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel: Towards Peaceful Coexistence (United Nations Publication, 2018).

† For the purpose of this analysis, “Sahel countries” refers to Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger.
§ The role of illegal activities associated with organized crime as livelihood providers is widely recognized, including in the case of drug production, which is addressed through alternative development described as “conventional rural development applied to a drug-production area”. See, for example, World Drug Report 2015, Booklet 2 (United Nations publication, 2015).
likely to suffer abuse or violence at the hands of armed groups and criminal gangs, as well as border officials and security forces, than the smugglers themselves.

There are various connections between armed groups and migrant smuggling in the Sahel countries, in particular in Chad and Mali. Even though some smugglers are affiliated to armed groups, those groups do not directly engage in migrant smuggling. They extract money from smuggling activities through their control of territories, either by imposing taxes on passage or by providing paid escorts.

By the same token, some smugglers in the Sahel do not restrict their illicit activities to migrant smuggling. They may also engage in trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation and forced labour, among other, the latter often being linked to gold mining, most notably in Mali and Burkina Faso. The diversification of the illicit activities of smugglers into drugs and firearms trafficking has also been reported in the Niger.

Although all refugees and migrants in the Sahel may fall victim to abuse and other human rights violations throughout their journey, women and children face the greatest risk. Indeed, gender-based violence and exploitation has been reported by refugees and migrants in the Sahel countries. Reported experiences of sexual violence in the Sahel, both by women who used smugglers and those who did not, suggests that this type of abuse affects women on the move irrespective of the involvement of a smuggler. Rape was the most frequently reported form of gender-based violence, with approximately 60 per cent of key informants and smugglers interviewed alluding to this form of abuse.1

Estimating the precise global share of sociopolitical homicides out of all homicides is challenging, as political instability often coincides with a lack of political will or technical capacity to accurately record homicides linked to political motives.143 Nevertheless, it is estimated that sociopolitical homicide accounts for at least 9.1 per cent of all homicides globally (see figure 2). In the following section, evidence on selected subtypes of sociopolitical homicide is provided in order to illustrate some of the characteristics of this homicide typology.

Killings of environmental defenders
Trends and patterns in killings of environmental defenders

Policy and research on the nature and scope of homicides of environmental defenders predominantly rely on data collected by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Global Witness,144 which has been estimating the number of homicides of environmental defenders globally since 2012.145 Global Witness employs a multirpronged approach to the creation of its dataset: homicides of environmental defenders are searched for on national and international databases, media alerts are set up and in-country local organizations are contacted for information.146 There are limitations to this methodology, which means that the overall number of homicides reported is likely to be lower than the actual number and there is likely to be a geographic bias to the data. For example, since the data collection of Global Witness partly relies on the reporting of homicides of environmental defenders by the media and civil society, in places without a free press and/or an independent civil society, homicides of environmental defenders may go unreported. Conversely, there may be some bias in the data due to the political leanings of the media or civil society sources. Furthermore, environmental defenders are often active in remote places, which may not have digital communications or be connected to civil society networks, further compounding the possibility that any such homicides go unreported or unrecorded and thus fail to be collected through the Global Witness methodology.

Despite these limitations, according to Global Witness there have been 1,733 killings of environmental defenders globally since 2012 (table 4), with 39 per cent of the victims being indigenous and 11 per cent being women. The Americas appears to account for the majority of those homicides, with 68 per of the total, followed by Asia, with 25 per cent, Africa, with 6 per cent, and Europe and Oceania, each with less than 1 per cent.

Factors in cross-country variations in homicides of environmental defenders

Evidence that can explain variations in the number of environmental defender homicides remains limited across countries and more research is needed to support the creation of prevention measures; however, available information provides some insights into the possible factors that drive this type of homicide.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment linked three contributory factors to the vulnerability of environmental defenders based on regional consultations and existing research: 1) a growing global demand for extraction and exploitation of natural resources; 2) a lack of political power and legal recognition of the groups that are often most affected by this increasing demand; and 3) weak or corrupt legal institutions that create a culture of impunity.147

Some scholars have explored these three factors further, linking judicial corruption and related impunity to homicides of environmental defenders.148 Foreign direct investment, the net amount of deforestation, a large share of indigenous populations and empowered local governments are also factors that have been associated with killings of environ-
Convergence of crime in the Amazon Basin: illegal mining, deforestation and attacks against environmental defenders\(^6\)

In some parts of Latin America, organized criminal groups are involved in an array of illicit activities beyond drug trafficking that have a significant negative impact on the environment and create violence hotspots. The Amazon Basin is a region where drug trafficking organizations perpetrate crimes that affect the environment beyond deforestation.\(^8\)

The convergence of crime in the Amazon Basin continues to happen in a context where there is limited law enforcement, a diversity of criminal actors and a scarcity of meaningful economic alternatives for the local population. Indigenous people and other minorities are disproportionately affected by the criminal nexus in the Amazon Basin, as they suffer forced displacement and increased exposure to violence and victimization.

In recent years, border areas have been cleared to make way for coca production, illegal logging and gold extraction, which creates a breeding ground for corruption, financial crimes and both lethal and nonlethal violence. The proliferation of criminal activities in border areas gives rise to a host of security and health risks, leaving local populations entangled in criminal enterprises. Young males from impoverished backgrounds who lack stable employment are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by criminal groups.

Many municipalities in the Amazon Basin record rates of criminal violence higher than the national average of the countries in which they are located. In 2021, municipalities in Brazil’s Legal Amazon registered some of the highest homicide rates in the country, which resulted in a regional average of 29.6 homicides per 100,000 population,\(^3\) compared with the national average of 21.3. This can be explained in part by competition between rival criminal factions competing for control over the production, distribution and retail of drugs.

There have been numerous instances in which law enforcement officials, journalists and environmental activists have uncovered how criminal groups have illegally purchased land to support illegal logging operations in countries in the Amazon Basin.\(^4\) The media and non-governmental organizations have also reported on escalating disputes between drug trafficking groups and traditional communities in the Amazon, leading to assassinations, assassination attempts, death threats and violent and non-violent protests.\(^4\) Moreover, killings of and attacks against environmental defenders have been reported in Brazil and Colombia (see maps).

In Brazil, the world’s largest indigenous territory is home to the Yanomami people. Mining on indigenous lands in Brazil and eastern part of the Colombian Amazon


The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.


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\(^{6}\) Sourced from chapter on the nexus between drugs and crimes that affect the environment and convergent crime in the Amazon Basin, World Drug Report 2023 (United Nations publication, 2023), p. 68.

\(^{8}\) Although Ecuador, Guyana, Suriname, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and French Guiana also form part of the Amazon Basin and are affected by drug and related crime issues, this section focuses on the Amazon region covering Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Colombia and Peru.

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\(^{3}\) Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, “Cartografias das violências na região amazônica”.

\(^{4}\) See chapter on the nexus between drugs and crimes that affect the environment and convergent crime in the Amazon Basin in World Drug Report 2023 (United Nations publication, 2023), p. 68.

\(^{5}\) Velasco, M., “Drug trafficking in Colombia undermines the foundations of indigenous autonomy”, IWGIA, 2 May 2022.
Table 4: Killings of land and environmental defenders, by region and year 2012–2021

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mental defenders, along with the availability of natural resources (for example, water and land) indeed, it has been argued that homicides of environmental defenders tend to be concentrated where resources are abundant and relatively unexploited. Other studies have argued that clashes between political groups, even in democracies with eco-populist movements, can lead to a higher level of homicides of environmental defenders.

### International response to killings of environmental defenders

In light of the continued killings of environmental defenders documented by Global Witness, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) developed an internal policy to denounce violence against environmental defenders, advocate for their protection and rights, support the responsible management of natural resources, and request accountability from Governments and companies in countries where environmental defenders are murdered. The UNEP policy was followed, in 2019, by the United Nations Human Rights Commission Resolution A/HRC/RES/40/11, which recognizes the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development. Another international agreement is the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, known as the Escazú Agreement, which is the first legally binding instrument to seek to protect environmental defenders. Article 9 of the Escazú Agreement states: “Each Party shall guarantee a safe and enabling environment for persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters, so that they are able to act free from threat, restriction and insecurity.”

### Killings of journalists

Public access to information is a fundamental right that forms part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Yet, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 85 per cent of the world’s population have experienced a decline in press freedom in their country over the past five years. This decline was the result of several factors, such as laws that restrict online freedom of expression or an increase in false and misleading content, but is also a reflection of the challenges to the freedom and safety of journalists, which continue to be compromised.

Journalists contribute to the public good by facilitating the dissemination of trustworthy and crucial news and analysis to the public, which in turn empowers citizens to participate in a free and open society. Attacks on journalists are considered a violation of the fundamental human right to freedom of expression. As part of Sustainable Goal 16: peace, justice and strong institutions, UNESCO measures indicator 16.10.1 on cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates.
Based on UNESCO data, it is estimated that the number of journalists killed during the period 2018–2022 was 25 per cent lower than in the preceding five-year period. In 2021, the death toll of journalists was the lowest since 2008, which along with the comparatively low number of deaths in 2020, is a partial reflection of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of journalists, when many shifted to online reporting. Spikes in the number of killings of journalists often reflect ongoing violent situations such as war or civil unrest, but in recent years the share of journalists killed in countries other than those experiencing conflict has increased to over 60 per cent. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, there was a noticeable increase in the number of journalists killed in 2022, with journalists covering the conflict in Ukraine and others covering crime, corruption, gang violence and the environment in Mexico and Haiti jointly accounting for roughly half of deaths of journalists globally.

A breakdown by sex of journalists killed during the past decade shows that male journalists accounted for at least 90 per cent of victims. The relatively small share of female journalists killed suggests that they are less involved in reporting in dangerous situations; however, it has been discovered that certain recent cases of killings of female journalists were linked to gender-related violence.

Since 2015, most killings of journalists have occurred in Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia (excluding Western Asia), with no clear trend visible in either region. The countries that have seen relatively high numbers of journalists killed in the past five years include Afghanistan, India, Mexico, Pakistan and the Syrian Arab Republic. In Northern Africa and Western Asia, the number of journalists killed has declined significantly since 2015, as the intensity of armed conflicts in the region has decreased.

Reflecting a broader trend in the profession towards diversifying the channels through which news are conveyed to citizens, the UNESCO database shows that the share of journalists killed in the period 2020–2022 who worked in cross-platform media was triple the number killed in the period 2017–2019. This may be linked to evolving trends in the media landscape as journalists now often work across multiple platforms, including traditional print, broadcast and digital media, which can expose them to a wider range of audiences and potential risks.

Data from the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) provide further insights both into the topics being covered by journalists when they were killed and the possible motives of the suspected perpetrators. At more than 30 per cent, politics accounted for the largest share among the topics being covered when journalists were killed.
killed in the period 2020–2022. Crime has overtaken war as the second most covered topic, which accounted for 19 per cent of killings in the period 2017–2019. In line with the pattern in the topics being covered, reportedly the main suspects in killings of journalists over the past five years have been political groups (28 per cent), followed by criminal groups (25 per cent) and military officials (20 per cent). Despite such insights, impunity for killings of journalists is still very high, with UNESCO estimating that the share of killings of journalists that went unpunished decreased by just 3 percentage points from 2018 to 2022, when impunity remained at 86 per cent.164

Killings of humanitarian aid workers

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), humanitarian aid workers face dangerous conditions and threats in their work, which can lead to kidnappings, injuries and deaths.165 Data from the Aid Worker Security Database show that, while the annual number of aid workers killed has been declining steadily since 2017, with the exception of 2021, the total number of fatalities in the period 2017–2022 was greater than in the period 2010–2016 (figure 22).166 However, because of the nature of the areas in which humanitarian aid workers tend to be deployed, it is difficult to distinguish between killings corresponding to intentional homicides and other conflict-related deaths.167

Almost two thirds (63 per cent) of the killings of aid workers perpetrated worldwide in 2021/22 occurred in South Sudan (48 killings), Afghanistan (30), Myanmar (29), Somalia (26) and Ethiopia (22), all of which represented significant increases compared with the figures recorded in the previous three years. In 2022, the fourth-highest number of lethal attacks on aid workers was recorded in Ukraine.

Killings by terrorist groups

National data on homicides perpetrated by terrorist groups tend to be limited and not comparable, in part due to the lack of a globally agreed definition of terrorism.170 It is therefore not possible to paint a global picture of terrorism-related homicides that meet the ICCS criteria of what constitutes intentional homicide. That said, data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) can provide a global overview of the extent of killings related to terrorism,171 although GTD data should be interpreted with caution, given the difficulties of disentangling terrorist killings from other types of killing (especially in conflict settings) and the reliance on publicly available, open-source materials that may be biased (in terms of coverage) towards specific terrorist groups, countries or regions.172, 173 The global distribution of fatalities from terrorist incidents recorded in the period 2010–2020 are shown in map 1.
### Violent deaths and intentional homicide in Mali

With an estimated population of 21.5 million in 2021, Mali is the twentieth most populous country in Africa. The country has faced numerous political issues in recent years, culminating in conflicts involving domestic and international groups such as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), the Arab Movement of Azawad (AMA), the Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) and Operation Barkhane, an international military operation led by France that lasted for more than eight years until it ended in November 2022. Partially as a consequence of these conflicts, Mali continues to face a wide range of social and political challenges that hinder the country’s human and economic development. Investigating the prevalence and characteristics of intentional homicide in such a challenging context is thus difficult.

The following analysis shows the complexity of counting intentional homicide in the context of an internal conflict and suggests that most homicides in Mali relate to sociopolitical tensions rather than interpersonal violence. Data compiled from integrated daily reports sourced from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) are used to differentiate killings as pure conflict-related killings (lawful killings during combat), intentional homicide committed during conflict operations (unlawful killings) and intentional homicide outside conflict settings. MINUSMA reports are typically short reports describing basic facts about noteworthy incidents happening across Mali, such as protests, battles and homicides. The information in the reports is sourced primarily from MINUSMA personnel, media published by other groups and from MINUSMA security, community and humanitarian sources across Mali.

All reports mentioning the keywords “homicide” and “killing” from January 2020 to October 2021 were investigated. The data collection included the identification of interpersonal killings and the coding of relevant information about each victim such as the location of the killing (for example, administrative units: 8 regions, 49 cercles and 703 communes), date, time, mechanism of killing, situational context, number of victims, their age, sex, etc.

As the reports were never meant to support any rigorous statistical analysis, the data are limited and the analysis simply attempts to extract the maximum amount of information on killings from the available data about the complexity of the situation in Mali in 2020 and 2021. Results should not be interpreted as representative of all the killings in the country, but as indicative of the presence of specific issues related to interpersonal killings, nor should statistics be interpreted as a minimum number of killings.

Altogether, the integrated daily reports reported on a total of 115 incidents (a few describing multiple incidents), which mentioned a total of 439 killings that resembled homicide or were conflict-related. Of those, 335 (76.3 per cent) were directly linked to armed conflicts in Mali, while the remaining 104 (23.7 per cent) were 7 terrorism-related killings and 97 intentional homicides of other types, for example, interpersonal killings, crime-related, etc.

A key challenge in contexts of non-international armed conflict (that is, internal armed conflict) is determining whether killings should be considered strictly unlawful. ICCS explores this issue, listing specific standards for classifying unlawful killings in the context of an armed conflict, such as the targeted killing of civilians, those resulting from breaches of international humanitarian law, and those linked to other criminal offences committed by combatants.

Following these standards, of the 335 killings linked to the armed conflict in Mali, 170 (55.7 per cent) were identified as intentional homicides by combatants in conflict settings. In most cases, these killings were determined as unlawful because they involved the targeted killing of civilians seemingly uninvolved in the conflict. This includes, for example, the detonation of an improvised explosive device that killed four civilians in a minibus in the Bandiagara area, or the killing in Ménaka region of 11 civilians who refused to surrender their village and livestock to members of ISGS. By contrast, killings in the context of the armed conflict were those involving parties to the conflict, regardless of the affiliation of the victim. The figure below shows the quarterly trend in the total number of killings, split between intentional homicides (per the ICCS definition) and other fatalities from the armed conflicts.

The figure displays a volatile trend in total killings, mostly due to sudden variations in killings in the context of conflict, as they are determined by larger combat operations and attacks that are relatively more sporadic and unpredictable. Conversely, intentional homicides, which include interpersonal killings and some terrorist attacks, as well as intentional homicides in conflict settings, follow a more predictable trend, which declined gradually over the period under study.

As a country, Mali is divided primarily into three levels of administrative units: 8 regions, 49 cercles and 703 communes.

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See “Considerations for classifying conflict-related deaths and intentional homicides, and their overlap in conflict situations”, in chapter 2 of the present study.
The figure below is a choropleth map of the intentional homicides (including those related to conflict settings but aligned with the ICCS definition) recorded in Mali from January 2020 to October 2021 by region. As shown, reported homicides are largely concentrated in the regions bordering Burkina Faso and the Niger, along Mali’s east and south-east borders.

Intentional homicides by region, Mali, January 2020 to October 2021

Source: MINUSMA.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Roughly three quarters of intentional homicides (75.2 per cent) occurred in villages of up to a few thousand inhabitants. Such villages and their surrounding areas occupy much of the territory of Mali, spread across rural communes that, according to data from World Population Prospects (UN WPP), contained 56.1 per cent of the population of Mali in 2020. Interestingly, 53.6 per of homicides occurred in remote places, with fewer homicides occurring either in the country’s cities, for example, Bamako, Gao, Timbuktu, or on main roads. Moreover, intentional homicides were concentrated in specific areas where the armed conflicts were most intense, showcasing the strong link between homicides and the armed conflicts in the country.

In terms of situational context, most intentional homicides in Mali are related to group tensions and conflicts, with the number of killings of an interpersonal nature being relatively much lower. Nearly 71.5 per cent of the homicides were socio-political, perpetrated by combatants in the context of an armed conflict, motivated by a grievance between ethnic groups, or related to civil unrest. Of the remainder, 6.9 per cent were interpersonal homicides, typically related to business or family disputes, and just 5.8 per cent were linked to another crime, most frequently robbery, but it was not possible to determine the situational context of 15.7 per cent of homicides. Some 15.0 per cent of victims were killed in incidents with a single victim, whereas 46.0 per cent were killed in incidents with 10 victims or more. In 65.9 per cent of homicides, the perpetrator was unknown to the victim, while in just 6.6 per cent the perpetrator was known to the victim. Only one single homicide victim was confirmed to be a family member of the perpetrator (a wife to a murderous husband). The perpetrator-victim relationship further underscores the group nature of homicides in Mali, while indicating that addressing those resulting from group conflicts would greatly reduce the prevalence of homicide in the country.

Intentional homicides in Mali by region, January 2020 to October 2021

Source: MINUSMA.

Nevertheless, data on homicide perpetrators were limited, not least because the perpetrator was often unknown. No report had information on the age of the perpetrator, the perpetrator was identified as male in just nine of them, while none linked a homicide to a female perpetrator. Most notably, out of all intentional homicides mentioned in the reports, only 2 (0.7 per cent) led to the arrest of the perpetrator and 47 (17.15 per cent) to the opening of an investigation.

Intentional homicides by age and sex, Mali, January 2020 to October 2021

Source: MINUSMA.

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Mechanisms of homicide

A vital factor in understanding homicide is the variety of methods used to perpetrate the crime. The WHO International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) identifies over 200 causes of death by assault, which UNODC groups into the following classifications:

- Victims killed with firearms or explosives (ICD codes X93-X96)
- Victims killed with another weapon (ICD codes X99, Y00, Y03)
- Victims killed without a weapon or another mechanism (ICD codes X85-X90, X97-X98, Y04-Y08)
- Victims killed with unspecified ("unknown") means (ICD code Y09)\(^\text{174}\)

For analytical purposes, the data are adjusted into four main groups: homicides perpetrated with firearms (excluding explosives), sharp objects, other mechanism\(^\text{175}\) and unknown mechanism.

Global and regional overview

The distribution of homicides by mechanism has remained relatively stable over time at the global level. Firearms continue to be the most common homicide mechanism identified globally, accounting for approximately 47 per cent of victims (range: 40–54) worldwide in 2021 (figure 24). The remainder was roughly equally split between homicides perpetrated with a sharp object or those perpetrated with another mechanism.

Compared with the global distribution, the predominant mechanism used to perpetrate homicide differs significantly across regions, but the overall distribution within each region does not appear to have changed much over time (figure 25). In the Americas, which accounted for an estimated 34 per cent of all homicides globally in 2021, at least 67 per cent of homicides were perpetrated with firearms. In other words, 23 per cent of all homicides globally in that year can be attributed to firearm homicides in the Americas.\(^\text{176}\) Europe was at the other end of the spectrum, with just 12 per cent of homicides perpetrated with a firearm in 2021, while roughly a quarter of homicides were
committed with sharp objects and another quarter with other mechanisms. However, since homicides in Europe are estimated to have represented just 4 per cent of all homicides worldwide in 2021, the distribution does not have a major impact on the global figures.

In Asia, the share of homicides perpetrated with sharp objects and other mechanisms were equal and a very small share of homicides were perpetrated with firearms. In India, for example, available data for the period 2005–2016 show a share of homicides perpetrated with firearms of less than 15 per cent.177 In Japan, the Republic of Korea and Singapore, the shares of firearm homicides were even smaller, with more than 95 per cent of homicides perpetrated with sharp objects or other mechanisms. Those three countries are characterized by strict gun laws and some of the lowest civilian gun ownership rates worldwide.178 This may explain the small share and low rate of homicides perpetrated with firearms, but other socioeconomic factors such as income inequality or the proportion of youth among the general population may also play a role.179

In Central Asia, homicide victims in Uzbekistan (64 per cent in 2019) and Kazakhstan (48 per cent in 2017) were mostly killed with sharp objects. However, data from Türkiye show that between 2015 and 2021 at least one third of homicides were perpetrated with firearms and the Philippines and Thailand had the highest shares and rates of firearm killings in Asia, accounting for up to 60 per cent of all homicide victims in the region in some years.180

The country-level pattern of mechanisms used to perpetrate homicide is more aligned with the regional picture in the Americas, where the majority of homicide victims in most countries were killed with firearms in 2021 (map 2). That was not the case in seven countries in the region, but in some of those countries, such as Bolivia (Plurinational
Most prevalent mechanism used in the perpetration of homicide in Europe, 2021 or latest available year

Source: UNODC homicide statistics. In Iceland and Ireland, the data refers to the most prevalent mechanism in the past three years.

Note: The following countries do not have information on the mechanism for more than 50 per cent of homicides: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Slovakia.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

State of) and Guatemala, there is no information on the mechanism used in over half of the homicides recorded. In Cuba, Guyana and Nicaragua, sharp objects accounted for the largest share of all homicide mechanisms used. In this context, a question may arise about whether this could be attributed to strict gun legislation; however, studies argue that there is no clear relationship between homicide and such legislation and that other factors such as the efficiency of institutions, the presence of organized crime and access to illegal firearms play an important role.\textsuperscript{181}

Unlike in the Americas, no clear homicide mechanism is predominant across Europe. Firearms constituted a large share of all homicides in just a few countries in the region in 2021 (map 3), most of which are located in the western Balkans. In Albania, for example, 75 per cent of all homicides in 2021 were committed with a firearm, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the share was 43 per cent, in Montenegro, 46 per cent and in North Macedonia, it was 51 per cent in 2017. Sweden was a notable exception in Northern Europe, with 40 per cent of all homicides perpetrated with a firearm in 2021.

No other pattern was observed within the different subregions of Europe and in many cases the shares of homicides perpetrated with sharp objects and other mechanisms were more or less equal (figure 26). Another notable observation is that 20 per cent of countries in Europe with data on homicide do not report the homicide mechanism for over 50 per cent of victims. In all types of fatality, identifying cause of death is a lengthy process requiring a medical examination to be performed outside the judicial system, which may lead to challenges relating, for example, to the coordination of civil registries and police records. In France and Germany, data on homicide mechanism are not reported by the police and health registries contain information on cause of death in only 50–60 per cent of all homicides in each country.\textsuperscript{182}
Fig. 26 Share of homicides perpetrated with a sharp object or other mechanism in selected countries in Europe, 2017–2021

Source: UNODC homicide statistics.

Note: The calculation adjusts for homicides where the mechanism of killing is "unknown". The shares are calculated using weighted averages of data from the latest three years available between 2016 and 2021.

Fig. 27 Distribution of homicides by type of mechanism in selected countries in Africa and Oceania, 2018–2021

Note: The shares are based on aggregates of the latest two years available between 2018 and 2021.

In Africa and Oceania, there are not enough countries with data to show regional patterns of and trends in the mechanisms used to perpetrate homicide; however, available data from a number of countries suggest that the share of homicides perpetrated with firearms is likely lower in those two regions than in the Americas (figure 27).

In Australia, homicide mechanisms other than sharp objects and firearms are the most prominent, while in New Zealand, the usually small share (15–30 per cent) of homicides perpetrated with firearms increased as a result of the Christchurch mosque shootings in 2019, a clear outlier event that caused the large difference in the share of firearm homicides between the countries during the period 2018–2021.

In Algeria and Morocco, the distribution of homicides by type of homicide mechanism are similar, with the most common mechanism being sharp objects (roughly 55 per cent), followed by other mechanisms (25 per cent). In South Africa, firearms have constituted a large share of homicide mechanism during the past three decades but the trend has fluctuated. The highest number of firearms killings in the country occurred before the passing of the Firearms Control Act in 2000, after which they declined gradually until 2010, when homicides perpetrated with firearms began to increase again to account for an average of around one third of total homicides in 2018/19.

As shown in the section on organized crime above, an observation that can be drawn across all regions is that high homicide rates are usually associated with a high percentage of homicides committed with firearms (figure 28), which may suggest that firearm homicides could be a driver of overall homicides on an aggregate level.
Countries that suffer from a high level of violence associated with organized crime are also likely to record a large share of homicides perpetrated with a firearm. This is the result of more than just a proliferation of firearms, as many countries in Europe have a higher rate of firearm ownership than countries in Latin America, yet still have a smaller share of homicides committed with a firearm, in addition to a lower overall homicide rate. Even in the United States, the country with the highest recorded number of firearms per capita worldwide, only 63 per cent of homicides were committed with a firearm in 2020, according to UN-CTS data. By contrast, in a number of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, more than two thirds of homicides are committed with a firearm (figure 29).

Non-firearm homicides

Despite the fact that homicides perpetrated using a mechanism other than firearms constitute at least 41 per cent of homicides globally, cross-national research on homicide mechanisms other than firearms is limited and when available often encompasses non-lethal injuries as well. That said, a number of country-specific case studies provide insights related to homicide perpetrated with sharp objects. A review of studies on knife crime in five high- and upper-middle-income countries suggested that knife crime may be associated with illicit drug use, mental health difficulties and early child victimhood. Males were more likely to use knives against strangers and in public, while females were more likely to use knives against family members and intimate partners in domestic settings.
However, the small geographical scope and number of the studies does not allow wider conclusions to be drawn on the entire population of the countries in question.186

In terms of country examples of trends in non-firearm homicides, in England and Wales, United Kingdom, the number of homicide victims killed with a sharp object in 2021/22 was the highest recorded in the past decade. The increase coincided with lockdown periods implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic and was mostly observed among young male victims.187 Data from South Africa have also shown that although sharp objects are not the main mechanism, sharp objects, especially knives, still account for a large number of homicides in the country in absolute terms.188

Although not on the same scale as mass shootings, mass stabbings involving sharp objects have also received media coverage in recent years. A study in 22 countries, including China, Germany, Israel the United States and the United Kingdom, examined 138 reported incidents between 2004 and 2017 that resulted in 402 deaths and 1,519 injuries.189 In almost half of the incidents (46 per cent), the perpetrator had a reported history of mental health issues, suggesting a possible link between such incidents and mental health issues. The study also noted that in such cases, the attack was disproportionately more likely to occur at a school.

In the different subregions of the Americas, changes in the homicide rate usually follow the same trend as changes in the rate of firearm homicide (figure 30). Given that around two thirds of all homicides in the region in recent years have been attributable to the use of firearms, this is not surprising. In the Caribbean, the rate of homicide has undergone a gradual increase since 2018, driven primarily by developments in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and several other smaller island nations in the subregion.

Even though there has been a decline in recent years, Central America continued to have the highest rate of homicide perpetrated with a firearm of all the subregions in the Americas in 2021, as shown most notably in the cases of Honduras (28.8 per 100,000) and Mexico (19.3). Central America also had the highest rate of homicide perpetrated without a known mechanism in the Americas – higher than the rate of homicide perpetrated with sharp objects or other mechanisms.

In South America, the homicide rate by each of the different known mechanisms of killing, most notably firearms, decreased from 2016 in line with a drop in the overall homicide rate in the subregion. South America also had a relatively high rate of homicide perpetrated with a sharp object compared with other subregions in the Americas, a mechanism that is relatively prevalent in Colombia, for example.

Subregional trends in homicide mechanisms in the Americas and Europe

The distributions of the different mechanisms used to perpetrate homicides has remained roughly the same both in the Americas and Europe in recent years, yet there are some notable subregional trends in the homicide rate by mechanism that can be examined due to the availability of data in those two regions.
The country examples in figure 31 provide further proof that spikes or drops in the total number of homicide victims are mainly driven by changes in the number of firearm homicides, while other types of mechanism play a more limited role in explaining national homicide trends. A notable exception is Chile, where up until 2019 the number of homicides perpetrated with sharp objects and firearms were at the same level, whereas the increase in homicides in 2020 was driven more by firearms and the subsequent decrease in 2021 by sharp objects.

In the United States, gun sales increased greatly in 2020.190 According to open sources, this was in connection with anxiety related to the COVID-19 lockdowns and also with upheavals related to social and political protests.191 An analysis by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) also showed that there was an increase in guns recovered by the police with a short “time-to-crime”,192 an indicator of newly purchased guns being used in crimes. In the same year, the United States recorded the highest number of homicides perpetrated with firearms since 2005 at least, an increase of around 30 per cent compared with 2019.193 Data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention also showed that, in 2020, firearm-related injuries were the leading cause of death among children and young people between the ages of 1 and 19, which was likely related to the increase in mass shootings.194 Record gun sales has been put forward as an explanation for the surge in homicides perpetrated using firearms in the United States.195 However, the extent to which the increase in sales of firearms contributed to the spike in firearm killings is contested. A study focusing on state-level firearm purchasing and violence196 during the COVID-19 pan-

**FIG. 31** Number of homicide victims and homicides by mechanism of killing in selected countries in the Americas, 2010 to latest available year

Source: UNODC homicide statistics.
demic showed that excess purchasing was only associated with increases in violence in the domestic context in the months with the strongest physical distancing restrictions, with no such relationship being observed in months with fewer restrictions. This also indicates that other factors relating to the pandemic, such as drug and alcohol use or restricted access to domestic violence prevention services, could have been contributing factors to the increase in violence in the months with fewer restrictions. Moreover, no association was found between firearms purchases and non-domestic violence.

In Brazil, there is a similar debate regarding the impact of the availability of firearms on crime, including homicide. Some studies have shown that Brazil's last major change in gun legislation in 2003, which restricted the carrying of guns, led to a reduction in gun-related homicides outside the home. In 2019, new legislation loosening certain restrictions on gun ownership led to an increase in gun sales, but also included more supervision and tracing of firearms. After a steady decline in homicides since 2017, there was a slight uptick in 2020 in tandem with an increase in homicides perpetrated with firearms. The increase in firearm homicides may be associated with the increase in gun sales, but the available evidence does not allow for a clear causal attribution at present.

In several countries in Latin America, trends in organized crime-related and other crime-related homicides are strongly linked to trends in firearm homicides. In El Salvador, for example, the use of firearms is strongly associated with killings in the context of gang violence, robbery and organized crime activities, as opposed to intimate partner/family-related violence. Along with a decrease in organized crime-related homicides in El Salvador in recent years (as described in chapter 2 of the present study), homicides perpetrated with firearms (and homicides overall) also declined, suggesting a link between trends in crime-related killings and firearm killings. A similar situation was observed in Mexico, where an increase in firearm homicides between 2015 and 2018 occurred during periods of increased organized crime activities.

In Europe, the overall homicide rate in most subregions has either remained at the same relatively low level or decreased slightly in recent years. Observations can be made on the different homicide mechanism in some subregions with available data. In Northern Europe, for example, the homicide rate in relation to all the different homicide mechanisms has gone down since 2016, with the exception of the rate of homicide perpetrated with a firearm, which has remained at the same level. This does not apply to Sweden, however, where the number of homicides perpetrated with a firearm has increased threefold since 2010. A study conducted by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention has shown that the illegal gun market has become easier to access and that the availability of guns has been associated with violence within the criminal milieu.

In Southern Europe, firearm homicide rates have been decreasing steadily since 2017, more so than the overall decrease in homicide, as seen in Serbia (0.42 per 100,000 population in 2017 to 0.12 in 2021), Bosnia and Herzegovina (0.67 to 0.43) and Spain (0.14 to 0.08).

A notable case in Western Europe is the Kingdom of the Netherlands, where the level of firearm killings has been relatively high in comparison with the neighbouring countries in recent years. Although this type of violence has been observed in liquidations carried out by the drug mafia, firearm killings still constitute a smaller share of homicides than those perpetrated with sharp objects.
The context of firearms homicide in Europe: results from Project TARGET

Project TARGET, coordinated by the Flemish Peace Institute and funded by the European Union, collected data on gun violence in 34 European countries and analysed the linkages between gun violence and firearms trafficking in seven European countries (Belgium, Estonia, Kingdom of Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, Spain and Sweden).

A general downward trend in firearm homicides could be observed in Europe between 2000 and 2014, which then seems to have come to a halt in some European countries. In countries such as Belgium, Germany and Latvia, for example, the number of firearm homicides stopped decreasing in the mid-2010s, while in Austria it returned to a level similar to that in the early 2000s. In Sweden, however, the number of firearm homicides doubled between 2000 and 2019.

Share of firearm type used in homicides (omitting other/unspecified) in Europe, 2000–2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Rifle/Shotgun</th>
<th>Handgun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>97.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechia</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>98.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>86.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>85.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>82.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>80.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>80.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>80.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom of the Netherlands</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>77.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>73.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Analysis by Duquet, N. and Vandenberghe, D. (2021), based on the detailed mortality database of the World Health Organization. Available at https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/who-mortality-database. The information was collected in October 2020; the database has since been taken offline.

Handguns are the firearms most used in homicides in most countries in Europe. In just 7 of the 34 countries included in the analysis the use of long guns/shotguns is more prevalent (figure below). The use of long guns appears to be particularly prevalent in France (92 per cent of all homicides with long or short guns), Portugal (76 per cent) and the United Kingdom (80 per cent). Nevertheless, this information should be interpreted with caution since in most of the countries analysed the majority of types of firearm were classified as “unspecified”.

Men under the age of 35 are the main perpetrators and victims of lethal firearm violence in Europe. This is overwhelmingly the case in the criminal context, yet in the context of domestic gun violence, a large number of female victims can also be observed. Specifically, in the context of intimate partner firearm violence, most of the victims are female. The age groups of perpetrators and victims in the domestic context are more evenly distributed than in the criminal context.

The findings of project TARGET demonstrate that the characteristics of gun violence differ according to the context in which it occurs. In the criminal context, firearms are used for facilitating various types of criminal activities, such as robbery, the drug trade, violent crime, criminal extortion and trafficking in persons. Firearms used in such criminal activities are almost always illegally obtained. In some countries, the illegal firearms market is so large that even lower-level criminals have access to guns. Handguns tend to be the tool of choice for criminal violence perpetrated with firearms as they are easy to carry, use and conceal. In most such cases, firearms violence is non-lethal as the weapon is mainly used to threaten others, as seen in cases of armed robbery in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Belgium and western Balkans. However, the drug milieu is responsible for more lethal casualties and higher levels of use of automatic rifles than other contexts of criminal gun violence.

Source: Statistics Belgium.

Victims of deadly firearms violence in Belgium, by sex, 2009–2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24-49</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-74</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 75</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Analysis by Duquet, N. and Vandenberghe, D. (2021), based on the detailed mortality database of the World Health Organization. Available at https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/who-mortality-database. The information was collected in October 2020; the database has since been taken offline.

b For more information, visit Flemish Peace Institute, “Project target”, 19 December 2021.
c See Flemish Peace Institute, Pulling the Trigger: Gun Violence in Europe (2022).
Mass shootings connected with (organized) crime are rare in Europe and even gang violence rarely results in a large number of lethal casualties, which may be explained by the desire of criminals to remain under the public radar.

The use of firearms in acts of domestic gun violence in Europe is predominantly aimed at killing or injuring the victim rather than achieving some other goal. Although handguns are also the most used type of firearm in this context, a significant portion of the violence is also committed with long guns. The type of firearms used is based on their accessibility, meaning that perpetrators often use a firearm that is already in their (legal or illegal) possession. The link between firearm trafficking and domestic gun violence is therefore generally weaker than in the case of criminal gun violence.

Firearms are used in the terrorist context to destabilize a political state or a social order. Terrorist attacks can be particularly lethal when firearms are used. In general, terrorists prefer to use military-grade and automatic firearms, but often have to rely on whatever is locally available. Jihadi terrorists often operate as lone actors and are usually not structurally associated with an existing network. They tend to rely on members with criminal pasts to acquire firearms. Right-wing terrorism is an umbrella term that covers a wide variety of ideological backdrops and grievances, such as islamophobia, ethnic nationalism, white supremacy and incel (involuntary celibate). This is a fairly heterogenous group that tends to rely on various methods to acquire firearms, including the legal acquisition of firearms, internet purchases of firearm components for self-assembly, and even self-manufactured firearms using 3D-printing technology. Left-wing terrorists seem to use explosive devices rather than firearms.

The analyses from project TARGET indicate that criminal gun violence in Europe is linked to the availability of firearms on illicit gun markets. In addition to the presence of legacy conflict weapons (from the western Balkans in particular), criminals have also exploited legal loopholes that have led to an increase in the availability of reactivated firearms, converted blank-firing weapons or converted Flobert-calibre weapons (guns with a low muzzle velocity designed for indoor use).

---

e These are weapons that were used during conflicts (for example, the armed conflicts in former Yugoslavia) and have been diverted into the hands of private citizens.

f Firearms that were not properly deactivated (i.e. modifying the firearm, making it unable to fire live ammunition) can be reactivated and used as a live-firing firearm.
## Appendix

### Appendix I. Linear OLS regression estimates underlying the figures in "More organized crime, less homicide? A look at municipality-level data in Mexico"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1st figure</th>
<th>2nd figure</th>
<th>3rd figure</th>
<th>4th figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seen gangs (%)</td>
<td>0.126***</td>
<td>-0.00195**</td>
<td>0.148*</td>
<td>0.704***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squared term</td>
<td>(0.0416)</td>
<td>(0.00807)</td>
<td>(0.0820)</td>
<td>(0.244)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoms of extor</td>
<td>0.149*</td>
<td>-0.00341</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>1.767***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squared term</td>
<td>(0.0871)</td>
<td>(0.00378)</td>
<td>(0.174)</td>
<td>(0.554)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.145**</td>
<td>1.788***</td>
<td>2.445**</td>
<td>3.661***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.500)</td>
<td>(0.465)</td>
<td>(0.985)</td>
<td>(0.926)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

### Appendix II. Intentional homicides by region and cercle – Mali, January 2020 to October 2021 (related to “Violent deaths and intentional homicide in Mali”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Cercle</th>
<th>Homicides</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bamako (Capital District)</td>
<td>Bamako</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gao</td>
<td>Gao</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ansongo</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bourem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayes</td>
<td>Kayes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidal</td>
<td>Kidal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ménaka</td>
<td>Ménaka</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mopti</td>
<td>Koro</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Douentza</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bankass</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bandiagara</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Djenné</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mopti</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segou</td>
<td>Niono</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>San</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baraouéli</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Macina</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tombouctou</td>
<td>Gourma Rharous</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timbuktu</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MINUSMA.
REFERENCES


6. Intimate partner/family-related homicides are a subtype of interpersonal homicide.

7. For further information, see “Introduction to the concept of homicide” in chapter 2 of the present study.

8. See “Nigeria: homicide estimates by homicide type using population surveys” on page 98 of this chapter and “Mapping violent deaths in Mali” on page 128.

9. This approach was, for example, used by Stöckl et al. to produce conservative (lower bound) estimates of intimate partner homicides globally. See Stöckl H. et al., “The global prevalence of intimate partner homicide: a systematic review”, The Lancet, vol. 382, No. 9895 (September 2013).

10. Due to the limited data, no separate regional estimates on homicide shares by type are published for Africa, Asia or Oceania. However, the global shares include imputed estimates for those regions.


12. Ibid.


15. Average weighted by the number of intimate partner killings (male and female victims) in each of the 75 countries.

16. Data on female homicides perpetrated exclusively by intimate partners are available from 75 countries across all regions for at least one year in the period 2015–2021.

17. For further information, see “Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killing of women and girls (also referred to as ‘femicide/feminicide’)” (United Nations publication, 2021).

18. There is a positive and statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.33, p < 0.01$) between the rate of female intimate partner homicide and the rate of female family-related homicide in a sample of 35 countries with sufficient disaggregated data for the period 2015–2021.


21. Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killing of women and girls (also referred to as “femicide/feminicide”) (United Nations publication, 2021).


23. See the methodological annex to the Global Study on Homicide 2019 (United Nations publication, 2019).


26. Ibid.


28. See Land Conflict Watch, Locating the Breach: Mapping the Nature of Land Conflicts in India (Nut Graph LLP, Rights and Resources Initiative, and Oxfam India, 2020).


33. The period of reference does not cover 2022, which saw an increase in armed conflict deaths due to the war in Ukraine.


38. See the section on interpersonal homicide, on page 103 of this chapter.


45. See Solmirano, C., “Behind a rise in Latin America’s violent crime, a

46 See Muggah, R. and Dudley, S., “COVID19 is reconfiguring organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean”, *Small Wars Journal* (February 2021).


48 Muggah, R. and Aguirre, K., “In the Americas, homicide is the other killer epidemic”, *Foreign Policy*, 20 May 2022.

49 As noted later in this chapter and in chapter 2 of the present study.

50 These countries were Jamaica (52.1 per 100,000 population), South Africa (42.4), Saint Lucia (39.0), Honduras (38.2), Belize (31.2), Saint Vincent (30.7), Saint Kitts and Nevis (29.4), Trinidad and Tobago (29.4), Bahamas (29.2) and Myanmar (28.4). Note that not all countries reported data for 2021.


52 At least 2,183 people were reportedly murdered in 2022 according to the Haitian National Police and United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti, up from 1,630 in 2021. See Haiti's Criminal Markets: *Mapping Trends in Firearms and Drug Trafficking* (United Nations publication, 2023).


55 Written information provided by the Government of El Salvador to UNODC.


57 Mexico reported 30,968 homicides in 2022, compared with 31,915 in 2021. Over 50 per cent were concentrated in just six states: Baja California, Chihuahua, Jalisco, Michoacan and the state of Mexico. See *Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI)*, “Defunciones por homicidios enero a diciembre de 2022”, 25 July 2023.

58 Most notably in the departments of Arauca, Putumayo, Cauca, Chocó, Guaviare and Valle del Cauca, according to González Díaz, A., “12,221 homicides in Colombia during 2022”, *Universidad Externado de Colombia*, 20 December 2022.


60 See Mistler-Ferguson, S., “Rivals for the throne – can Argentina’s Alvarado clan threaten the Monos?”, *Insight Crime*, 16 June 2022.

61 Data from Ministry of Health of Brazil, Information Technology Department of the United Health System (DATASUS).

62 Bessa Francisco Diniz, V. and McBrien, J. L., “Children and drug trafficking in Brazil: can international humanitarian law provide protections for children involved in drug trafficking?” *Societies*, vol. 12, No. 6 (December 2022).


64 See “Drug gangs and surging violence in Ecuador” in the present chapter.

65 The rival factions are called Choneros and Lobos, although Colombian, Mexican and Albanian drug cartels and crime syndicates are also increasingly involved. See Andrade, C., Margolis, M. and Muggah, R., “Ecuador’s crime wave and its Albanian connection”, *Americas Quarterly* (12 April 2023).


70 Ibid.


72 *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking* 2020 (United Nations publication, 2020).


74 *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking* 2020 (United Nations publication, 2020).


76 UNODC data based on regional estimates rounded up to the multiple of 100.


86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.


90 Ibid.


92 Ibid.

These municipalities included Ixchiguan and Tajumulco in the department of San Marcos. Guatemala, Ministerio de Gobernación, Segundo año de Gobierno: Memoria de Labores 2017 (Guatemala, 2017).


105 See Sustainable Development Goal indicator 16.10.01 at Sustainable Development Goal global database.

106 See Ray, J., "Global progress on safety, confidence in police stalls", Gallup, 26 October 2022.

107 Honduras, Diario Oficial de la Republica de Honduras, Decreto Ejecutivo Número PCM 29-2022 (Honduras, 2022).

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109 OHCHR, "Honduras: Militarization of public security", Press Briefing Notes, 7 July 2023

110 Written information provided by the Government of El Salvador to UNODC.

111 OHCHR, "El Salvador: Concern at measures in response to rising gang violence", Press briefing notes, 5 April 2022.

112 These municipalities included Ixchiguan and Tajumulco in the department of San Marcos. Guatemala, Ministerio de Gobernación, Segundo año de Gobierno: Memoria de Labores 2017 (Guatemala, 2017).

113 Ecuador, Government of Ecuador, Decreto Ejecutivo No. 824 (Ecuador, 2023).

114 See Agence France Presse, “Ecuador declares emergency rule in major port to combat crime”, Barron’s, 1 April 2023.

115 See Senate of Chile, “Ley Naln-Retamal ya una realidad”, 6 April 2023.


120 A UNODC internal review of a sample of European countries with a comparatively high number of firearm-related homicides committed identified two clusters of countries: one with a proportionately greater use of hunting and military rifles and another with a proportionately greater use of handguns. The latter category is typically reflective of a greater likelihood of organized crime.


125 More information on violence linked to the cocaine supply chain in Europe is available in the Global Report on Cocaine 2023 (United Nations publication, 2023).


128 See, for example, Interpol, “Organised crime groups fuel a rise in violent crime in the EU”, 29 January 2021.

129 UNODC data portal, “Drug trafficking and cultivation statistics”.


134 Spain, for example, reported an average of just one organized crime-related homicide per year for every 10 million citizens in the period 2011–2021: UNODC data.


136 They are also targeting shipping companies and transport providers that may be intentionally or unintentionally involved in criminal activity. See Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, “Coalition of European countries fighting organised crime”, 7 October 2022.


141 See OHCHR, “Challenges faced by human rights defenders”.


146 According to Global Witness (“Last line of defence” (September 2021): “To meet our criteria, a case must be supported by the following available information: Credible, published and current online sources of information. Details about the type of act and method of violence, including the date and location. Name and biographical information about the victim. Clear, proximate and documented connections to an environmental or land issue”.


149 Ibid.


152 UN Environment, Promoting greater protection for environmental defenders, Policy.

153 United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), “Regional agreement on access to information, public participation and justice in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean”, 28 September 2023.


155 Ibid. p. 20.

156 CI-22/COUNCIL.33/6 Rev. – page 12.

157 Ibid. p. 17.

158 Dunham, J., “Deadly year for journalists as killings rose sharply in 2022”, *Committee to Protect Journalists*, 24 January 2023.

159 Ibid, p. 19.


161 Journalists who worked in cross-platform media includes journalists who worked regularly across different media, including: print/web; film; radio/print; radio/web; TV/radio; TV/print.

162 CI-22/COUNCIL.33/6 Rev. p.15.

163 CPJ data differ slightly from UNESCO data, but suggest the same overall trends in killings.

164 CI-22/COUNCIL.33/6 Rev. – page 36.


166 The Aid Worker Security Database is a project of Humanitarian Outcomes.

167 For more information on the differences between intentional homicides and killings related to conflicts/wars, see chapter 2 of the present study.

168 Ibid p. 6.


171 Global Terrorism Database (GTD). Available at: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd.

172 For more information on the GTD methodology, see GTD, “Data collection methodology”.

173 Global trends in terrorist killings in comparison with global trends in homicide and conflict-related deaths are discussed in chapter 2 of the present study.

174 The grouping follows the ICCS approach to building the additional disaggregation of intentional homicide by mechanism of killing (see ICCS, Table V, p. 104).

175 These include but are not limited to drugs, medications, biological substances, corrosive substances, pesticides, gases, vapours, carbon monoxide, hanging, strangulation, suffocation, drowning, submersion, explosive material, smoke, fire, flames, steam, hot vapours, hot objects, bodily force, sexual assault, other maltreatment and other unspecified means.

176 The 67 per cent figure represents the lower bound of estimates.


179 *Global Study on Homicide 2019, Booklet 3 (United Nations publication, 2019).*

180 UNODC homicide statistics., “Intentional homicide”, dataUNODC.


182 Data on the mechanism of killing in the two countries are available at the WHO Mortality Database.


185 The studies were conducted in United States (9), United Kingdom (3), South Africa (1), South Korea (1) and Australia (1) and were mostly cross-sectional.


190 See National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFTCA), *Crime Guns Recovered and Traced Within the United States and Its Territories* (2023).

“Time-to-crime” is the time from the last known retail sale of a firearm to when it is recovered in a crime.

Publicly available data on homicides perpetrated with firearms go back to 2005.


In the study, violence-related firearm injuries include both fatal and non-fatal ones.


See chapter 2 of the present study.

See Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå), Shootings in Criminal Milieux (Sweden, 2019).

See Ducuet, N. and Vanden Auweele, D., Targeting Gun Violence and Trafficking in Europe (Flemish Peace Institute, 2021).