



Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011

Lethal Encounters

THE 2011 EDITION of the *Global Burden of Armed Violence* adopts an integrated approach to understanding the origins and outcomes of armed violence. Contemporary armed violence can take multiple forms. Whether in the context of conflicts or rebel uprisings, or of gang violence and killings associated with drug trafficking or transnational organized crime, hundreds of thousands of people suffer injuries or lose their lives every year. Countless others are forced to leave their homes and communities. Still more must endure various forms of violence inside the home. Many tragedies—from epidemics to natural disasters—kill people. But violence is unique because it involves the deliberate harming of fellow human beings.

Conventional analyses often compartmentalize armed violence into distinct categories according to a particular context or underlying intentions of the perpetrator. The two most common distinctions are drawn between *organized* (collective) and *interpersonal* (individual) violence, and between *conflict* (politically motivated) and *criminal* (economically motivated) violence. These distinctions are intended to capture the level of organization and the motivations behind violent acts. Governments, multilateral agencies, non-governmental organizations, and research institutes around the world use them to assess overall levels of violence or to plan violence reduction programmes and policies. Yet these distinctions give the misleading impression that

different forms and incidents of violence fit into neat and separate categories.

The 2011 *Global Burden of Armed Violence* challenges such compartmentalized approaches to armed violence and provides a global overview of violent death across different forms of violence. Rather than confining its analysis exclusively to conflict, criminal, or interpersonal forms of armed violence, it provides a solid foundation for further refining and deepening our understanding of how violence manifests itself in different contexts, and how different forms of violence may interact with each other.

Key findings of the report are:

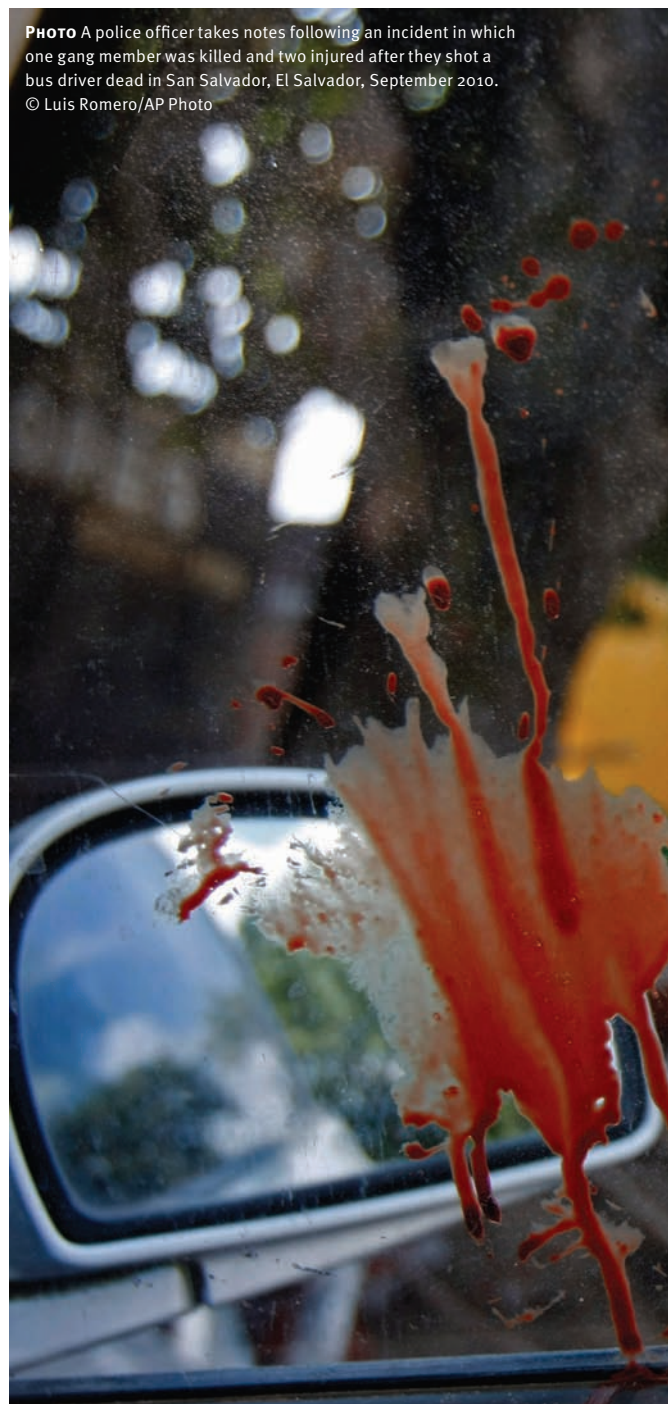
- More than 526,000 people are killed each year as a result of lethal violence. One in every ten of all reported violent deaths around the world occurs in so-called conflict settings or during terrorist activities, while 396,000 intentional homicides occur every year.
- Fifty-eight countries exhibit violent death rates above 10.0 per 100,000. These countries account for almost two-thirds of all violent deaths. El Salvador was the country most affected by lethal violence in 2004–09, followed by Iraq and Jamaica.
- The proportion of homicides related to *gangs* or *organized crime* is significantly higher in Central and South America than in Asia or Europe. Homicide rates related to *robbery* or

theft tend to be higher in countries with greater income inequality.

- The proportion of homicides related to *intimate partners or the family* represents a significant proportion of homicides in some countries in Europe and Asia.
- Roughly 66,000 women are violently killed around the world each year, accounting for approximately 17 per cent of total intentional homicides.
- Lethal violence is strongly associated with negative development outcomes in various ways and is accompanied by low levels of overall achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Chapter One (A Unified Approach to Armed Violence) shows high levels of gang violence in Guatemala or Honduras, vigilante justice in post-war and fragile states such as Liberia or Timor-Leste, post-election violence in Côte d'Ivoire or Kenya, and high levels of urban crime in cities such as Kingston or Rio de Janeiro amply demonstrate how the lines between armed conflict and criminal violence are increasingly blurred. In Iraq since 2003, for example, the targeting of non-combatants by insurgents, militias, and sectarian groups may seem chaotic or random at first glance, yet a closer look at underlying patterns of violence suggests that seemingly arbitrary or criminal violence may also serve political purposes in line with the goals of armed groups. In many places, non-conflict violence is linked to highly organized criminal activity, or to different forms of 'political violence', either targeting political opponents or government officials (such as mayors, teachers, police officers, or journalists), or seeking to influence and modify government policies through corruption and use of force. In these contexts, the label 'homicide'—which implies ostensibly

PHOTO A police officer takes notes following an incident in which one gang member was killed and two injured after they shot a bus driver dead in San Salvador, El Salvador, September 2010.
© Luis Romero/AP Photo

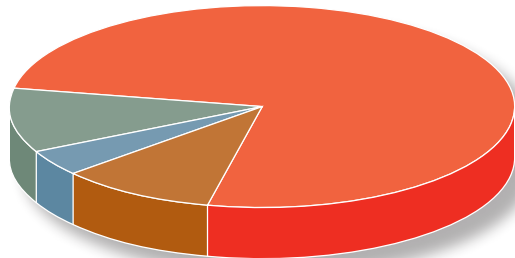
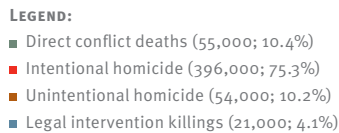




apolitical interpersonal and criminal violence—is slightly misleading.

The violent activities of organized criminal groups frequently have broader political consequences, even if their main motivation remains profit-seeking. Criminal activities such as trafficking in drugs or other illegal goods have also been used to finance war efforts in places such as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, and Liberia. The operations of organized crime groups, and especially the trafficking of illicit narcotics, are frequently accompanied by high levels of violence. Such groups have shown an extraordinary capacity for blurring the boundaries between criminal and political types of violence, as evidenced by the drug wars in Mexico and the rest of Central America, the Caribbean, and certain Andean countries. Drug cartels are locked in battle for control over the flow of narcotics while governments in countries across these regions have mobilized their armies to boost a faltering war on drugs. Illicit trafficking of drugs is increasingly recognized as a threat to international, regional, and national security, as well as public safety.

FIGURE 2.14 Disaggregating the global burden of lethal violence



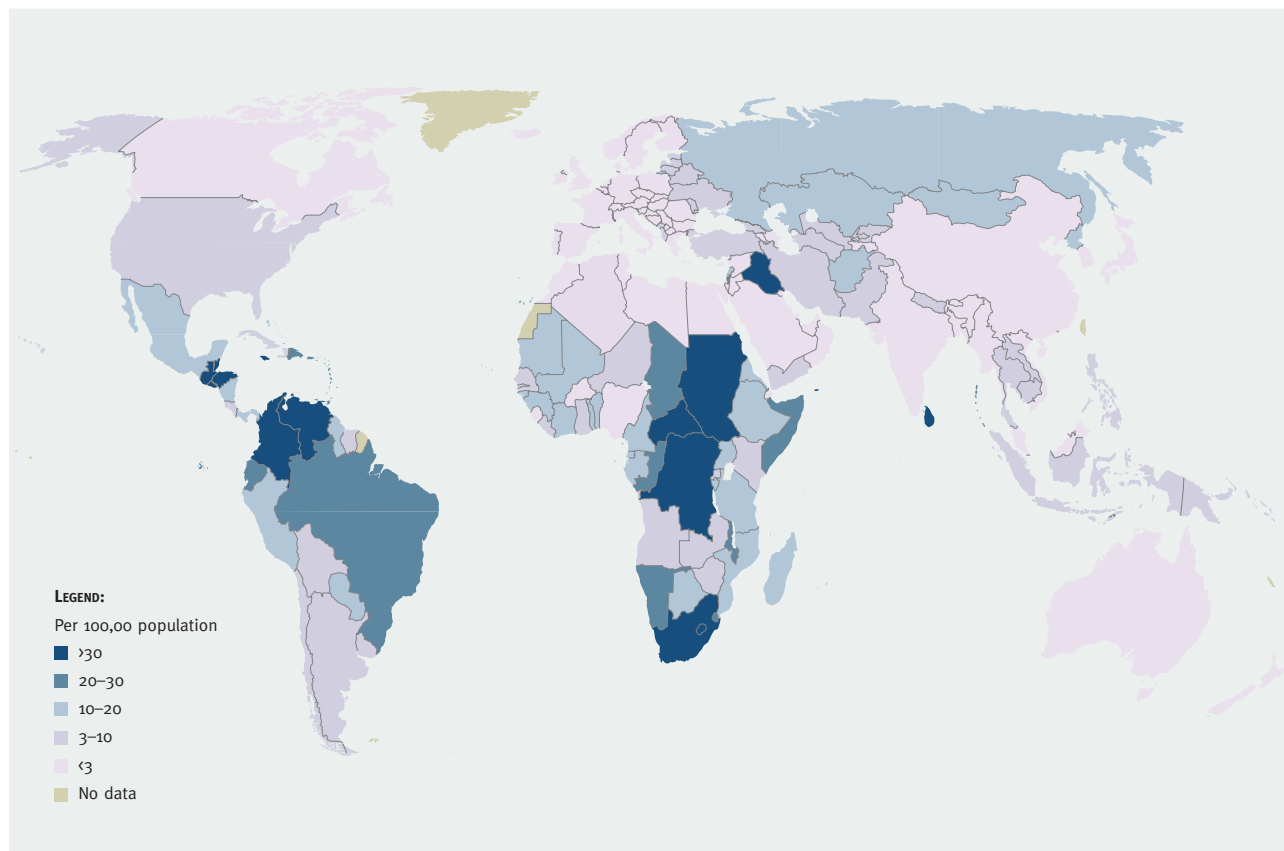
SOURCE: GBAV 2011 database

These recurring characteristics—the multiple, simultaneous, and shifting motivations of violent actors, and the links between different forms of violence—demand more than simple analytical classifications and policy responses. They require new ways of understanding the relationships between what were previously held to be distinct forms of armed violence. The *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011* offers a preliminary roadmap to do precisely this.

Disaggregating lethal violence

The intensity and organization of violent killings provides a critical indicator of a state's—and its population's—relative insecurity. From a statistical perspective, violent deaths tend to be more systematically recorded than other crimes and human rights violations. Based on data on lethal violence from established administrative sources in the criminal justice, health, and conflict studies sectors, **Chapter Two** (Trends and Patterns of Lethal Violence) finds that an average of 526,000 people died violently per year between 2004 and 2009. The estimate includes civilian conflict deaths, battle deaths, and victims of terrorism (combined as direct conflict deaths), intentional and unintentional homicide, and legal interventions in non-conflict settings (see Figure 2.14).

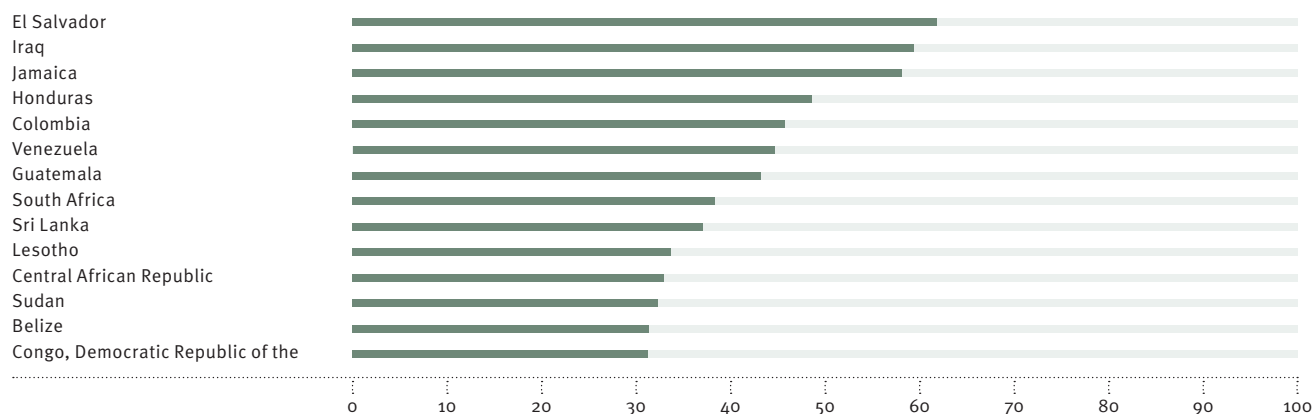
While war casualties are frequently featured in media headlines, their actual number is far lower than that of victims killed in many ostensibly non-conflict countries. Roughly three-quarters of all violent deaths are the result of intentional homicide, while approximately 10 per cent are direct conflict deaths. This translates into 396,000 intentional homicide victims and 55,000 direct conflict deaths per year. Map 2.1 presents a snapshot of the global distribution of direct conflict and intentional homicide death rates per 100,000 population.

MAP 2.1 Average annual violent death rates per 100,000, 2004–2009

SOURCE: GBAV 2011 database

An estimated 54,000 additional people (more than 10 per cent of all violent deaths) die violently as a result of unintentional homicide. The remaining category—killings during legal interventions—accounts for at least 21,000 victims a year, or 4 per cent of all violent deaths. Most of the data is derived from incident reporting systems and databases, which typically yield conservative estimates since they often undercount the number of victims in any given situation. The reasons for this are obvious: any data harvesting system depends on quality reporting and institutional capacity to monitor incidents.

The 2011 *Global Burden of Armed Violence* zooms in on the 58 states that are experiencing violent death rates (direct conflict deaths and intentional homicides combined) of more than 10 per 100,000 population. It finds that one-quarter of the world's countries—comprising some 1.2 billion people or roughly 18 per cent of the global population—exhibit high and very high rates of armed violence and account for almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of all violent deaths. An estimated 285,000 people are violently killed each year in these countries. Among them, 14 countries are experiencing extremely high violent death rates—more

FIGURE 2.3 (detail) Countries with average annual violent death rates of more than 30 per 100,000 population, 2004–09

SOURCE: GBAV 2011 database

than 30 violent deaths per 100,000 people (see Figure 2.3); these comprise 4.6 per cent of the global population and account for an estimated 124,000 violent deaths. In other words, 25 per cent of violent deaths occur in just 14 countries, which are home to less than 5 per cent of the world's population. Of these 14 countries, seven are in the Americas.

As these findings reveal, armed violence is highly concentrated in specific regions and in a comparatively small number of countries. The regions most affected by lethal violence include Latin America and the Caribbean, and Central and Southern Africa. At the country level, El Salvador experienced the highest overall annual average violent death rate between 2004 and 2009, followed by Iraq and Jamaica.

Lethal violence is not only distributed unevenly across states or regions, but also within states. While specific municipalities, cities, or neighbourhoods may be highly affected by criminal violence and armed conflict, other areas may be comparatively peaceful. Whereas Mexico's violent death rate in 2009 stood at 18.4 per 100,000

population, for example, the state of Chihuahua experienced a rate of 108 per 100,000 in the same year. Understanding what is behind such extreme sub-national variations in the incidence of armed violence is a prerequisite for designing and administering effective violence prevention and reduction programmes.

The *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011* also unpacks the diverse contexts and settings in which intentional homicides occur. It examines how intentional homicide may arise in the context of violent operations by gangs or organized criminal groups, premeditated or unplanned crimes of passion committed against intimate partners or family members, or other crimes, such as robbery or theft. **Chapter Three** (Characteristics of Armed Violence) looks at the trends and patterns of these different forms of intentional homicidal violence across different situations and geographic settings.

Such disaggregation of data is important for policy and programmatic reasons. For example, while countries in Asia and Europe show a comparatively high proportion of intimate or family-

related homicides (around 30 per cent of total homicides), their overall homicide rates are significantly lower than those of other regions, such as the Americas. Nonetheless, the high proportion of intimate or family-related homicides in many countries in Asia and Europe underlines the importance of aiming research and local violence reduction and prevention initiatives at these forms of lethal violence. Chapter Three also finds that the proportion of intentional homicides associated with gangs or organized crime is significantly higher in countries in Latin America. At the same time, it notes how homicide rates related to robbery or theft tend to be higher in countries with greater income inequality.

Firearms play an important role in lethal violence, and a close inspection of how and how frequently they are used in homicide can also highlight ways to refine and focus armed violence prevention and reduction efforts. Chapter Three presents a review of 104 countries for which accurate data is available with the aim of untangling the relationships between overall intentional homicide rates and the proportion of homicides committed by firearm. Not all countries with high homicide rates have a high proportion of homicides carried out by firearm; however, four-fifths (78 per cent) of the countries in which more than 70 per cent of homicides are carried out with a firearm show disproportionately high homicide rates of 20 per 100,000 population or above.

These and other findings indicate that societies with high proportions of homicides committed with firearms also experience higher overall violent death rates. In addition, Chapter Three demonstrates that firearms are increasingly supplanting knives and blunt objects as the weapons of choice for youth gangs and organized criminal groups. This shift is related to the general availability of weapons to civilians, as

well as the presence of illegal trafficking and smuggling of firearms.

In **Chapter Four** (When the Victim Is a Woman), the 2011 *Global Burden of Armed Violence* shines a spotlight on ‘femicide’—the intentional killing of a woman. Trends in femicide are especially difficult to monitor and interpret because of scarcity of data. Based on the sparse data that is available, the chapter conservatively estimates that 66,000 women and girls are violently killed around the world each year. While men make up the larger proportion of victims of violent deaths, femicide accounts for approximately 17 per cent of the total 396,000 intentional homicides.

Countries that feature comparatively high homicide rates also typically experience higher femicide rates. In countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala, it is not just young men who are dying in high numbers, but also higher numbers of women and girls. At the same time, a deeper comparative inspection of the proportion of male and female victims shows considerable variations. A review of data from 83 countries highlights how in countries where homicides are relatively rare, as in Austria, Japan, Norway, or Switzerland, the percentage of female homicide victims compared to male victims is higher than in more violent contexts. Indeed, in countries where homicides are rare, the female–male victim ratio approaches 1 to 1. At the other end of the spectrum, in countries experiencing high homicide rates, femicide rates represent just a fraction of rates of homicides with male victims. This is the case in Brazil, Colombia, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela, where men are more than ten times more likely to die from homicide than women.

The use of firearms is less common in femicides than in homicides with male victims. But as with homicides in general, there appears to be some





PHOTO Women displaced by recent attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army near Tambura, South Sudan, wait for aid to be distributed in May 2010. © Trevor Snapp

relationship between femicide rates and the percentage of femicides committed with firearms: low femicide rates frequently correspond to a lower percentage of use of firearms.

Reducing armed violence, enabling development

The 2011 *Global Burden of Armed Violence* also considers the complex relationship between armed violence and development. Aid agencies and governments now widely accept that there is a relationship between higher levels of armed violence and fragile institutional capacities, and that there is a strong association between insecurity and underdevelopment. Without security, human, social, and economic development suffer. Countries with higher respect for the rule of law—including effective criminal justice systems—also broadly show lower levels of intentional homicide. At the same time, there is a nexus between high homicide rates, a high proportion of homicides committed with firearms, and a low proportion of cases solved by law enforcement agencies. Countries showing this combination of factors, such as El Salvador and Jamaica, may risk entering a spiral of increasing violence and impunity.

Chapter Five (More Armed Violence, Less Development) presents an analysis of the relationship between lethal violence and development progress as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) indicators. Research conducted for the 2011 *Global Burden of Armed Violence* suggests that lethal violence constrains development progress. Countries that register an improvement in their HDI are also most likely to exhibit lower levels of lethal violence. In other words, homicide rates are negatively and significantly linked to changes in

a country's HDI rating. Yet whether levels of violence *cause* lower scores is difficult to determine. Country data for 2000 to 2009 indicates that the greater the income disparity, the higher the homicide rates. The inverse is also true: societies reporting less severe income inequality report much lower levels of homicidal violence. The findings are aligned with and confirm the body of research that identifies a robust relationship between income inequality and violent criminality.

More positively, the 2011 *Global Burden of Armed Violence* finds that a reduction in a country's incidence of armed violence corresponds with improved MDG performance. High rates of intentional homicide are accompanied by significantly higher levels of extreme poverty and hunger (MDG 1), lower primary school enrolment (MDG 2), higher infant mortality and adolescent birth rates (MDGs 4 and 5), and higher youth unemployment. The same relationship is found between direct conflict deaths and MDG progress. Higher rates of direct conflict deaths are correlated with higher rates of poverty (measured as the population living below USD 1 per day); a lower share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector; lower enrolment in primary education and a lower ratio of girls to boys in primary education; and last, but not least, lower HDI. These findings reveal a broad set of linkages between armed violence and development outcomes and represent a solid basis for further research at the local and national levels.

Containing and reducing the incidence of armed violence requires a proper diagnosis of its causes and consequences. Many governments affected by high levels of armed violence—as well as many others that are not affected—have initiated comprehensive armed violence monitoring systems. Such 'observatories', especially when administered in partnership with civil society and reliable

research institutions, can provide crucial information on the scale and distribution of lethal violence. This data is indispensable in unpacking the complex relationships between armed violence and factors such as unemployment, inequality, the presence of illicit markets, corruption, weak rule of law, and impunity. The ability of the international community and national as well as local governments to design appropriate policies and programmes for armed violence prevention and reduction depends critically on an integrated and comprehensive understanding of the distribution and dynamics of lethal (and non-lethal) violence worldwide. 

Abbreviations

HDI	Human Development Index
MDG	Millennium Development Goal