GLOBAL VIOLENT DEATHS 2017

Executive Summary and Key Findings

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Executive summary

In 2016, interpersonal and collective violence claimed the lives of 560,000 people around the world. About 385,000 of them were the victims of intentional homicides, 99,000 were casualties of war, and the rest died in unintentional homicides or due to legal interventions.

For the first time since 2004, the global homicide rate increased, growing from 5.11 to 5.15 per 100,000 population in 2015–16. That increase does not necessarily indicate a new trend, but it signals growing insecurity in non-conflict areas. At the same time, the global conflict death rate continued to decline, dropping from 1.61 per 100,000 population in 2015 to 1.32 in 2016. This decrease contributed to a reduction in the overall violent death rate, which fell from 7.73 to 7.50 per 100,000 population over the same period. As the uptick in homicides affects far more people’s perceptions of local security than does the drop in conflict deaths, however, the overall decrease in violent deaths is unlikely to lead to an increased sense of safety at the global scale.

Of the five countries with the highest violent death rates in 2016—Syria, El Salvador, Venezuela, Honduras, and Afghanistan—only two had active armed conflicts. Nigeria, Syria, and Yemen accounted for nearly two-thirds of the global decrease in direct conflict deaths in 2015–16; in contrast, Somalia witnessed 36 per cent more war fatalities, the highest such increase.

More than 1 million lives could be saved by 2030. If current trends continue, the annual number of violent deaths is likely to increase to approximately 610,000 by 2030, primarily due to population growth. Yet if states were able to replicate the results of the countries that have been most successful at preventing and controlling violence in their respective world regions, that number could drop to about 408,000—meaning that about 1.35 million lives could be saved between 2017 and 2030. Nearly half a million of those lives could be saved in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, states have an unprecedented opportunity to significantly reduce ‘all forms of violence and related death
rates everywhere’. The extent to which they implement the Agenda will largely determine how many lives can be saved between now and 2030.

Some states—particularly those in the midst of or emerging from conflict—need urgent assistance to build the requisite capacity. Civil society groups also require funding to be able to serve as independent data sources and as watchdogs that hold governments to account.

To be effective, violence prevention and reduction initiatives need to be informed by reliable data. The Small Arms Survey is at the forefront of efforts to improve data collection and analysis methods. The Survey’s analytical tools can assist policy-makers in understanding the extent to which they can save lives—and the risks associated with inaction.

“In 2016, interpersonal and collective violence claimed the lives of 560,000 people around the world.”
Map Violent death rates per 100,000 population, 2016
Afghanistan
Syria

Global violent death rates
—2016: 7.5
—2015: 7.7
—2014: 8.1
In 2016, at least 560,000 people were killed violently, which corresponds to about 7.50 violent deaths per 100,000 population. The rate is slightly lower than it was in 2015 (7.73) and 2014 (8.12).

About 385,000 intentional homicides were recorded worldwide in 2016. These deaths accounted for more than two-thirds (68 per cent) of all the victims of lethal violence.

The year 2016 marked the first increase in the global homicide rate since 2004. Between 2015 and 2016, the rate rose from 5.11 to 5.15 homicides per 100,000 population.

Direct conflict deaths accounted for 18 per cent of all violent deaths in 2016, a confirmation that a large majority of victims of lethal violence continue to lose their lives off the battlefield.

Of the 23 countries with the highest violent death rates in 2016, nine were affected by armed conflict.

Globally, 99,000 people died in armed conflict in 2016. This number is lower than in 2015 (119,000), following a peak in 2014 (143,000), but it is still more than twice as high as in 2004 (42,000).

The five most violent countries in 2016—in terms of recorded violent death rates—were Syria, El Salvador, Venezuela, Honduras, and Afghanistan.
Global overview of violent deaths in 2016

560,000 violent deaths

Intentional homicides
Direct conflict deaths
Other forms of violent deaths

Unintentional homicides and killings due to legal interventions

18% are direct conflict deaths

Countries with the highest numbers of violent deaths

- Brazil
- India
- Syria
- Nigeria
- Venezuela
- South Africa
- Afghanistan
- Mexico
- Iraq
- Pakistan

Countries affected by conflict
Each icon represents 2,500 persons
The consequences of (in)action: violent death scenarios

- If current regional trends persist, annual violent deaths are likely to increase from about 560,000 in 2016 to more than 610,000 by 2030. Reflecting projected population growth, the yearly number of homicides will increase from approximately 385,000 to 421,000 while the global homicide rate will decrease marginally between 2016 and 2030, from 5.15 to just below 5.0 per 100,000 population. The number of annual direct conflict deaths is anticipated to exceed 100,000 by 2030.

- A more positive scenario entails a reduction in the annual number of violent deaths to about 408,000 by 2030, down from 560,000 in 2016. In a significantly more negative scenario, the total number of violent deaths could increase to about 819,000 by 2030.

- Up to 1.35 million lives could be saved between 2017 and 2030 if states were to abandon the ‘business-as-usual’ approach in favour of the positive scenario. Compared to the negative scenario, the positive one foresees nearly 2.6 million saved lives.

- In terms of homicides alone, states could save up to 825,000 lives between 2017 and 2030 if they gradually stepped up their approach to crime control and prevention to reach the violence reduction levels of the top performers in their respective world regions. In so doing, states in the subregion of Latin America and the Caribbean would benefit most, saving as many as 489,000 lives in total by 2030, followed by states in South-eastern Asia (86,000 lives) and Eastern Africa (56,000 lives).
Violent death scenarios, 2017–30

How many lives can be saved globally by 2030 by moving from a ‘business-as-usual’ to a positive scenario?

- ‘Business-as-usual’ scenario (if current trends continue)
- Positive scenario (if states reinforce violence prevention efforts)
- Negative scenario (if anti-violence control efforts fail)

*In view of the inherent limitations of scenario analysis, none of the hypothetical projections should be treated as reliable predictions of future violent death patterns.*
Firearms and lethal violence

- In 2016, firearms were used to kill about 210,000 people—38 per cent of all victims of lethal violence. About 15 per cent of these individuals died in direct conflict, while the majority fell victim to intentional homicide (81 per cent).

- Latin America and the Caribbean recorded particularly high proportions of firearm deaths in 2016. Firearms were also used in at least half of all lethal violence incidents in several African countries—Benin, Cape Verde, Mauritania, Senegal, and Togo—as well as in Albania, Thailand, and the United States.

- In countries characterized by the highest levels of lethal violence, 50 per cent of all killings were committed with a firearm, as opposed to about 12 per cent in countries with the lowest rates.
The role of firearms in lethal violence in 2016*

Firearms were used to kill 210,000 in 2016.

- 81% Homicides
- 15% Direct conflict deaths
- 4% Other violent deaths

Countries with the highest levels of lethal violence:
- 50% committed with a firearm

Countries with the lowest levels of lethal violence:
- 12% committed with a firearm

**Lethal violence incidents involving firearms, globally 2004–16**

- Number of firearm-related deaths:
  - 155,000
  - 200,000
  - 250,000

**Percentage of homicides committed with a firearm**

- Of all homicides in 2016, **44%** were committed with a firearm

*All figures are for ‘violent deaths’ only, as measured by homicides, direct conflict deaths, and other violent deaths (unintentional homicides and killings due to legal interventions), excluding suicides and accidents.*
Globally, men and boys accounted for 84 per cent of the people who died violently in 2016; 87,300 women and girls made up the remaining 16 per cent. These are the same proportions as in 2015.

The past decade and a half witnessed a slow but steady decline in the global violent death rate of women and girls, most notably in Eastern Europe, Eastern Asia, and Central Asia.

Between 2015 and 2016, the violent death rate for women and girls in Syria dropped dramatically, to 7.6 per 100,000 female population. From 2012 to 2015, when the average rate exceeded 30 per 100,000 female population, Syria had recorded the world’s highest violent death rate among women and girls.

Jamaica exhibited the highest violent death rate among women and girls in 2016: 25.6 per 100,000 female population.

The greatest number of women and girls were killed in 2016 in countries with large populations, such as India (10,700 deaths), followed by Nigeria (6,400), Brazil (5,700), Pakistan (4,400), China (3,900), the Russian Federation (3,800), the United States (3,400), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2,900).

In industrialized countries, a general decrease in homicide rates has not been accompanied by an equivalent decline in the violent deaths of women, in part because levels of intimate partner homicide remain high.

In seven countries that are characterized by high income and generally low violence levels—namely Austria, Belgium, Germany, Japan, Slovenia, South Korea, and Switzerland—about as many or more women than men died violently in 2016.
Female and male victims of lethal violence in 2016

- **Men**: 472,600
- **Women**: 87,300

1 in 6 of lethal violence victims is a woman

**Regions with the highest percentages of female victims**

- **Western Europe**: 44%
- **Australia and New Zealand**: 36%
- **Eastern Asia**: 35%
- **Southern Europe**: 32%
- **Melanesia**: 29%

**Countries with the most female victims**

- **India**: 10,700
- **Nigeria**: 6,400
- **Brazil**: 5,700
- **Pakistan**: 4,400
- **China**: 3,900
- **Russian Federation**: 3,800
- **United States**: 3,400
- **Democratic Republic of the Congo**: 2,900

High-income, low-violence countries where at least as many women as men were killed in 2016

- Austria
- Belgium
- Germany
- Japan
- Slovenia
- South Korea
- Switzerland

As general rates of violence decrease, the female share of homicide victims increases.
Within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, states have an unprecedented opportunity to significantly reduce ‘all forms of violence and related death’ rates everywhere.”

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About the Small Arms Survey

The Small Arms Survey is a global centre of excellence whose mandate is to generate impartial, evidence-based, and policy-relevant knowledge on all aspects of small arms and armed violence. It is the principal international source of expertise, information, and analysis on small arms and armed violence issues, and acts as a resource for governments, policymakers, researchers, and civil society. It is located in Geneva, Switzerland, at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

The Survey has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies, sociology, and criminology, and collaborates with a network of researchers, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments in more than 50 countries.

For more information, please visit: www.smallarmssurvey.org.

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