2. THE MANY FACES OF HOMICIDE

The study of why people kill other people is vital from a policy perspective, as without such knowledge it is very difficult to implement appropriate strategies and policies for the prevention and reduction of homicide. A number of homicide types can be identified on the basis of elements such as premeditation, motivation, context, instrumentality and perpetrator-victim relationship, which all play roles of varying magnitudes in different forms of homicide. That said, developing homicide typologies is a complex business, not least because they sometimes overlap and, in real life, homicide drivers can be multiple. Indeed, further research and methodological work is needed to help develop a comprehensive categorization of homicide, but some of its typologies, which are particularly relevant from the crime prevention perspective, can already be identified in the following manner:

- Homicide related to other criminal activities
- Interpersonal homicide
- Socio-political homicide

Homicide related to other criminal activities

The first of the three typologies is homicide committed in relation to other criminal activities that are aimed, directly or indirectly, at obtaining illicit profits. Within such a broad category, two distinct types of homicide can be identified: those committed by organized criminal groups; and those committed while perpetrating other, more conventional criminal acts such as robbery. Although the main goal of organized criminal groups is to generate illicit profit, they may commit homicide for a variety of reasons, from the elimination of rivals and State representatives, to shows of strength and territorial control. In such cases, homicides are instrumental to achieving longer-term criminal

---

1 The International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS), currently under development in a process led by UNODC, will provide tools to build a consistent categorization of intentional homicide.

2 An “organized criminal group” is defined by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000) as a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences... in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit. (See United Nations (2000). Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, article 2.)
goals and are typically the result of premeditation and purpose. On the other hand, while organized criminal groups may also commit conventional crimes, homicides perpetrated during other criminal acts have different drivers: homicide does not represent the primary goal of most criminals, though it may be perpetrated in order to accomplish the original crime and/or avoid detection.

**Interpersonal homicide**

Central to the definition of the second homicide typology is the fact that homicide is not instrumental to the accomplishment of a secondary goal, but is rather a means of resolving a conflict and/or punishing the victim through violence when relationships come under strain (including from friction due to social and cultural norms). The two main categories in this typology are homicide related to intimate partner or family relationships, in which victim and perpetrator are relatives, share the same household and/or an intimate relationship; and other interpersonal homicide, in which the victim and perpetrator may or may not know each other. The relationship in intimate partner/family-related homicide is distinguished from the relationship in the other interpersonal homicide category by the level of emotional attachment and other links, often of an economic or legal nature, between victim and perpetrator. Homicides within this typology can be the result of a premeditated design or of a random act of violence, but the nature of the relationship between perpetrator and victim is a fundamental feature of this crime. Straddling the divide between the private and public spheres, much of this type of violence is attributed to the very nature of coexisting with and among others.

**Socio-political homicide**

The third typology encompasses homicides that originate in the public sphere and are typically committed as an instrument for advancing social or political agendas. Power relationships, including among social, ethnic and political groups, are involved and homicide is committed in order to exert influence over those relationships, whether directly or indirectly. People are killed for what they represent and/or for the message that such killings can convey to the general public or to specific sub-sectors. In contrast to interpersonal homicide, the victims of this typology are often anonymous to its perpetrators, or at least the nature of the relationship between them is not a consideration in the decision to kill. Often the result of premeditation and organization, homicides of this type include those resulting from acts of terrorism and hate crime, amongst many others. War and conflict-related killings are also considered acts of socio-political violence, but are not included in this category as they are outside the realm of intentional homicide.

**Homicide typologies: data challenges and regional patterns**

Just as countries are affected by different types of violence, the three homicide typologies affect a country’s overall homicide rate in different ways. Global analysis of such differences is hampered by insufficient statistical information as not many countries produce or disseminate data on motives for homicide, and important differences exist as to the criteria used for determining motivation when they do. This makes it difficult to identify homicide drivers and the relative prevalence of each of the homicide typologies in a comprehensive manner, whether at the country or regional level.

Where data is available, different types of homicide can be linked to the differences in homicide levels between some regions. For example, homicide related to other criminal activities seems to be largely a phenomenon in the Americas, with 30 per cent of homicides in the region being linked to organized crime or gangs. In five countries with available trend data in the sub-regions of Central America and the Caribbean, homicide linked to other criminal activities drives overall national homicide rates.

While homicide linked to robbery is a very stable share of all homicides (about 5 per cent of all homicides in the Americas, Europe and Oceania each year), homicides linked to gangs or organized crime tend to be more variable over time and more diverse across countries. This suggests that organized crime or gang-related homicides can produce sudden changes in the homicide level of a given country; an example being the sharp (40 per cent) decline in homicides in El Salvador in the course of a single year (see chapter 2.1), or the rapid increase in the homicide rate in Central America between 2007 and 2011. Those most at risk from this type of homicide are males, particularly young males aged 15-29 in the Americas.

By contrast, intimate partner/family-related homicide affects every region and country across the globe, accounting for one in seven (14 per cent) of all homicides in 2012. Although its intensity is
greater in the Americas, this type of homicide accounts for a greater share of total homicides in Asia, Europe and Oceania. Unlike other types of killing, it disproportionately affects women: two thirds of all victims of this type of homicide are women, and almost half (47 per cent) of all female victims of homicide are killed by their intimate partners or family members. Those most at risk from this type of homicide are adult women aged 30 and over.

Other types of interpersonal homicide may include those resulting from conflicts relating to issues such as property disputes or revenge-type killings, or even from random acts that may be solely the result of the victim being in the wrong place at the wrong time. From limited available data, it appears that other interpersonal-type homicides occur at all latitudes, though for different reasons (such as land disputes or urban violence).

Very limited statistical information is available on killings motivated by social or political agendas (such as hate crimes or acts of terrorism). This typology of homicide can represent a substantive share of total homicides in specific contexts or regions, such as in post-conflict settings or countries experiencing social, economic or political upheaval. However, national definitions and recording practices may differ substantially and determine if and how such homicides are reflected in statistics.3

---

3 Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (2013).

---

Fig. 2.2: Shares of homicide, by typology, selected countries (2001-2012)

2.1 HOMICIDE RELATED TO OTHER CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES

Due to its direct impact on public security, homicide committed by "professional" criminals often attracts the full attention of law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system. But the relationship between other criminal activities, particularly the most clandestine among them, and homicidal violence is not a straightforward one. Homicides committed while perpetrating other crimes such as robbery (homicide is not the primary goal) show constant trends and levels across regions, while trends and levels of homicides related to organized criminal groups (homicide is instrumental and premeditated) vary over time and by region.

The share of homicides related to organized criminal groups out of total homicides is highest in the Americas and lowest in Asia (see figure 2.1.1), though these figures should be interpreted with caution because of the existence of different criteria in the classification of homicides linked to organized crime. Moreover, the fact that organized crime/gang-related homicides are more prevalent in the Americas does not necessarily mean that organized crime or gangs are more prevalent there than in Europe or Asia. Rather, violence is often linked to competition between involved parties, such as organized criminal groups, or between them and the State, with regard to control over territory or illicit activities, including trafficking. Such groups in the Americas may be experiencing higher levels in three regions), a relatively clear pattern emerges. The median proportion of organized crime/gang-related homicides is highest in the Americas and lowest in Asia (see figure 2.1.1), though these figures should be interpreted with caution because of the existence of different criteria in the classification of homicides linked to organized crime. Moreover, the fact that organized crime/gang-related homicides are more prevalent in the Americas does not necessarily mean that organized crime or gangs are more prevalent there than in Europe or Asia. Rather, violence is often linked to competition between involved parties, such as organized criminal groups, or between them and the State, with regard to control over territory or illicit activities, including trafficking. Such groups in the Americas may be experiencing higher levels

Organized crime/gang-related homicide

When looking at proportions of homicides related to gangs and organized criminal groups (according to national police statistics from several countries in selected European countries and in India, but a large share of unknown homicide contexts leaves room for uncertainty.

As demonstrated by the variety of regional and national experiences analysed in this study, there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to tackling homicide. Better understanding of motivations, contexts and relationships between perpetrators and victims will facilitate targeted strategies and policies to decrease homicide around the world.

4 The attribution of homicide to "organized crime" or "gang" depends on national penal legislation, practices by law enforcement agencies and accuracy in compiling statistics. For example, in one country, a homicide is defined as gang-related if the suspect is known to be a gang member, while in another country, the classification can be related to crime-scene criteria such as the modalities of killing, weapon used, number of perpetrators, etc.
of conflict with each other, or with the State, than organized criminal groups in other regions, which, though they may also be active, may have reached a level of stability or control over their territory and resources that does not generate the same level of visible violence.

Across the world, trends in organized crime/gang-related homicide vary considerably. In selected developed countries (see figure 2.1.2), in a framework of relatively low homicide rates, the trend in such killings has been quite stable and slowly decreasing, and rates of organized crime/gang-related killings have decreased to below 0.3 per 100,000 population since 2006. In Italy, there has been a 50 per cent decline in this type of homicide since 2007, with organized crime-related rates of homicide decreasing from 0.2 to less than 0.1 per 100,000 population.

The picture is different in Central America and the Caribbean (see figure 2.1.3) where, in a context of high homicide levels, countries reporting on homicides linked to gangs and organized criminal groups often show increasing trends, particularly the Bahamas, Belize, El Salvador and Honduras.

5 The group of developed countries considered here has an average homicide rate below 0.8 per 100,000, with the exception of the United States, which in the last five years has had an average homicide rate of 4.9 per 100,000 population. (UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013)).
organized criminal groups and gangs for years, the surge in homicide levels in Central America in recent years is largely a result of violence related to the control of drug trafficking routes, to turf wars between criminal groups and to conflict between organized criminal groups and the State.

**Italy: Mafia-related crime**

Although many of their activities take place outside the law, from the perspective of organized criminal groups, these activities are still business activities. As in conventional business, the main goal of organized criminal groups is to maximize their profits, which means being pragmatic and adaptable, particularly in terms of the amount of attention they draw from law enforcement agencies. The term “pax mafiosa” has been used to refer to situations when organized criminal groups maximize their efforts to avoid the use of violence, which can result in low levels of violent crime even though levels of other crime may be high. Indeed, the relationship between organized criminal groups and homicidal violence is not symmetrical and though a high level of violence caused by organized criminal groups is a clear indicator of their presence, a lack of such violence is more difficult to interpret.

A case in point is Italy, where the story of organized crime-related homicide is not only one of declining trends, but also of varying relationships between crime and the presence of Mafia-type associations.

![Fig. 2.1.4: Number of homicides in Italy, by Mafia-type association (1992-2012)](source: Massari, M. (2013); Small Arms Survey; Ministry of Interior, Transcrime, Italy (2013).)

A declining rate of Mafia-related killings does not mean, per se, that Mafia-type associations are necessarily loosening their grip in certain Italian regions. Such organizations typically operate in a covert manner, thus the assessment of the scope and intensity of their activities is extremely challenging. However, by using a number of direct and indirect indicators, a composite indicator of the presence of Mafia-type associations has been recently proposed. Using four variables to cover different dimensions of Mafia activity, including persons charged for being associated with the Mafia and assets confiscated from organized criminal groups, the “Mafia Index” measures the presence of Mafia-type associations, and of the resulting conditions of submission (omertà), to commit criminal offences, to directly and indirectly acquire management or control of economic activities, licences, authorizations, public contracts and services, or to obtain unlawful profits or advantages for themselves or any other person, or with a view to preventing or limiting the freedom to vote, or getting votes for themselves or other persons, on the occasion of an election (Government of Italy (1930). Italian Criminal Code, Article 416. Association to commit crime).
ence of Mafia-type associations at the provincial level in Italy. By mapping the presence and activities of Mafia-type associations, it indicates that the infiltration of such groups is not limited to southern Italy, as areas in the centre and north of the country also show signs of Mafia activity (see map 2.1.1).9

Mafia-related homicides are still concentrated in areas where there is a strong Mafia presence (high Mafia Index). But while there is generally a link between homicide and organized criminal groups, there are areas with a significant presence of Mafia-type associations without Mafia-related homicides. As such, provinces with high levels of Mafia-related homicides have a high Mafia presence, but a high Mafia presence does not necessarily result in organized crime-related homicides.

**El Salvador: the gang “truce” and decreasing homicide rates**

The experience of Italy shows that organized crime-related homicide is not just a function of the presence of organized crime per se. In contrast to other types of homicide, trends in organized crime-related homicide are exposed to sudden changes as a consequence of power shifts between organized criminal groups, conflicts between those groups or between them and State authorities. But organized criminal groups are clearly also susceptible to the effect of specific policies aimed at fighting or mitigating violence stemming from their activities.

Central America’s gang-related homicides have been driving the extremely high levels of homicide in the sub-region. In El Salvador, major changes in homicidal violence took place after a “truce” between two major gangs was agreed upon in March 2012. The truce, brokered by local government, the international community and religious leaders, had an immediate impact on homicide levels (see figure 2.1.5).10

The long-term impact of the truce cannot yet be evaluated, but the most welcome effect has been the dramatic drop in the homicide rate. In 2011 and January-February 2012, prior to the truce, the average monthly homicide rate was 6.0 per 100,000 population, a value close to the global annual homicide rate, meaning that people were killed at the same rate on a monthly basis in El

---

9 The map is based on a revised Mafia Index, which does not include Mafia-related homicides. This is to avoid autocorrelation effects in the analysis of Mafia-related homicides and Mafia presence, as measured by the Mafia Index.


Salvador as in one year at the global level. After the truce, however, the monthly homicide rate was more than halved (averaging 2.8 per 100,000 population) from March 2012 to February 2013. This sudden reduction provides an indirect quantification of the homicidal violence that could be directly attributed to gang-related conflict in the period before the truce. In parallel with the decline in homicides since the truce, there also appears to have been a slight decline in some other criminal activities, according to data on crime reported (see figure 2.1.6).

For example, levels of extortion, a crime typically associated with gangs, appear to have decreased slightly since the truce but are still extremely high throughout the country, particularly its eastern region (see map 2.1.2).

Despite an overall decline in violent crime rates, especially the homicide rate, the situation remains fluid and fragile. According to surveys in 2012 and 2013, just over 50 per cent of the population felt that the truce had helped to reduce crime,11 suggesting that the benefits of the truce have yet to be perceived by the population with an intensity reflecting the drop in the homicide rate.

Elsewhere in Central America, gang truces have seen mixed results. For example, in Honduras, a truce agreement has been in place since May 2013 but, in contrast to the situation in El Salvador, the number of homicides did not decrease in the period immediately following the truce.12 This may be attributable to differences in the gangs themselves, as gangs in Honduras may be less organized and less hierarchical than those in El Salvador, possibly making it more difficult for gang leaders to impose their will over the various factions.

11 Instituto Universitario de Opinion Publica (2013). Data relates to the sum of answers “a lot”, “some” and “a little” to the question “In your opinion, how much has the truce between gangs reduced crime?”

12 Instituto Universitario de Democracia, Paz y Seguridad (2013). In the month following the truce, there were 614 murders, an increase from the 599 murders in the month preceding the truce.
**Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: progress in prevention**

Brazil has made significant inroads in combating gangs and related violence in recent years. In particular, an innovative programme known as Unidades de Policia Pacificadora (Pacifying Police Units (UPPs)) has been instituted in favelas, or slums, in Rio de Janeiro, which have become the base of operations for many organized criminal groups and, with competing criminal factions vying for territory, are also traditionally the most violent parts of the city.

UPPs have been instituted in several favelas since 2008/2009 to provide traditional community "proximity" policing, while consolidating State control over those communities and linking them to State social services. As of November 2013, 34 units were in operation in 226 communities, benefiting over 1.5 million people. UPP officials are given specialized education and training, notably in human rights and modern policing techniques, with the aim of taking control back from the gangs and promoting long-term security.a

Official data attest to a decrease in homicide rates, as well as robbery rates, since the UPP programme began. The trend in homicide incidents was decreasing in the areas now controlled by UPPs prior to their implementation (see figure 2.1.7), but those areas have experienced a continued decline in the number of homicides since the programme commenced and they all show a greater decrease than the one recorded in the city of Rio de Janeiro over the same period of time. It is noteworthy that the number of reported sexual assaults in the same period significantly increased in communities where UPPs operate (by almost 200 per cent). This latter trend may be attributed to higher rates of reporting of those crimes, which may be interpreted as growing trust in the police, or be due to better recording practices.

There is also broad support for the UPPs from favela residents. For example, 66 per cent of those surveyed in Santa Marta and Cidade de Deus approved of the programme in 2009. In 2010, 93 per cent of people resident in UPP areas felt safer, while 70 per cent of residents of communities without UPPs would have liked to have had the programme implemented in their neighbourhood.b The installation of UPPs is an important acknowledgement that social inclusion and community development are key components in preventing crime. They facilitate or promote security and access to social services, as well as help create opportunities for social and economic development.

---

**Fig. 2.1.7: Trend in homicides in UPP areas of operation and the city of Rio de Janeiro, (2007-2012)**

![Graph showing trend in homicides in UPP areas of operation and the city of Rio de Janeiro, (2007-2012)](image)

*Note: Data for UPPs starting in 2009 include Cidade de Deus, Batam, Chapu Mangueira and Pavao Pavaozinho, as well as for Santa Marta (which commenced 19 December 2008); data for UPPs starting in 2010 include Andarai, Borei, Formiga, Macacos, Providencia, Salgueiro, Tabajaras and Turano; data for UPPs starting in 2011 include Coroa, Fallet e Fogoenteiro; Escondidinho e Prazeres; Mangueria; Sao Carlos; and Sao Joao Quieto e Matriz.

Source: Instituto de Segurança Publica, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2013).

---


---

**Conventional crime and homicide**

Despite the fact that homicide may be considered a possible outcome of a criminal action, it does not represent the primary goal of the majority of criminals. For that reason, homicides linked to more conventional types of crime such as robbery or burglary are of a different nature from homicides linked to organized crime, for which homicide can often be a strategic element of its modus operandi.

In 37 countries with available data, roughly 5 per cent of all homicides were linked to robbery in 2012. This percentage holds true for the three
regions for which data are available, the Americas, Asia and Europe, where, at 5.2, 5.2 and 5.3 per cent of all homicides, respectively, it is remarkably similar.

When looking at data from a smaller selection of countries for which trend data on homicide linked to robbery are available, the homicide rate generally decreased from 2005 to 2011, as per the global trend, whereas the rate of homicide linked to robbery bucked that trend by remaining stable (see figure 2.1.8). As such, the share of homicides linked to robbery slightly increased from 2005 to 2011. Contrary to fluctuations that are often recorded in trends in organized crime-related homicide, killings during robberies show a higher degree of stability.

**Fig. 2.1.8: Total homicide and homicide linked to robbery rates, selected countries (2005-2011)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rate per 100,000 population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Homicide in Latin American cities**

Homicide linked to other criminal activities, and particularly to criminal groups, garners significant attention in the Americas, but considerable levels of other types of homicide also exist there. Based on data available for five cities in South America, homicide levels are lowest in the cities of Montevideo (Uruguay) and Santiago (Chile), in the southern part of the sub-region, but the proportion of homicides that the different typologies account for varies considerably. In Santiago, the vast majority of homicides are linked to other criminal activities, while the share of interpersonal homicides is higher in Montevideo. In Quito (Ecuador), the share of homicides attributed to the interpersonal and crime-related typologies are nearly identical* (see figure 2.1.9).

In those cities, homicides due to assaults and robberies, as well as vengeance-related killings, are considered to be included in the typology of homicide linked to other criminal activities, while interpersonal homicide encompasses homicides resulting from inter-family and inter-couple homicide, femicide, and homicides linked to sexual crimes.

* Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (2013).

**Fig. 2.1.9: Average share of homicides, by typology; and homicide rates, by selected cities, South America (2008-2011)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Undetermined</th>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
<th>Related to other criminal activities</th>
<th>Homicide rate per 100,000 population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santiago</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cali</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogota</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quito</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montevideo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rate per 100,000 population

Source: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (2013).