

Handgun Ownership and Armed Violence in the Western Balkans

Introduction

In the 1990s, the countries and territories of the Western Balkans¹ experienced several transformations: a transition from socialism to liberal democracy, widespread economic decline, and episodes of violent conflict in Bosnia and Croatia (1991–95) and in Kosovo (1999) (see Map). Since the turn of the 21st century, the region has witnessed increasing political stability and socio-economic adjustment. Yet while the threat of armed conflict in the region has decreased, levels of handgun ownership and armed violence remain high.

Throughout the region, which has an overall population of about 25 million (UNDESA, n.d.), an estimated 3.6–6.2 million firearms are in civilian possession. The high prevalence of civilian-held firearms has been linked to the rate of violent crime, with the homicide rate in the Western Balkans being higher than in the other countries of Southern Europe as well as in Western Europe (Alvazzi del Frate and Mugellini, 2012; Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2011, p. 60). In addition, the high prevalence of firearms and violent crime in the region is linked to the activities of organized crime, which is largely perceived by both the international and the local population as one of the primary sources of insecurity in the Western Balkans.

These findings call for an analysis of the dynamics of firearms possession and armed violence in the Western Balkans. This Issue Brief examines the historical aspects of firearms proliferation in the region in order to frame the issue. It also presents the results of a nationwide household survey conducted

by Gallup Europe in the countries and territories of the Western Balkans in 2012. The Small Arms Survey had the opportunity to insert three questions relating to firearms possession and armed victimization into the 2012 Gallup Balkan Monitor (see Box 1). Where necessary, the data from the survey has been supplemented by information from other sources, such as international and national data, special reports, and policy and academic research. The main findings are as follows:

- The Western Balkans is home to an estimated 3.6–6.2 million registered and unregistered firearms.
- At least 500,000 and up to 1.6 million households own firearms in the Western Balkans.
- Since 1995, the average homicide rate in the region has decreased drastically, stabilizing at around 2.0 per 100,000 between 2007 and 2010. Nevertheless, the homicide rate is still significantly higher than in other European regions, and



homicides are more frequently committed with firearms.

- About 1.2 per cent of all survey respondents reported that a household member was held at gunpoint in the 12 months prior to the administration of the survey.

This Issue Brief is divided into three sections. The first section outlines the cultural and historical factors that have facilitated the spread of firearms among the population. The second section examines the post-conflict security dynamics, the role of organized crime in the proliferation of firearms, and the prevalence of registered and unregistered firearms in the region. The section ends with a focus on longitudinal trends in the homicide rate, as disaggregated by sex and firearms. Section three, which comprises the bulk of the analysis, presents region-wide household survey data obtained from the 2012 Gallup Balkan Monitor to generate an evidence-based understanding of armed violence in the Western Balkans. Specifically, the section unpacks issues relating to self-reported and perceived levels of handgun ownership, provides estimates of household firearms possession, and reflects on experiences of armed violence.

Framing the small arms problem in the Western Balkans

Cultural heritage of the *hajduk*

A common assumption regarding firearms in the Western Balkans is that the region has a deep-rooted 'gun culture' that predisposes its populations not only to carry firearms, but also to use them. Yet there has been very little analysis of this 'gun culture' in the region.² In academic literature, the use of guns in the Western Balkans is often traced to the socio-cultural category of the *bandit*—locally referred to by terms such as *hajduk*, *haidut*, *uskok*, and *klepht*—which carries 'connotations of oppression, thirst for liberty, and heroic masculinity' as well as 'lawlessness, primitivism, and violence' (Bracewell, 2003, p. 22). It has been argued that the historian Eric Hobsbawm (1971) even

based his most institutionalized form of social banditry on the Balkan notion of the *hajduk* (Bracewell, 2003, p. 22).

Despite the emphasis on the 'home-grown' nature of the bandit (in both abovementioned senses of the term), historical analysis suggests that it was not solely the product of the local culture, but that it also reflects the prominent state-building practices of the Ottoman Empire, which dominated the region until the 19th century. Unlike in Western Europe—where the state eventually consolidated its monopoly over the use of force by suppressing other forms of armed violence (Tilly, 1991)—the Ottoman consolidation of state power and authority was achieved by making bargains and deals with local armed bands (Barkey, 1994). It was only in the 18th and 19th centuries, when the Ottoman Empire began to weaken and national liberation struggles swept across the Western Balkans, that the image of the bandit, with all of its trappings—including the style of dress and an emphasis on armaments—took on cultural salience (Bracewell, 2003, p. 24). Moreover, the period of insecurity that accompanied the emergence of nation-states in the region led not only to the proliferation of bandit groups, but also to the view that weapons can guarantee personal, family, and community security (SEESAC, 2006a, pp. 4–7).

While the notion of *hajduk* may thus refer to an important cultural phenomenon, it also reflects Ottoman power-sharing with local elites as well as a certain degree of tolerance of local 'bandits' who posed no threat to Ottoman central power or colonial rule. While the socio-cultural image of the bandit might shed light on the symbolic meaning of owning a gun and even condone its use in certain situations, it is not clear to what extent they actually shape the proliferation of firearms. Indeed, as argued in a recent study, 'culture' and 'tradition' are not primary reasons for gun ownership in the region (SEESAC, 2006a). There are a few exceptions, however. In Montenegro, about 22 per cent of survey respondents stated that 'tradition' was the reason why individuals within their neighbourhoods owned

handguns; the same view was expressed by 16 per cent of respondents in Albania and 15 per cent in Serbia. Elsewhere in the region, however, the tendency to invoke tradition as a reason for handgun ownership was much lower (below 5 per cent) (SEESAC, 2006a, p. 13).

Conflict-related spread of firearms

During the 1990s, the Western Balkans saw not only the War of Yugoslav Secession (1991–95),³ but also general political instability in the region. Albania was experiencing an economic and political crisis that peaked in 1997, following the collapse of its banking sector, and Macedonia was witnessing growing ethnic animosity along its borders (Fischer, 2010; Irwin, 2010). Following the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995, both Bosnia and Croatia faced precarious peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which comprised Serbia and Montenegro, underwent dramatic political changes as Serbia's Socialist Party lost power in 2000 and the push for independence intensified in Montenegro. The end of the 1990s also saw a more assertive drive for independence in Kosovo and an increasing opposition to it from the Serbian government. This political crisis, in turn, led to a 78-day NATO air campaign against the Serbian forces and government that paved the way for the emergence of Kosovo as a UN protectorate under Security Council Resolution 1244 (ICG, 1999).

That all of these transformations had an impact on the levels of firearms throughout the Western Balkans—especially in terms of the large quantities of weapons outside of governmental control—has been acknowledged by both academics and security analysts. One of the primary reasons for the high numbers of firearms in the region has to do with the fact that before 1991, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY)⁴ had the fourth-largest army—the Yugoslav People's Army—in Europe and a matching military industrial complex (Anastasijevic, 2006, p. 10).

The Yugoslav People's Army was made up of two elements: the regular

ground forces, controlled by the federal government in Belgrade, and the territorial defence force (Gow, 2003, p. 52).⁵ The territorial defence units were especially important for guarding the country's large stockpiles. When the wars in Croatia and later in Bosnia broke out, these stockpiles were increasingly placed under the control of the Yugoslav People's Army and, by extension, the Serbian government (Griffiths, 2010, pp. 183–87).⁶ Some of these weapons were allegedly diverted to paramilitary-cum-criminal groups that were backed by the various local governments and that came to play a key role in the conflict. Following the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, some weapons trickled into the hands of civilians and others found their way to organized crime groups, whose importance in the region was growing steadily (SEESAC, 2007, p. 3; Milosevska, 2009, pp. 6–7).

Another reason for the proliferation of firearms in the region was the result of smuggling channels operating in Croatia and Bosnia during the wars. The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the outbreak of war led to the imposition of international sanctions and an arms embargo on all the republics of the SFRY. These measures had little effect on Serbia and Montenegro, which, as mentioned above, had inherited the Yugoslav People's Army and its stockpiles. Croatia and Bosnia, however, were hit hard by the embargo and resorted to smuggling of arms in order to build up their armed forces. Although it is difficult to estimate the precise quantity and value of weapons funnelled into Croatia during the period, it is believed that between 1993 and 1995 about USD 308 million worth of weapons were smuggled into the country (Hajdinjak, 2002, pp. 9–10).⁷ Similarly, during the same period about USD 270 million worth of weapons was smuggled into Bosnia—with the last year of the conflict seeing the value of illicit arms imports in the war-torn country reaching \$800 million (pp. 10–11).⁸

Another source of weapons in the region was the breakdown of the Albanian government in 1997. From

1944 until 1985, under the communist regime of Enver Hoxha, a great deal of emphasis was placed on creating a strong and well equipped military (Arsovska and Kostakos, 2008, p. 362). This practice ensured that even after the fall of communism, large stockpiles of weapons existed in the country. Following the collapse of the pyramid schemes and subsequent fall of the Albanian government in 1997, large-scale looting of military stockpiles took place. In fact, according to some estimates, up to 643,220 small arms and light weapons were pillaged; only about 15 per cent of these were subsequently recovered (Khakee and Florquin, 2003, p. 25). It is assumed that the local population was responsible for much of the looting, which resulted in the widespread diffusion of illicit weapons and ammunition. Nevertheless, a significant portion—about 150,000 firearms—is thought to have been smuggled across the border into Kosovo and sold to various rebel groups, such as the Kosovo Liberation Army, the Albanian National Army, and the National Liberation Army (NLA) (Arsovska and Kostakos, 2008, p. 362; Khakee and Florquin, 2003, p. 25).

Post-conflict security dynamics

Arms trafficking and the spread of organized crime in the Western Balkans

Organized crime in the Western Balkans did not emerge as a by-product of the political and economic turmoil that characterized the region during the 1990s, as some analysts have argued;⁹ rather, it predated that period. However, the outbreak of war in Bosnia and Croatia, the imposition of an arms embargo and comprehensive economic sanctions, and political changes in Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia at the turn of the century did provide opportunities for organized crime to proliferate. The socio-political environment of the past 14 years has done little to curb criminal activities. As a result, 'the Western Balkans are not only a transit region, but also a major source of fire-

arms traded on the international weapons market, precursors (ephedrine) and synthetic drugs' (EUROPOL, 2013, p. 12). This remains the case even though all UN Member States in the Western Balkans have signed the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking in Firearms (UN, 2001; 2003).

Although the international community has devoted attention to the issue of organized crime in the Western Balkans, very little systematic analysis of the phenomenon exists (Woodward, 2004, p. 225). Similarly, while links between Balkan organized crime and arms trafficking are often made explicit in the grey literature (Anastasijevic, 2008), evidence is scarce and fragmentary, especially if the state is implicated in criminal activities. What little information exists is mostly drawn from journalistic accounts and official discourse, both of which portray organized crime as having a hierarchical structure, comprising members who tend to come from a single ethnic group (often referred to as the Albanian, Montenegrin, and Serbian mafias), and monopolizing not only traditional forms of criminal activity (such as trafficking in drugs, arms, and human beings), but also white-collar types of crime (such as money laundering and bank and investment fraud). There is, however, very little empirical support for these assumptions.

What little evidence exists seems to suggest that organized crime in the Western Balkans, as in many other parts of Europe, is neither a single, large entity, nor is it cohesive, homogeneous, hierarchical, or monopolizing (Paoli and Fijnaut, 2004, p. 608; von Lampe, 2008). Rather, it is small and fragmented—characterized by loose horizontal networks and ethnic heterogeneity (Antonopolus, 2008, p. 320; Carapic, 2014; Mladenovic, 2012).¹⁰ Thus, despite the fact that organized crime leaders and members tend to present themselves as ultra-nationalistic—portraying an image of a unified ethnic underworld within specific countries—they are actually guided by pragmatism

and often collaborate with different ethnic groups that are based elsewhere in the region (Carapic, 2014; Mladenovic, 2012). As one analyst observes, this ethnic heterogeneity reveals that 'Yugoslavia has never ceased to exist for the organized crime world in the Balkans' (Mladenovic, 2012). This is most evident when it comes to the smuggling of arms (especially prior to 1995) and trafficking in drugs, activities that depend on the close collaboration and overlap between organized crime groups (Anastasijevic, 2006).

Contemporary forms of organized crime largely took place during the 1970s and 1980s, when communist rule still predominated in the region (Carapic, 2014).¹¹ Unlike elsewhere in the world, where organized crime has filled a political vacuum created by state weakness or collapse, the formation and evolution of organized crime in the Western Balkans was closely tied to the state. In the former Yugoslavia, for instance, organized crime partly formed as a result of the 'open border policy' promoted by the then socialist regime, which enabled a portion of the population to emigrate and seek employment in Western Europe. This policy had two broad side effects. On the one hand, it led to an increase in the general standard of living in the former Yugoslavia, as the diaspora wired remittances to the local population and the pressure on the domestic Yugoslav labour market dropped due to the outflow of unemployed individuals to Western Europe (Carapic, 2014).

On the other hand, the policy led to a so-called 'crime export' of individual lawbreakers and small criminal groups to Western Europe, where they later developed into larger organized crime groups. This exodus can be further attributed to two interrelated processes. First, in terms of financial opportunity, Western Europe was a much more attractive environment than the Western Balkans, where the society and economy continued to be controlled by the state. In this sense, it was rational for criminal groups to take advantage of the open border policy and emigrate with other individuals in search

of employment. The second reason for the outflow and proliferation of criminal groups from the Western Balkans, and from the former Yugoslavia in particular, can be attributed to the state's desire to extend its political influence outside its borders—in terms of targeting so-called 'political enemies' and by involving itself in illegal and illicit markets (Anastasijevic, 2008; Carapic, 2014; CSD, 2004). At this stage of its development, organized crime in the Western Balkans can thus best be described as 'foreign-based', in the sense that the groups commit crimes outside of their place of origin (von Lampe, 2005).

When war broke out in Bosnia and Croatia in the early 1990s, these foreign-based groups returned to their countries of origin in order to take advantage of the new profit-making opportunities and to help (formally or informally) with the war effort, thus effectively transforming into paramilitary-cum-criminal groups. These groups were especially important when it came to the smuggling of weapons—whose availability, as noted above, varied among the warring sides. The availability of weapons affected not only the ability to wage war, but also the types of illegal markets in which organized crime groups became involved. For instance, in Croatia and Bosnia organized crime groups were heavily involved in the smuggling of arms into their respective countries in order to aid the state in building up its war-fighting capacity; some of these weapons were provided by their Serbian counterparts (Hajdinjak, 2002). Given the abundance of weapons under the control of Serbian forces, the primary focus of organized crime groups in Serbia and Montenegro was not arms trafficking (although they did engage in it), but sanctions busting—especially in terms of smuggling petrol, drugs, cigarettes, foodstuffs, and other scarce goods.

These activities could not have taken place without the proliferation of organized crime in neighbouring Macedonia, one of the most active violators of the arms embargo and sanctions imposed on the republics of the

former Yugoslavia (Hajdinjak, 2002, pp. 16–18). Indeed, partially in response to the events taking place outside Macedonia's borders, organized crime groups mushroomed in the country; at the same time, they stepped up their involvement in various illegal activities, such as the smuggling of arms, petrol, and cigarettes to Serbia and Montenegro, and trafficking in drugs (CSD, 2004, pp. 81–82). The imposition of sanctions also had an effect on the spread of organized crime in Albania. During the first few years of the 1990s, organized crime in Albania was the domain of relatively small groups of related individuals involved in the smuggling of cigarettes and petrol—especially to Montenegro. By 1997, when pyramid schemes crashed, these groups had transformed, not only becoming more organized and cohesive, but also taking on a prominent role in society and acting as a threat to the state (CSD, 2004, pp. 88–89; Hysi, 2004, p. 542).

Given its strategic location, Kosovo has for decades been one of the major distribution centres of narcotics entering Europe via the Balkan route. Money obtained from the heroin trade appears to have fuelled not only the organized crime groups themselves, but also the emerging Kosovo state and its independence movement (Hajdinjak, 2002, p. 12; Judah, 2000, p. 321). This was especially the case with the Kosovo Liberation Army, which reportedly evolved from the Jashari clan, itself implicated in the drug trade and allegedly the beneficiary of a significant amount of weapons that were looted from Albania in 1997 (Judah, 2000, pp. 135–69; Pugh, 2004, p. 55). These organized crime groups continued to collaborate throughout the 1990s.

Yet by the turn of the century, significant transformations in the nature of organized crime had begun to take place across the region, with many groups attempting to 'legalize' themselves (Albertini, 2011). On the one hand, this was the result of repressive police policies that tried to restrain the spread of organized crime. On the other hand, however, it was the result of the political and economic transfor-

mations taking place in the region. The desire to enter the European Union and the liberation of markets in the countries of the Western Balkans created incentives for political leaders to tackle corruption and the influence of organized crime; meanwhile, the economic opportunities that came along with increased European integration allowed organized crime groups in the region to buy up or open legal businesses. These ‘controversial businessmen’—as many organized crime leaders are referred to locally (Carapic, 2014)—are embedded in mainstream society and present themselves as law-abiding citizens, although they continue to be involved in white-collar crime, such as investment fraud and health insurance fraud (von Lampe, 2005).

This is not to say that organized crime groups involved in the business of smuggling are no longer present in the region. Rather—if the various assassinations that rocked Belgrade in mid-2012 and the arrest of Naser Kelmendi, an alleged Balkan drug kingpin, in May 2013 in Kosovo are any indication—organized crime continues to be present and active (Glavonjic, 2012; OCCRP, 2013). A full understanding of the levels of armed violence in the Western Balkans thus calls for recognition of the presence of organized crime, which has been found to have

an effect on the levels of insecurity and violence in society, especially with respect to trafficking in narcotics (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2011, p. 4). It is perhaps not surprising that a recent survey discovered that about 37 per cent of the population in the Western Balkans saw organized crime as affecting their lives on a daily basis.¹²

Availability of firearms and levels of violence in the Western Balkans

The Western Balkans is home to between 3.6 and 6.2 million registered and unregistered firearms (see Table 1). There is very little available data on the types of firearms in circulation. Nevertheless, a recent survey of small arms in Europe, conducted by the Small Arms Survey, provides insight into the different types of firearms circulating in the region. For instance, of the 157,000 registered firearms in Macedonia, the majority were handguns, revolvers, and bolt-action rifles and carbines (Small Arms Survey, 2012a). Similarly, a survey on small arms undertaken in Serbia in 2012 shows that there were up to 1.2 million registered civilian firearms in the country, 90 per cent of which were handguns (revolvers and pistols) and bolt-action weapons (rifles and carbines). In addition, there were about 874,000 licensed firearms owners in

Serbia, 94 per cent of whom are men (Small Arms Survey, 2012b).

The same survey found that there were about 100,000 registered firearms in Montenegro. As in Macedonia and Serbia, the majority of firearms in Montenegro were handguns and bolt-action firearms. Moreover, there are about 80,000 licensed firearms owners in Montenegro, most of whom are men and only about 500 of whom are state personnel. In addition, an estimated 40,000–80,000 unregistered firearms are circulating in Montenegro (Small Arms Survey, 2012c).

One important, albeit under-researched, area when it comes to the proliferation of firearms in the Western Balkans relates to legislation—that is, the changes in the legal and law enforcement approach to gun ownership and use since the collapse of the SFRY. In the former Yugoslavia, obtaining a permit to possess and carry small arms was relatively easy: any person of legal age without a criminal record could obtain a gun permit (SFRY, 1967). This lax policy did not translate into higher rates of homicide. Although data is hard to obtain, it is believed that up to 1990, the SFRY homicide rate was relatively low, compared to both the European and global rates at the time. Moreover, the rate of solved or cleared homicides was around 90 per cent (Simeunovic-Patic, 2003, p. 34). Since the 1990s, and especially following the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord, many of the countries of the Western Balkans have implemented tougher laws for obtaining and possessing firearms.

A detailed analysis of the laws is beyond the scope of this Issue Brief and has been provided elsewhere.¹³ However, with the exception of Serbia and Croatia, most of the legislation in the region is still in its early stages and untested (Grillot, 2010, p. 162). That being said, a recent study conducted in Montenegro considers the changes in patterns of homicide following firearms legislation passed in 2007, which stipulates gun owners may carry firearms in public only if they have a licence to that effect. While the study finds that the implementation of stricter

Table 1 Estimated numbers of registered and unregistered firearms, per country

Country or territory	Registered firearms		Unregistered firearms		Total	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Albania	70,000	70,000	200,000	210,000	270,000	280,000
Bosnia and Herzegovina	350,000	350,000	150,000	750,000	500,000	1,100,000
Croatia	370,000	380,000	150,000	600,000	520,000	980,000
Kosovo	30,000	70,000	260,000	260,000	290,000	330,000
Macedonia	160,000	160,000	160,000	450,000	320,000	610,000
Montenegro	90,000	100,000	40,000	90,000	130,000	190,000
Serbia	1,100,000	1,190,000	500,000	1,500,000	1,600,000	2,690,000
Total	2,170,000	2,320,000	1,460,000	3,860,000	3,630,000	6,180,000

Note: The values are rounded to the nearest ten thousand.

Sources: Albania: Holtom et al. (2005, pp. 45–48); SEESAC (2006a, p. 11); Bosnia and Herzegovina: Azinovic, Bassuener, and Weber (2011, p. 53); SEESAC (2006a, p. 11); Croatia: SEESAC (2006a, p. 11; 2006b, pp. 3, 5); Kosovo: Republic of Kosovo (2009, p. 47); SEESAC (2006a, p. 11); Macedonia: Grillot et al. (2004, pp. 17–19); Small Arms Survey (2012a); Montenegro: B92 (2012); Florquin and O’Neill Stoneman (2004, p. 4); Small Arms Survey (2012c); Serbia: Glavonjic and Heil (2012); SEESAC (2006a, p. 11); Small Arms Survey (2012b)

firearms policies was followed by a decrease in the rate of firearms-related homicide in Montenegro, it shows that the number of knife-related homicides increased (Radojevic and Cukic, 2012, pp. 229–30). The dearth of comparable studies and data from other countries of the Western Balkans precludes an assessment of the relationship between handgun legislation, gun ownership, and violence. Such comparisons can be instructive; a recent study of data from 50 US states, for instance, finds that the states with more stringent gun laws have lower levels of gun-related deaths (Fleegler et al., 2013).

Variations in gun legislation can thus be taken as an entry point for country-by-country comparison of gun availability and types of violence, at both the national level and the level of the individual (van Kesteren, 2014, pp. 54–55). Although this is the focus of the next two sections, it is important to mention that despite the historical experience of war and the high numbers of firearms in the post-conflict period, the countries of the region are not characterized by high levels of conventional crime or violence (UNODC, 2008, p. 9), which is most obvious when homicide data, the most readily available indicator of levels of crime and armed violence in a country,¹⁴ is examined and compared to the global average.

While there is a general lack of reliable historical information on all

Table 2 Homicides, by sex of the victim, 2006–10

Country*	2006		2007		2008		2009		2010	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
Albania	77	17	72	14	63	21	47	12	60	8
Croatia	38	29	49	23	47	35	30	28	31	28
Bosnia and Herzegovina	265	72	271	77	282	65	255	79	232	60
Macedonia	42	11	36	12	38	8	20	9	31	13
Montenegro	9	3	4	1	12	3	10	4	n/a	n/a
Serbia	106	48	127	73	103	39	94	46	88	42
Average	89.5	30.0	93.2	33.3	90.8	28.5	76.0	29.7	88.4	30.2

Notes:

M=Men; W=Women.

* No sex-disaggregated data was available for Kosovo.

Source: Small Arms Survey (2013a)

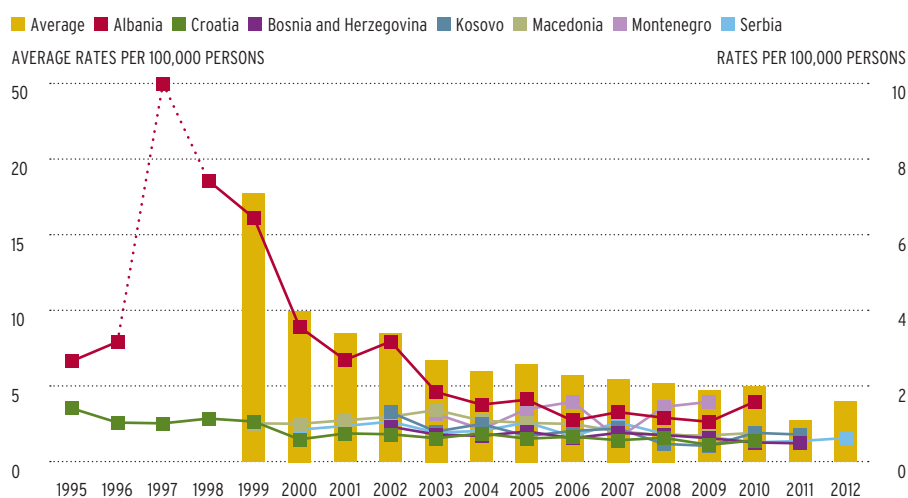
countries in the region, data collected by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reveals a general downward trend in homicides since the end of the wars in Bosnia and Croatia in 1995, and following the political changes in Albania and Serbia at the turn of the century. Although the exact scope and timing of the decline varies across the countries, it appears that the average homicide rate in the region began to decrease drastically in 1995, stabilizing to around 2.0 per 100,000 between 2007 and 2010 (see Figure 1).

Although the level of intentional homicides has decreased, to a level significantly below the global average,¹⁵

the rate is still higher than in other European regions. Homicide rates in Western Europe, for instance, are about 1.0 per 100,000 while the average homicide rate in Southern Europe (excluding the countries of the Western Balkans) is 1.5 per 100,000 (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2011, p. 60). When the homicides are disaggregated by sex, it becomes clear that between 2006 and 2009 men were on average three times more likely than women to be victims (see Table 2). This rate is much lower than the global average, which indicates that men are killed approximately five times more frequently than women, but much higher than the average in Western Europe, where the ratio approaches 1:1 (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2011, pp. 114, 119).

Moreover, in the Western Balkan region an average of 44 per cent of homicides are conducted with firearms, which is much higher than in Southern and Western Europe, where the rates are 30.5 per cent and 35.1 per cent, respectively. The authors conclude that the availability of guns in the region constitutes one factor in understanding the level of homicide rates (Alvazzi del Frate and Mugellini, 2012, pp. 149–50). To assess how the availability of firearms affects homicide rates, it is important to unpack its interaction with other factors, such as levels of firearms ownership, perceptions of firearms in society, and victimization rates.

Figure 1 Trends in intentional homicides in the Western Balkans



Note: The homicide rate per 100,000 persons in Albania for the year 1997 is 49.9. The methodology used to produce this graph is drawn from Alvazzi del Frate and Mugellini (2012, p. 145).

Sources: Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia (2000–01): UNODC (n.d.); Bosnia and Herzegovina: Bosnia and Herzegovina (2011, p. 56); Kosovo: KAS (n.d.); Serbia (2003–11): SORS (2012, p. 79)

Box 1 Data on firearms possession and armed victimization

This analysis utilizes interview data on handgun ownership and victimization in the Western Balkans, as obtained from Gallup Europe and collected in 2012 by the Gallup Balkan Monitor. The Balkan Monitor, a nationwide annual survey, was used because it offers the advantage of three-stage probability sampling, ensuring higher levels of representation by conducting face-to-face interviews in the respondent's home, stratifying the data according to geo-economic regions and types of settlements (urban vs. rural), and gathering information on non-institutionalized adults (15 years of age and older) living in the countries of the Western Balkans. The nationwide surveys were conducted in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.¹⁶ The Small Arms Survey inserted three questions into the 2012 Balkan Monitor survey, two relating to issues of handgun ownership (direct and perceived) and one relating to direct experiences of armed violence.

The examination of handgun ownership and armed violence relies on the data provided by 7,106 respondents (see Table 3). The data obtained from the Balkan Monitor is a subset of the original questionnaire—including the responses to the three questions provided by the Survey and relevant data required for their analysis. The three questions appeared in the section on 'political activity in the region', which included questions on political events both in the respondent's country and in neighbouring countries.

Table 3 Breakdown of respondents by country or territory (n=7,106)

Country or territory	Number of valid responses	Response rate (%)
Albania	1,029	72.0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1,005	68.7
Croatia	1,000	65.9
Kosovo	1,024	74.0
Macedonia	1,025	66.4
Montenegro	1,000	52.1
Serbia	1,023	64.4

In terms of handgun ownership, the Small Arms Survey suggested a combination of two questions to assess how many firearms are in civilian hands. One deals with direct household ownership of firearms and the other looks at perceptions of firearms in the community. The exact wording of the question relating to direct handgun ownership was: *Do you, or does anyone else in your household, own a handgun?* Possible responses were: 1. Yes; 2. No; 8. Don't know; or 9. Refuse to answer. The exact wording of the question relating to the perception of firearms in society was: *How widespread would you say handgun ownership is in the town or area where you live? How many households have handguns?* The possible responses were: 1. Very few; 2. Quite a few; 3. The majority; 4. Most/almost all; 8. Don't know; or 9. Refuse to answer.

The Small Arms Survey's third question concerned direct experiences of armed violence. The advantage of this question, as opposed to classic follow-up questions regarding victimization experiences (such as 'If you have been a victim of crime... was a gun used?'), is that it is asked of the entire sample and not just the subset of individuals who have been victimized. The exact wording of the question as it appeared in the questionnaire was: *Have you personally, or has anyone in your household, been held at gunpoint during the past 12 months?* The possible responses were: 1. Yes; 2. No; 8. Don't know; or 9. Refuse to answer. The 'don't know' and 'refuse to answer' replies were withdrawn from the computations for questions with missing values, so that only valid responses remained.

Results in this Issue Brief are based on data that has been weighted to make the samples as representative as possible of national populations aged 15 or older. The weight variable takes into account sex, geo-economic region, urban vs. rural population distribution, age, and education (primary/secondary/higher education) variables.

own a handgun?'—which represents self-reported or direct ownership data—it can be deduced that approximately 7.55 per cent of households in the Western Balkans owned at least one firearm. On the basis of the responses to the question, 'How widespread would you say handgun ownership is in the town or area where you live? How many households have handguns?'—which is taken as an indirect measure of ownership—it can be estimated that the proportion of households that own handguns is nearly three times as great, at about 23.1 per cent.

Table 4 shows the results of both the direct question on self-reported ownership and perceptions of ownership in one's neighbourhood. Accordingly, the number of households that own firearms in the Western Balkans can be estimated to be between about 530,000 and 1.62 million. This range differs markedly from the abovementioned estimates for registered and unregistered firearms (3.6 to 6.2 million; see Table 1), calling into question the widely held assumption that every household in the region owns a gun (SEESAC, 2007, p. 3).

The discrepancy may be partly explained by the fact that the figures presented in Table 4 do not take into account the possibility that one household can possess more than one gun. Likewise, they do not account for the various firearms that could be in official state stockpiles, or that may be unregistered or illegally possessed by ordinary citizens or organized crime groups. In this context, it should be noted that a significant correlation has been shown to exist between higher levels of gun ownership and higher firearm homicide rates, as well as an increased risk of both suicide and homicide of women (Bailey et al., 1997; Killias, Van Kesteren, and Rindlisbacher, 2001; Siegel, Ross, and King, 2013). An analysis of handgun ownership and armed victimization in the Western Balkans is provided below.

Self-reported handgun ownership

When asked the question 'Do you, or does anyone else in your household, own a handgun?', about 6.8 per cent

Estimates of household firearms ownership

The distribution of gun availability in the region is key to understanding the dynamics of armed violence more generally. A good indicator of the distribution is the percentage of house-

holds that own handguns. Despite the fact that data on this issue is often not recorded or not available, it is still possible to estimate household firearms possession by using data obtained from national surveys. On the basis of responses to the question, 'Do you, or does anyone else in your household,

Table 4 Estimates of household firearms possession across the Western Balkans

Country or territory	Total households in population	Direct (self-reported)		Indirect (opinion about how many households own firearms in the area)		Average	
		% of households	Low estimate number	% of households	High estimate number	Average	Average number
Albania	722,600	6.50%	46,969	17.20%	124,287	11.90%	85,628
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1,207,098	4.60%	55,527	31.40%	379,029	18.00%	217,278
Croatia	1,535,635	4.30%	66,032	23.30%	357,803	13.80%	211,918
Kosovo	294,886	2.90%	8552	21.70%	63,990	12.30%	36,271
Macedonia	564,296	5.70%	32,165	25.10%	141,638	15.40%	86,902
Montenegro	194,795	11.80%	22,986	27.80%	54,153	19.80%	38,569
Serbia	2,497,187	11.90%	297,165	20.00%	499,437	16.00%	398,301
Total	7,016,497	7.55%	529,396	23.10%	1,620,337	15.32%	1,074,867

of all respondents attested to owning a firearm. This is nearly 2 percentage points higher than the proportion of individuals reporting handgun ownership in the European Union (European Commission, 2013, p. 6). However, country-level results show that this difference is even greater in some cases. Serbia and Montenegro have by far the highest self-reported ownership rate: 11.9 and 11.8 per cent of household respondents confirming that they own handguns, respectively. Indeed, the reported number of handgun owners in both countries was about double that of Albania (6.5%) and Macedonia (5.7%), triple the ownership rate of Croatia (4.3%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (4.6%), and nearly four times higher than in Kosovo (2.9%) (see Table 4). Despite the ongoing political insecurity in Kosovo, respondents were least likely to report that they or someone within their household owned a handgun. Indeed, only 30 out of 1,023 respondents from Kosovo—or 2.9 per cent—answered the question on handgun ownership in the affirmative.

While no regional differences emerged in terms of patterns of firearms ownership in Croatia, Montenegro, or Serbia, such variations were apparent elsewhere. In Albania, for instance, the central region accounted for almost 61 per cent of all reported cases of handgun ownership, while the southern part of the country and the area around

Shkoder Lake came in second and third, respectively. Kosovo also exhibited regional variation, with individuals from Serbian north and south-west Kosovo reporting the highest rate of ownership (5.6%), followed by Pristina, which accounted for 4.2 per cent of reports. Moreover, in both Albania and Kosovo, residents of small towns or villages were more likely to report that they or someone in their household owned a handgun, compared to respondents living in more urban settlements. These findings echo study results showing that handgun ownership is much lower in larger cities—where the presence of state security forces is stronger—than in rural areas, where the absence of a state presence fosters the provision of security through private means (Kleck and Kovandzic, 2009).

In Bosnia the highest number of self-reported firearms was present in the Cazin region, whereas residents of the southern Republika Srpska reported the lowest number of handguns. The most striking aspect of this finding is that the Cazin region is famous for having been one of the most contested areas during the Bosnian war, suggesting that motivations for handgun ownership may still be related to the country's recent history. Although it might not be obvious, the fact that respondents from the southern Republika Srpska reported

such low levels of handgun ownership also lends credence to this argument, especially since owning a gun in the area might be seen as a politically sensitive issue. Finally, in Macedonia, respondents from the south-western part of the country were significantly more likely to report that they or someone in their household had a gun (12.2 per cent). Moreover, there was also a difference between Albanian Macedonia and north-western Macedonia, with the former reporting a rate of 1.2 per cent and the latter 4.8 per cent.

In terms of respondent characteristics, men in the region were 1.5 times ($p < 0.001$) more likely than women to report that they or someone in their household owned a handgun. Croatia exhibited the greatest gendered difference, with men 2.4 times ($p < 0.01$) more likely to report that they or someone in their household owned a gun than women. Similarly, in Montenegro men were 1.7 times ($p < 0.01$) more likely to report handgun ownership than women; in Serbia, they were 1.8 times ($p < 0.01$) more likely to do so. Although not statistically significant, differences also emerged in the other countries of the Western Balkans. Interestingly, in Albania women were more likely than men to report firearms ownership; the opposite was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia.

Figure 2 presents the responses to the question, 'Do you, or does anyone

Figure 2 Self-reported firearms ownership, by sex



Note: The number of 'yes' responses for Kosovo was too small to make the difference between men (n=19) and women (n=12) statistically meaningful.
Source: Small Arms Survey (2012d)

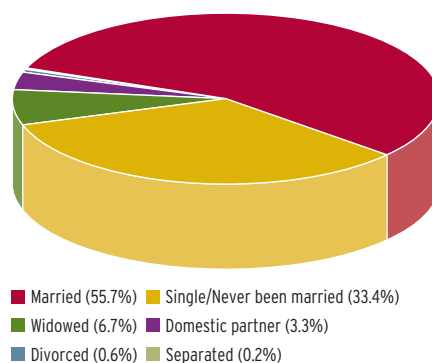
else in your household, own a handgun?' The abovementioned association between sex and firearms possession is visible for Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia. Yet this finding has to be interpreted with caution, as these samples may not be truly representative due to various constraints. For instance, women are probably over-represented in the sample because they were more likely to be at home during the day, when the interviews were conducted. Conversely, women could be under-represented due to cultural constraints, which may have prevented male interviewers from speaking freely to women (Pavesi, 2013).

In all countries under review except Albania, men were more likely to report handgun ownership. These results may be attributed to long-standing cultural ties between guns and masculinity as well as the fact that men accounted for the vast majority of combatants during the periods of conflict and that they are more involved in informal economic activities than women. In this sense, one possible explanation for the continued prevalence of firearms in the region could be the direct experience of war by men and the continued insecurity they face in the post-conflict environment. In any event, the findings presented here are in agreement with studies that point to a relationship between male victimization (or a fear thereof) and handgun

ownership (Hill, Howell, and Driver, 1985, p. 549; Kleck et al., 2011).

Figure 3 reveals the distribution of firearms ownership by marital status of respondents. The majority of individuals who reported gun ownership were married (55.7 per cent). Together with respondents who had previously been married (6.7 per cent) or were in a domestic partnership (3.3 per cent), married respondents comprise about two-thirds (65.7 per cent) of all individuals who reported gun ownership. About one-third (33.4 per cent) of the respondents described themselves as single. Divorced or separated individuals were the least likely to report that they owned a handgun (less than 1 per cent). The different categories of marital status appear to affect handgun ownership in different ways ($p < 0.000$). A disaggregation of these categories

Figure 3 Percentage of handgun ownership by marital status (n=479)



Source: Small Arms Survey (2012d)

shows that respondents who were in a domestic partnership provided reliably different responses from all the other respondents ($p < 0.000$); meanwhile, single respondents only differed from individuals who described themselves as widowed or in a domestic partnership ($p < 0.05$). An analysis that considers both marital status and sex ($p < 0.05$) reveals that men in domestic partnerships reported higher levels of handgun ownership than all the other respondents ($p < 0.05$).

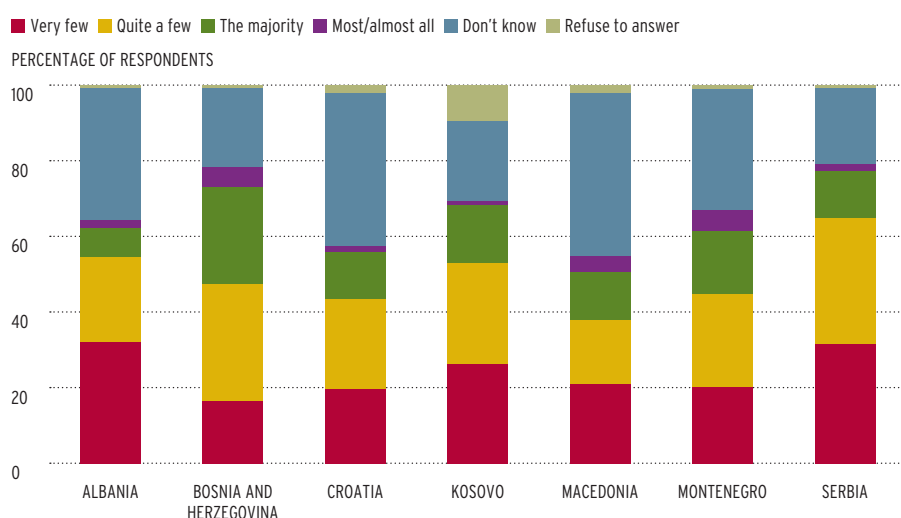
Perception of firearms in society

When asked, 'How widespread would you say handgun ownership is in the town or area where you live? How many households have handguns?', numerous respondents—namely one-third to one-half of all survey participants—replied with 'don't know' or 'refuse to answer' (see Figure 4). This may be a reflection of the politically sensitive nature of the subject of handgun ownership in the Western Balkans. In line with the reported level of handgun ownership, nearly half the respondents (n=3,521 or 49.5 per cent) stated that 'very few' or 'quite a few' households within their communities had handguns. Throughout the region, a combined total of 17.8 per cent of all respondents stated that 'the majority' or 'almost all' households in their area had handguns.

Apart from Albania and Croatia, a respondent's ethnic or religious group was significantly correlated with the perception of handgun ownership in one's neighbourhood or area. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, individuals who identified themselves as Croat or Muslim were more likely to assert that 'quite a few' or 'the majority' of households had guns, compared to respondents who identified themselves as Serb.

Reflecting the overall demographic makeup of Kosovo, the majority of respondents identified themselves as Albanian (90 per cent), followed by Serb and Muslim (about 7 and 2 per cent, respectively). Of the ethnic Albanians, more than half (55 per cent) described their neighbourhoods as having 'very few' or 'quite a few'

Figure 4 Perception of handgun ownership, country or territory



Source: Small Arms Survey (2012d)

guns, while 16 per cent reported that 'the majority' held firearms. Almost one-quarter of all ethnic Albanians refused to answer or said that they 'did not know'. Conversely, nearly 60 per cent of the Kosovo Serbs (n=72) were reluctant to answer the question relating to the perception of firearms; the majority of those who did reply stated that there were 'very few' handguns in their neighbourhoods. These findings reflect the political insecurity still felt in Kosovo and the differences between the ethnic communities.

In Macedonia, the three major ethnic and religious groups sampled were Macedonian (59 per cent), Albanian (34 per cent), and Muslim (5 per cent). The other 2 per cent comprised roughly equal proportions of individuals who identified themselves as Serbs, Bosnians, Hungarians, and Yugoslavs.¹⁷ Among those who identified themselves as Macedonian, about 35 per cent¹⁸ were reluctant to answer the question on perceptions of firearms in their neighbourhood. Nevertheless, 24 per cent of the Macedonians who did answer the question said they saw their neighbourhoods as having 'very few' guns. Similarly, those who identified themselves as Albanians or Muslim were reluctant to talk about firearm levels in their neighbourhoods, with about 60 and 57 per cent reporting that they did not know or refusing to answer the question, respectively. The Albanian and Muslim respondents who did answer the question

described their neighbourhoods as having either 'very few' or 'quite a few' guns.

Reflecting the overall demographic makeup of Montenegro, the majority of respondents identified themselves as Montenegrin (about 52 per cent), followed by those who called themselves Serb (about 39 per cent), and Muslim (about 7 per cent). Of those who identified themselves as Montenegrin, about 35 per cent responded that they either did not know about the level of handgun ownership in the country or refused to answer the question. An almost equal amount of people (about 40 per cent) responded that there were 'very few' to 'quite a few' handguns in their neighbourhoods. Those who identified themselves as Serb or Muslim, however, were more likely to report that there were 'very few' or 'quite a few' firearms in their neighbourhoods (about 50 per cent).

In Serbia the vast majority (about 90 per cent) of respondents identified themselves as Serb, with the remaining 10 per cent comprising Hungarians, Muslims, Croats, Bosnians, and Montenegrins.¹⁹ Of those who identified themselves as Serb, about 65 per cent stated that there were 'very few' or 'quite a few' firearms in their neighbourhoods and about 21 per cent reported that they did not know or refused to answer the question.

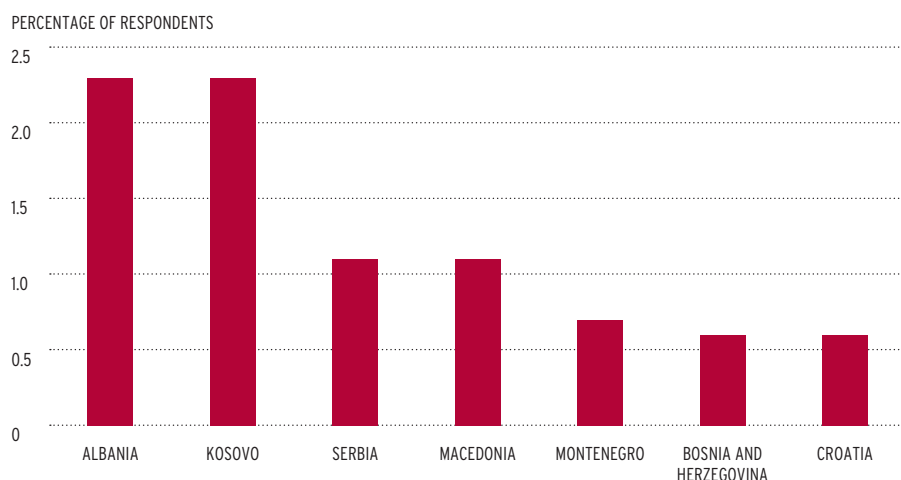
As mentioned previously, the sex-disaggregated responses on firearms ownership should be treated with cau-

tion. The positive correlation identified above—which shows men to be 1.5 times more likely than women to report firearms ownership—can be further examined by taking into account the indirect measure of firearms ownership, that is, perceptions relating to the presence of handguns in one's neighbourhood. With the exception of Croatia, the indirect measure of firearms ownership was significantly associated with sex throughout the region. For each country, responses to the question, 'How widespread would you say handgun ownership is in the town or area where you live?' were disaggregated by sex. The high incidence of 'refuse to answer' and 'don't know' by both women and men is noteworthy; together, these responses account for between one-third and nearly half of the total. When these responses are disaggregated by sex, they reveal that women replied with 'don't know' more often than men. In Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, men were more likely to refuse to answer the indirect question relating to firearms ownership compared to women, suggesting that this is a sensitive issue in these countries and territories.

In addition, and despite the fact that sex is not significantly correlated with perceptions of firearms ownership in Croatia, both men and women overwhelmingly associated themselves with the 'don't know' category, which aligns with the low level of direct reporting of firearms ownership (see Table 4). On the one hand, this could be interpreted as an indication of low levels of firearms ownership in Croatia overall. The low levels of self-reported armed victimization in the country further support this interpretation (see Figure 5). On the other hand, this finding could also hint at the unwillingness of the respondents to answer the question due to its sensitive nature, the history of war, or the link between these issues and levels of firearms-related suicide in the country, for instance (Bosnar et al., 2005; Cengija et al., 2012).

That respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia—all of which experienced armed conflict directly or

Figure 5 Percentage of household respondents who indicated that a household member had been held at gunpoint, by country or territory (n=86)



Source: Small Arms Survey (2012b)

indirectly during the 1990s—tended to select the ‘quite a few’ category is also of note, as it indicates that they perceive firearms ownership levels as high more than a decade after the cessation of conflict. An exception to this is Kosovo, where men were more likely to report that there were ‘very few’ guns in their neighbourhoods. One explanation for this could be the contentious nature of the issue of firearms ownership. By comparison, in Albania and Macedonia, most answers for both sexes fall within the ‘very few’ category.

Patterns and victims of armed violence

The findings of the household survey indicate that about 1.2 per cent of all respondents reported that a household member had been held at gunpoint in the 12 months prior to the administration of the survey. Figure 5 highlights the distribution of armed violence experiences by country. If weighted by population, experiences of armed violence are significantly more common in Albania and Kosovo, than in the rest of the region. In these two countries, on average, 2.3 per cent of respondents reported that someone in their household had been held at gunpoint, more than twice the rate of Serbia and Macedonia, and about three times that of Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia. This difference is emphasized further by statistical

analyses, which show that respondents who identified themselves as Albanian made up nearly 50 per cent of all household respondents who reported that they or someone in their household had been held at gunpoint in the previous year. Of the respondents who reported such experiences, those who identified themselves as Serbs were the next largest group, representing about one-quarter of the respondents.²⁰

Based on the regional distribution of reported experiences of armed violence, victimization seems to be higher in rural areas than in urban areas. In fact, about 50 per cent of the respondents indicated that they or someone in their household had been held at gunpoint on a farm or in a small town, compared to 40 per cent who stated that they experienced armed victimization in urban areas. At the national level, however, there appears to be more variation, with respondents from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo following the regional trend; meanwhile, Serbia and Croatia revealed higher levels of victimization in urban centres. Montenegro differed most with an equal distribution of victimization among rural and urban areas. The reason for the variation at the national level may be linked to the different levels of urbanization within countries, with Serbia and Croatia being two of the most urbanized in the region (Hajdu and Racz, 2011).

At first glance, the above findings regarding national victimization rates

and the distribution of victimization according to location suggest that levels of firearms ownership and armed victimization are not related. This point is supported by the fact that Albania and Kosovo have much lower response rates to the question ‘Do you, or does anyone else in your household, own a handgun?’ (see Table 4). Nevertheless, these findings have to be treated with caution because the question dealing with experiences of armed victimization only deals with ‘being held at gunpoint’ and does not inquire about other forms of violence, such as suicide. Moreover, there was no follow-up question inquiring about the circumstances surrounding the incident of being held at gunpoint, making it difficult to ascertain which kind of victimization individuals were exposed to.

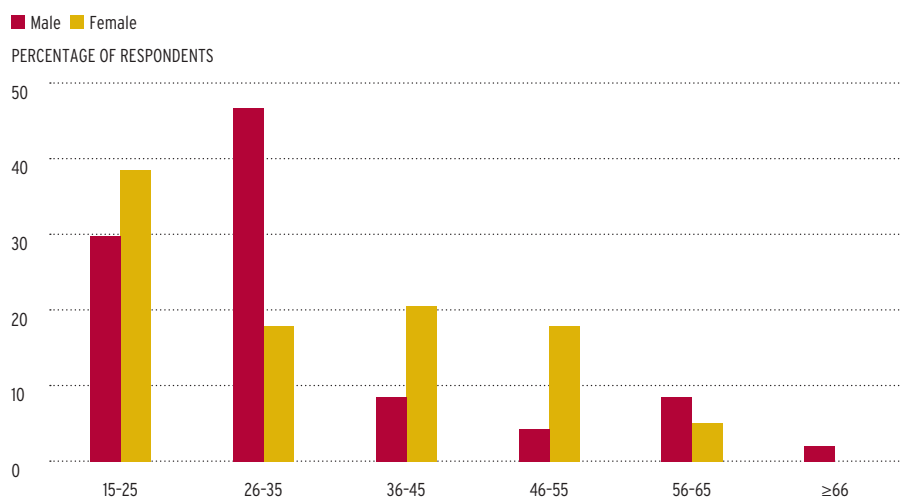
In addition, the household survey did not provide a follow-up question to identify the sex of the victim who was held at gunpoint.²¹ That said, men and women reported almost equal rates of armed victimization in their households, which may not be surprising, given the overall low homicide rate in the region (see Table 2). Evidence suggest that in regions with low homicide rates—such as the Western Balkans, but also Europe in general—there is not only a lower rate of female homicide, but also a smaller gap between the rates of male and female homicides (GBAV, 2011, p. 45). Together, these findings imply that in the Western Balkans most armed violence is gender-neutral, in the sense that it is equally likely to affect men and women. Nevertheless, men are more likely—even if only by 0.3 per cent—to report that they or someone in their household has been held at gunpoint (see Table 5).

Table 5 Percentage of respondents who reported that someone in their household was held at gunpoint during the previous 12 months, by sex of the respondent (n=7,106)

Sex	Yes	No	Don't know
Male	1.4%	94.8%	3.8%
Female	1.1%	95.0%	3.9%

Source: Small Arms Survey (2012d)

Figure 6 Respondents who reported that they or someone in their household was held at gunpoint, by sex and age group



Note: The number of 'yes' responses for Kosovo was too small to make the difference between men (n=19) and women (n=12) statistically meaningful.
Source: Small Arms Survey (2012d)

This finding is further corroborated if the experience of victimization is disaggregated by age and sex. As shown in Figure 5, individuals who fall within the 15–25 and 26–35 age brackets were most likely to report that they or someone in their household had been held at gunpoint. The figure also shows that young men, especially 26–35-year-olds, are most likely to report armed victimization. Again, given the history of armed conflict, the prevalence of organized crime, and levels of firearms in the region, this finding is not surprising. Furthermore, it is in line with the established notion that although young men usually account for the majority of the perpetrators of armed violence, they are also likely to be its victims—with 15–29-year-old men accounting for about half of the world's firearm homicide victims, or 70,000–100,000 deaths annually (Bevan and Florquin, 2006, p. 295; Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2011, p. 113).

The aforementioned point is important as it underscores differences between men's and women's experience of violence in the region. Again, it is difficult to unpack this dimension of armed victimization based on the data from the household survey, since follow-up questions relating to the circumstances were not asked. Nevertheless, recent studies have shown that different forms of violence are experienced in varying ways across the region. Available data suggests that

domestic violence, for instance, is a widespread and serious problem in all of the countries in the region and that it is primarily targeted against women (Nikolic-Ristanovic and Dokmanovic, 2006, pp. 21–32). Indeed, it is estimated that experiences of armed violence in the home make up between 70 and 90 per cent of all cases of domestic violence (SEESAC, 2007, pp. 5–6).

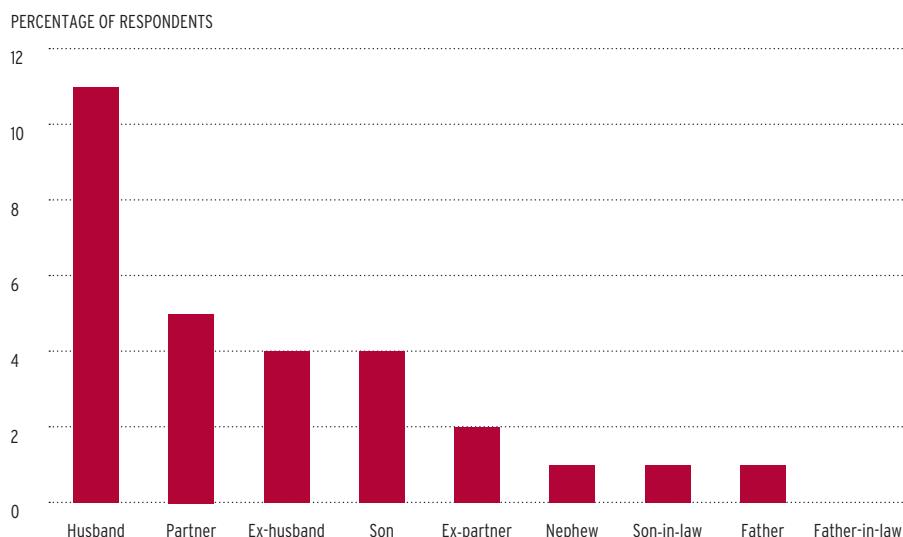
According to one study, two primary factors facilitate the high levels of domestic violence in the region. First, the economic effects of the transition from socialist rule to liberal democracy placed a strain on the internal dynamics of the family and weakened the social control of the state. Second, the

regional experiences with war and socio-political insecurity led men to experience conflict and thus gain access to firearms (Nikolic-Ristanovic and Dokmanovic, 2006, p. 29).

Data on relationships between victims and perpetrators in the region is scarce, rendering analysis of domestic violence difficult. That being said, a recent study has detailed the degree of armed victimization within the home in Serbia. According to the data provided by the non-governmental organization Women against Violence Network, between 2010 and 2012 an average of 29 women were killed in Serbia every year. Most of the women were killed with a firearm and were older than 26 years of age, with the highest number of victims falling in the 36–45 age category. Comparatively few women in the 18–25 age category were killed (an average of one per year), suggesting that women are most likely to experience domestic violence once they have reached the age of marriage (Small Arms Survey, 2013b). This insight is supported by data on the relationship between the perpetrators and victims, which shows that women who die in domestic violence in Serbia are most often killed by an intimate partner—a husband, ex-husband, partner, or ex-partner—followed by other male members of the family (see Figure 7).

The socio-economic transition and historical experiences of armed conflict

Figure 7 Perpetrators of intimate partner femicides in Serbia, average for 2010–12



Source: Small Arms Survey (2013b)

are also thought to influence the level of other forms of violence, such as suicide. According to the European Health for All Database compiled by the World Health Organization (WHO, n.d.), Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia top the list of gun-related suicides in Europe. Country-by-country comparisons indicate that the rate of gun-related suicides in Montenegro is double the rate of Serbia and nearly three times that of Croatia. Moreover, female suicides in Montenegro were also high, when compared not only to Serbia and Croatia, but also to other countries in Europe (WHO, n.d.). Although a detailed analysis of suicide in the region is not readily available, scholars have examined longitudinal trends of suicide in Croatia and found a close correlation between the context of war—in terms of insecurity and the proliferation of firearms—and an increase of firearm-related homicides in the war and post-war period (Bosnar et al., 2005; Cengija et al., 2012).

Conclusion

In examining the dynamics of handgun ownership and armed violence in the Western Balkans, this Issue Brief has sought to achieve two goals. The first is to provide historical analysis of the small arms problem in the region in order to unpack the reasons behind the high numbers of firearms in circulation, including cultural heritage, the history of armed conflict and political instability, and the proliferation of organized crime in the region. The second goal is to provide a more detailed overview of handgun ownership and armed victimization by analysing data obtained from a region-wide household survey.

Despite the insight obtained from the analysis presented in this paper, a number of questions remain unanswered, opening the door for further research.

First, the Issue Brief highlights the need for greater attention to the issue of culture and firearms proliferation. Although it has been argued that cultural legacies are not necessarily able to shed light on why firearms are so

prevalent in the region, they might provide insight into the way firearms are used.

Second, more research should be devoted to the link between organized crime and firearms proliferation in the region and firearms trafficking outside of the region. While many international organizations and regional governments claim that organized crime is the primary concern when it comes to arms trafficking, very little data is available to back up this assertion, making this an important avenue for future research.

A third issue concerns the link between firearms legislation, the levels of firearms ownership, and armed victimization. Preliminary results suggest that the tightening of firearms laws in the region since the late 1990s is correlated with a decrease in homicide rates. It is not clear, however, whether these stricter laws have an effect on the level of firearms ownership.

Fourth, this Issue Brief calls for more research on the circumstances under which armed victimization takes place. Although the findings presented here suggest that men and women experience armed violence in different ways, the contexts in which individuals of both sexes experience armed violence remain to be explored. ■

Notes

- 1 This Issue Brief uses the term 'Western Balkans' to refer to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (referred to as 'Macedonia'). The designation of Kosovo is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. Croatia became member of the European Union on 1 July 2013.
- 2 Two exceptions are SEESAC (2006a) and Schwandner-Sievers (2005).
- 3 The War of Yugoslav Secession has been characterized as the most significant armed conflict to have taken place on European soil since the end of World War II. It had a significant effect not only on the economy and political environment in the region (which gave rise to a new political and territorial order, with the emergence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the

- Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Slovenia as independent states), but also on the international system, especially when it came to relations between major powers (the European Union, the Russian Federation, and the United States). The war came to an end in 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord; see Hoare (2010).
- 4 The SFRY was a federation consisting of six republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia), two autonomous provinces (Kosovo and Vojvodina), and multiple ethnic and religious identities—including Albanians, Croats, Bosnian Muslims (or Bosniaks), Hungarians, Macedonian Slavs, Montenegrins, Serbs, Slovenes, Turks, and Romany (Bromley, 2007, p. 2).
 - 5 Prior to the dissolution of the SFRY, the territorial defence force of the six republics comprised around 510,000 soldiers, 195,000 of whom were on active duty (Bromley, 2007, p. 3).
 - 6 By 1991, the Serbian government had inherited an estimated 3.5 million small arms and light weapons from the SFRY (Griffiths, 2010, p. 184).
 - 7 Arms smuggled into Croatia came primarily from the former Soviet and Warsaw Pact states, as well as Latin America—especially Argentina (Hajdinjak, 2002, p. 9; Bromley, 2007, p. 13).
 - 8 The primary sources of weapons meant for the Bosnian forces were the Third World Relief Agency and large-scale shipments from Iran (Bromley, 2007, p. 10).
 - 9 See, for example, Stojarova (2007).
 - 10 Organized crime groups in Albania might be an exception as they appear to be based around kinship and clan ties that are prevalent in the society (Hysi, 2004, p. 544). Nevertheless, they collaborate with the other organized crime groups in the region, as well as those in Italy (CSD, 2004, p. 88; Massari, 2013, p. 80).
 - 11 This is not to say that forms of organized crime did not exist in the region prior to this period. Rather, it can be argued that the nature of organized crime in the Western Balkans today is a contemporary form of the phenomenon. See, for instance, Bougarel (1999) and Xenakis (2001).
 - 12 This is an average of the data provided for the reported countries and regions. See Gallup Balkan Monitor (2010, p. 36).
 - 13 See Grillot (2010).
 - 14 Criminologists take homicide to be both the most reliable measure of crime and an accurate indicator of a country's overall level of criminal violence (Fox and Zawitz, 1998; Howard, Newman, and Pridemore, 2000; Trent and Pridemore, 2012). Nevertheless, homicide statistics have their drawbacks, one of the most significant being that due to their narrow

- focus on intentional lethal violence, they underreport the various other violent ways in which individuals lose their lives (Krause, 2009; Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2011).
- 15 Between 2004 and 2009, the average annual global violent death rate was 7.9 per 100,000 inhabitants. This number decreased slightly in recent years, with the most recent data suggesting that between 2007 and 2012, the annual global violent death rate was 7.2 per 100,000 inhabitants (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2011, p. 44; Geneva Declaration Secretariat, forthcoming).
- 16 For details on the methodology, see Gallup Balkan Monitor (n.d.).
- 17 Despite the fact that there is no longer a country that goes by the name 'Yugoslavia', a minority of individuals in most of the countries of the Western Balkans continue to identify themselves as Yugoslav.
- 18 Of the total, 202 respondents refused to answer while 201 responded that they did not know if anyone in their neighbourhoods possessed a gun.
- 19 Hungarians accounted for 4.6 per cent, Muslims for 1.8 per cent, Croats for 1.6 per cent, Bosnians for 1.2 per cent, and Montenegrins for 0.8 per cent of the sample.
- 20 Those who described themselves as Albanian were 0.51 (0.336–0.788, $p < 0.01$) times more likely to report that a household member had been held at gunpoint than all the other respondents put together. There was no significant difference between respondents who described themselves as Albanian and Serb.
- 21 Evidence suggests that there is a gendered dynamic to homicides, with men being the primary victims and perpetrators, accounting for more than 80 per cent of all intentional homicides. In fact, five men are killed for every woman who is killed, a ratio that has remained relatively constant since 2004. This gendered dynamic is more pronounced in countries with higher rates of homicide compared to those with lower rates (GBAV 2011, pp. 117, 122–23).
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