



## CHAPTER SEVEN Other Forms of Armed Violence: Making the Invisible Visible

**T**HE GLOBAL BURDEN of armed violence extends well beyond acute death and injury rates arising during war or as a consequence of crime. Other forms of social and predatory violence are routinely committed through such acts as intimidation and assaults, extortion and kidnapping, or gang violence. Similarly, political violence is often deployed against citizens in the form of extrajudicial killings and disappearances. The effects of armed violence are routinely experienced by women afraid to walk in certain neighbourhoods at night; by partners in abusive relationships; and by children in slums that lack adequate lighting, safe schools, and public security.

Throughout the world's rapidly urbanizing cities and shanty towns, many citizens are beginning to fill these 'protection gaps' with alternative means of security provision at the community level. From the Americas and Africa to the South Pacific, gangs and vigilante groups are a major, if poorly understood, security concern. In the absence of legitimate military and policing authorities, civilians are increasingly investing in private security companies, barbed wire and higher protective walls, neighbourhood watch associations, and even gun-free zones.

This chapter considers 'other forms' of armed violence that are not easily classified under the rubric of war or crime. It finds that while largely hidden from view and rarely discussed, such violence can be present in ostensibly 'peaceful' contexts. Likewise, these other forms of armed

violence may contribute to or result in direct conflict deaths or homicide. While such violence defies easy description or categorization, the chapter nevertheless finds the following:

- Armed violence perpetrated by armed groups and gangs is under-studied and contributes to insecurity in urban settings, with 70,000–200,000 gang members in Central America alone.
- A high proportion of armed violence by agents of the state is concentrated in just over 30 countries (in 2006). Disappearances are difficult to calculate but appear to be common in a similar number of countries.
- More than 50 extrajudicial killings were registered in 2006 for at least 12 countries unaffected by war, with most not being captured in typical surveillance systems.
- Recorded enforced disappearances declined from an annual average of 1,442 cases between 1964 and 1999 to the annual average of 187 cases between 2000 and 2003, and 140 between 2004 and 2007.
- There was an annual global average of 1,350 reported kidnapping for ransom cases from 1998 to 2002. These appeared to have increased to 1,425 in 2007.
- The five countries registering the most kidnapping cases in 2007 included Mexico, Venezuela, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Colombia.

- The violent death rate for aid workers is 60 per 100,000 workers per year, and a considerable proportion of these killings are carried out using arms.

The chapter seeks to enhance the understanding of other forms of armed violence around the world. It offers a general overview of their different manifestations and considers various risk factors that contribute to their onset and duration. The first section considers specific agents responsible for armed violence in urban and peri-urban areas. It focuses on the role of gangs, especially *maras* and *pandillas* in Central America, as symptoms of larger political, economic, and social processes. The second section focuses on extrajudicial vio-

lence and enforced disappearances, categories of illegitimate state-led violence that frequently are poorly recorded or ignored. It also considers kidnapping—a tactic adopted by armed groups, gangs, and common criminals alike—and another source and outcome of armed violence. The third section considers the incidence of armed violence against aid workers.

## Armed groups and gangs

Armed groups—including rebels and organized gangs—do not emerge in a political vacuum. They reflect a complex combination of economic and ideological interests. While certain groups reportedly mobilize out of greed or profit, researchers are discovering that motivations for recruitment are much more multifaceted than narrow monetary interest.<sup>1</sup> Although prospects for loot clearly provide a motivation for some, in many situations there are multiple factors that shape the resort to violence. For example, political elites may have long-established systems of personal rule and patronage, and may draw on armed groups to shore up their authority. Similarly, members of armed groups may join out of the more routine and pragmatic desire to protect their neighbourhoods or communities from violence.

Armed groups are highly heterogeneous and exhibit tremendous dynamism and enterprise. In some cases, members may be popularly described as ‘thugs’ or ‘bandits’, while in others they may be seen as heroes in their communities. Gang members may be viewed with apprehension, particularly if recruits were forcibly removed from their families and social milieu. In situations where political institutions and public security providers suffer from weak governance, alternative forms of political authority and security delivery

PHOTO ▼ Children in one of the slum areas in the centre of Kathmandu, Nepal.  
© Espen Rasmussen/  
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will likely emerge. Armed groups may therefore be widely regarded as more legitimate than state institutions in the eyes of the community (Moser and McIlwaine, 2006; Moser, 2004).

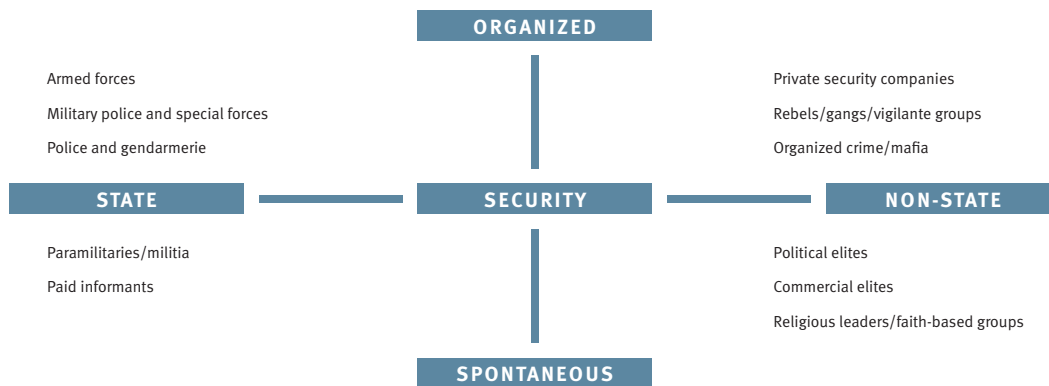
Armed groups are also frequently connected through power, patronage, and political affiliation. Groups include both formal and informal actors such as soldiers, police, paramilitaries, rebel groups, and ex-combatants and their dependents, together with mercenaries, militia groups, criminal and predatory gangs. Figure 7.1 presents a stylized typology of different types of organized armed groups and the ways in which they are potentially interlinked.

In many cases, armed groups emerge in the context of a wider social crisis or malaise, itself potentially shaped by macroeconomic distortions and political disorder. Armed group members and their backers may coalesce as a reaction to social and economic exclusion rather than as a direct political project, as was the case of the Bakassi Boys or O’odua People’s Congress of Nigeria.

Likewise, the Mai Mai militia of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and former diamond miners in Sierra Leone initially banded together to defend their communities from predation, though their motives changed over time (Weinstein, 2007). The domestic (and in some cases international) legitimacy bestowed on such groups is linked in large measure to their capacity to provide public goods such as security and services otherwise lacking to ordinary civilians (Muggah and Jütersonke, forthcoming).

While not a new phenomenon, gangs are emerging as a major concern for policy-makers and practitioners around the world. Gangs are found in all societies, with the vast majority constituting little more than ephemeral groups of youth engaged in behaviour labelled ‘anti-social’ or ‘delinquent’. Gangs in the more formal sense are defined social organizations that display institutional continuity independent of their membership. They exhibit fixed conventions and rules that may include, for example, initiation rites, ranking systems, induction

**FIGURE 7.1** A typology of armed groups and related actors



**SOURCE:** Muggah and Jütersonke (forthcoming)

### Box 7.1 Gender and gang violence

The gender dimensions of gang violence are complex and contradictory. Armed gang violence is mostly a male phenomenon, and victim rates are highest for young men. However, women are also affected by gang activities in a number of ways. Gang violence can have oppressive or protective implications for women. In some cases, women are exposed to homicide, robbery, and sexual assault; in others, they are protected from attacks by other gangs (UNODC, 2007).

Women also participate in gang activities and have multiple roles. They often act in support roles such as cooking and washing for male gang members, or providing logistical assistance like hiding guns, or transporting drugs or weapons from one point to another. However, women and girls also sell stolen goods, drugs, and weapons and use armed violence themselves in some circumstances.

In general, female gang members are responsible for less serious, sporadic delinquencies than male gang members (Miller and Decker, 2001). While gang membership may present an opportunity for some women to break out of traditional gender roles, these roles are often reproduced within gangs. Independent of their role, participation in gangs makes women a target for violent acts between gangs.

A study on the participation of women and girls in gang violence in Haiti reveals the complex gender dimensions of gang activities (Loutis, 2006). An overview of the variety of female roles within the different gangs and armed groups in the townships of Cayes, Port-au-Prince, and Gonaïves—the main urban centres of violence—highlights that women and girls are perpetrators, dependents, supporters, and victims of gang violence. Activities differ from one group to another, but mostly they entail support functions such as cooking and washing, and transmitting messages, news, and warnings of incursions of rival gangs. Women gang members may be forced to deliver sexual services or be used as human shields during gang disputes.

Women also commit acts of violence. One female gang in Haiti, composed of young women, reportedly participates in the kidnapping and raping of girls, sometimes in concert with male gangs. In some cases, they were also reported to surrender the kidnapped girls to other groups to be raped again. It is not clear whether members of this female gang are armed, but there is evidence that the male groups they act with are armed. Other groups, such as the 'Brigades de Vigilance' in Gonaïves, unified to protect their neighbourhood against raids and attacks by criminals and gangs. The members of this group are mainly women; they do not possess firearms but fight with stones and machetes (Loutis, 2006).

ceremonies, rules of conduct, or specific behaviour patterns. Gangs are often associated with a particular territory, and relationships with local communities can be either oppressive or protective.

Current estimates of the proportion of all regional violence in Central America committed by gangs vary from 10 to 60 per cent, suggesting that the range may be more a question of inclusion and exclusion criteria than violence itself (UNODC, 2007, p. 64). Gangs are regularly accused of committing (and more rarely prosecuted for) crimes ranging from delinquency, mugging, theft, and harassment to rape, assault, and drug dealing. In other cases, gangs are linked to insurrections and global terrorism. They are described as a kind of 'new urban insurgency' with the objectives of deposing or controlling the governments of certain countries through 'coups de street'. For example, the US government recently announced that gangs constituted the greatest problem for national security in Central America and Mexico (Rodgers, 2007; Bruneau, 2005).

State responses to armed groups tend to reproduce violent behaviour rather than contain it (Small Arms Survey, 2007). Such interventions generate localized conditions of insecurity and symbolically demonstrate the power of the state. The most visible manifestation of this is the 'war on gangs' launched by Central American governments (and others) in the past decade (Muggah and Stevenson, forthcoming). While anticipating a major deterrent effect, the war on gangs—or *mano dura*—has led instead to the fracturing of gangs and their adopting more violent tactics. While this is interpreted by some officials as the state 'winning' the war, it also seems likely that gangs have adapted and become less conspicuous in their activities.

## Gangs in Central America

Central America is a region in which gangs constitute a real contemporary concern from the regional to the community level. However, their interests and activities remain relatively poorly understood. Reliable data and analysis of gangs are limited, and official statistics are especially problematic owing to chronic under-reporting, deficient data collection, and issues of political interference. Although official figures suggest there are some 70,000 gang members operating in Central America, the estimates of NGOs and certain scholars suggest that the number could be as high as 200,000 (UNODC, 2007, p. 60). Even using the low estimate suggests that there are at least as many gang members as there are military personnel in Central America (World Bank, 2008).

There is a great diversity of gangs among countries in Central America. For example, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are experiencing considerably higher rates of gang violence than Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The distribution of armed violence attributed to gangs therefore varies considerably, although the overwhelming majority of such activity is urban, including in capital cities. This is not entirely surprising: gangs are an urban phenomenon, partly because they require a critical mass of youth to allow them to emerge and be sustained over time. Recent studies suggest that as many as 15 per cent of all youth within gang-affected communities can end up joining a gang (Rodgers, 2004; 2007). They remain tight-knit and small-scale, with between 15 and 100 members (although average sizes tend to be 20–25 members).

One of the strongest predictors of gang membership and related violence relates to demographic factors, including so-called youth bulges (ARMED VIOLENCE AFTER WAR). The vast majority of gang



members are young urban males, often unemployed and from lower-income segments of a given community. Although female gang members exist (all-female gangs are operating in Nicaragua and Guatemala), perpetrators and victims are most frequently boys and young men (see Box 7.1). While the age of gang members ranges from 7 to 30 years, the average entry into gangs is approximately 15 years of age (Muggah and Stevenson, forthcoming).

Although there is a tendency to treat Central American gangs generically, a distinction can be made between *maras* and *pandillas* (see Box 7.2). Specifically, *maras* are a phenomenon with transnational roots, while *pandillas* are more localized and home-grown. In contrast to the many sensa-

PHOTO ▲ Honduran police officers stand above three Mara Salvatrucha gang members after an anti-gang operation in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 2005. © Ginnette Riquelme/AP Photo

tionalist claims linking Central American gangs to migrant trafficking, kidnapping, and international organized crime, it appears that most *maras* and *pandillas* are involved in small-scale localized crime and delinquency, such as theft and muggings (Rodgers, 2006).

While there is some evidence that certain *mara* groups in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are involved in extortion and racketeering, these often extend no further than the territories they physically control. There are, however, growing risks of their assuming a more prominent role in the drug trade in the coming decade, owing to the way in which Central America is assuming an important transit function in the trafficking of narcotics from South America to North America.

### Box 7.2 *Maras* and *pandillas* in Central America

*Maras* are organizations that can be directly linked to specific migratory patterns. Formerly, there were just two *mara* groups—the Dieciocho and the Salvatrucha, which today operate in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and southern Mexico. The gangs find their origins in the gangs of Mexican, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan refugees and migrants in the United States during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Following the imposition of strict anti-gang laws and immigration reform in the United States, however, many gang members were repatriated back to Central America. Between 1998 and 2005, the United States deported almost 46,000 convicts to Central America—with El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras receiving more than 90 per cent of the total. These gang members reproduced many of the structures and functions they exhibited in the United States (Rodgers, 2006).

*Pandillas* have their origins in the Central American peace processes of the 1990s. Demobilized former combatant youths in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala returned home to situations of heightened insecurity and socio-economic uncertainty. Many eventually formed localized vigilante-style self-defence groups in an effort to provide safety for themselves and their families. From relatively organic beginnings, however, they rapidly expanded and developed semi-ritualized patterns of behaviour, including gang warfare. Some acquired new names—Los Dragones, Los Rampleros, and Los Comemeuertos in Nicaragua—and assumed strict hierarchies.

**SOURCE:** Muggah and Stevenson (forthcoming)

## Extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and kidnapping

A number of forms of armed violence perpetrated by individuals acting in the name of the state can be classified as illegitimate. Two described here include *extrajudicial killings* and *enforced disappearances*. Owing to their political nature, they often remain purposefully hidden from view. It is, of course, important to recognize that not all uses of force are illegitimate. International norms and, in most cases, domestic laws recognize a state's legal monopoly of the legitimate use of armed force to protect and safeguard citizens, institutions, and core values.

But states are also bound by international law and human rights principles, together with national laws, to exercise only legitimate force. Excessive or inappropriate uses of force can contravene international and domestic laws, and can thus be declared illegitimate. In certain cases, the illegitimate use of force by public actors against the population—ranging from extortion and harassment to extrajudicial killings and disappearances—can undermine the legitimacy of the state and its institutions and generate negative socioeconomic impacts. As a result, many multilateral and bilateral assistance programmes are seeking to build effective and accountable security institutions.

### Extrajudicial killings

Human rights groups, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch or trade unionists and local NGOs, have long decried the use of extrajudicial armed violence. Until recently, little data existed to compare the severity of such violence among countries and over time. Activists and others are frequently unable to disclose precise information on extrajudicial violence for legal and ethical reasons. Similarly, owing to international

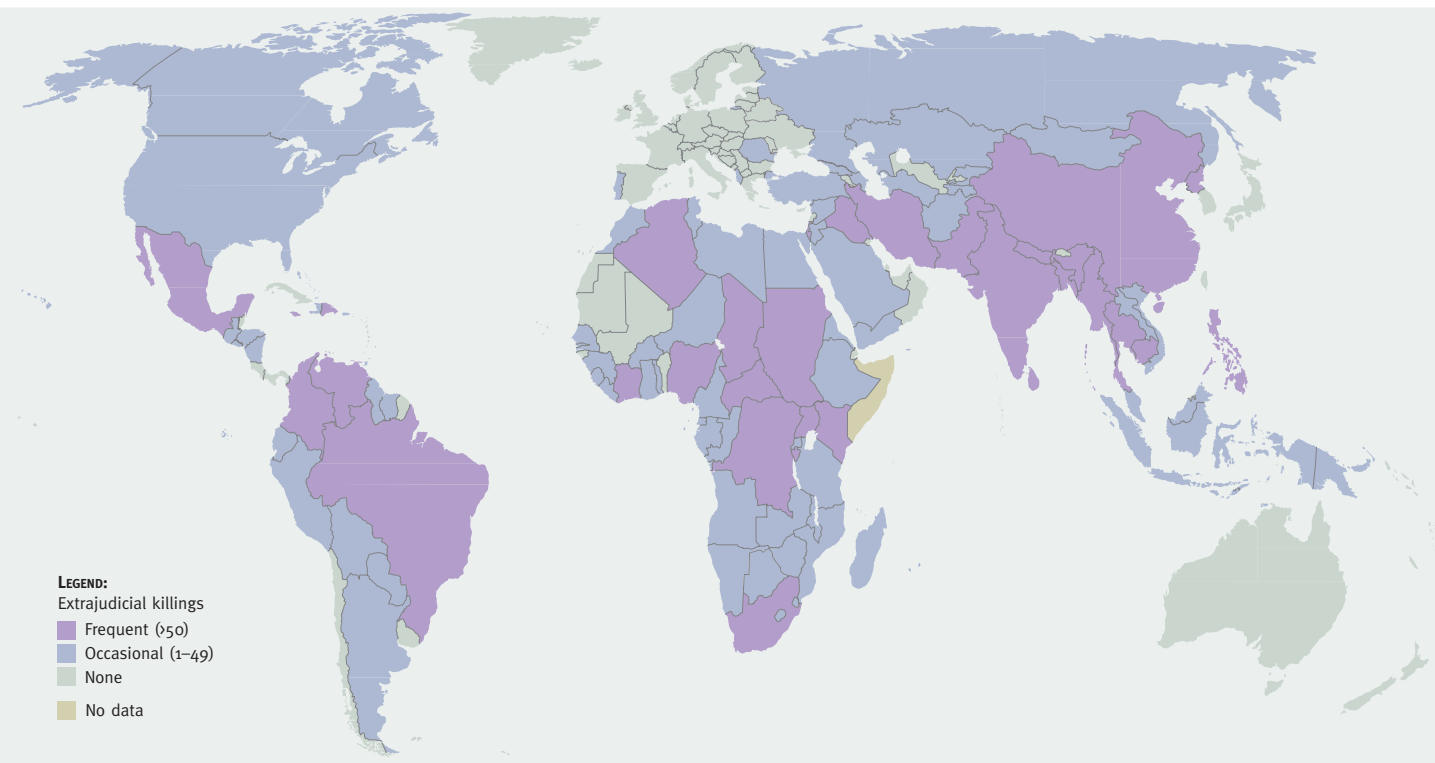
norms condemning such violence, states are seldom prepared to volunteer such information for public consumption.<sup>2</sup>

One crucial source is the Cingranelli–Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Data Project, which features cross-country data on extrajudicial killings. Such killings are broadly defined as the illegitimate use of fatal armed violence by agents of the state against its citizens. They may result from the deliberate, illegal, and excessive use of force by the police, security forces, or other state actors against criminal suspects, detainees, prisoners, or other

individuals or groups, and can also include murders committed by private groups, if instigated by the government (Cingranelli and Richards, 2008b, p. 7).

The CIRI Human Rights Data Project collects data on extrajudicial killings along with other human rights variables. Data is drawn from reports of the US State Department and Amnesty International. They are coded in three categories that capture whether extrajudicial killings occur not at all (0 deaths), occasionally (1–49 deaths), or frequently (more than 50 deaths). When available, numerical

**MAP 7.1** Global extrajudicial killings, 2006



**NOTE:** Data for Somalia is not available in this map as there was no central political authority in the country in 2006.

**SOURCE:** Cingranelli and Richards (2008a)

counts of extrajudicial killings are used to classify countries into the three categories (Cingranelli and Richards, 2008b, pp. 7–10).<sup>3</sup>

In 2006 there were at least 31 countries<sup>4</sup> in which extrajudicial killings occurred frequently (more than 50 deaths) and 73 countries<sup>5</sup> in which they occurred occasionally (between 1 and 49 deaths) (see Map 7.1). These figures serve as a reminder that the burden of other forms of armed violence requires more investigation and attention.

Comparison of the distribution of extrajudicial killings to maps generated by Uppsala's Conflict Database displaying the distribution of direct conflict deaths for 2006 shows that at least 12 countries register more than 50 extrajudicial killings but are not considered to be in 'conflict'. These countries include Cambodia, China, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Dominican Republic, the DRC, Jamaica, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, and Venezuela.

**PHOTO** ▼ A man holds up a picture of his son, who has been on death row for more than a decade as a result of a confession he made under torture.  
© Ian The/Panos Pictures



Although certain national human rights agencies can provide confidential information to international organizations, there are few monitoring mechanisms to track trends and investigations in this area over time. In 1982 the UN established a special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions, with a mandate to perform country visits. In a recent report on Brazil, for example, the special rapporteur found that many killings registered by on-duty police were classified as 'acts of resistance' or cases of 'resistance followed by death', suggesting that such events were under-diagnosed. Indeed, in 2007 in Rio de Janeiro, the police recorded 1,330 resistance killings, a figure that accounts for 18 per cent of the total number of killings in the city (HRC, 2008a, para. 10).

There are a number of reasons why comprehensive statistics on extrajudicial killings have not been tabulated and publicized. Existing human rights practice tends to focus on individual cases rather than cross-country comparisons. As a result, few comprehensive databases exist within the human rights community. Similarly, the UN special rapporteur was issued a mandate to investigate 'situations' rather than establish global or even national datasets on extrajudicial killings.

It is thus extremely difficult to verify and validate extrajudicial killings. In many cases, human rights agencies render assessments on the basis of information transferred to them by local people or local NGOs. Allegations frequently contradict official accounts, and legal cases can take years, even decades, to build. Equally challenging is the fact that instances of such killing frequently go unreported, for the simple reason that there is nobody to report them or a lack of awareness about reporting practices and a fear of the legitimacy of relevant institutions.



The absence of data makes it difficult to compare extrajudicial killings across time and space. One element of violence reduction policies, however, could include improving reporting rates, enhancing access to legitimate justice mechanisms, and providing meaningful protection. At the most basic level, the pooling of information on extrajudicial killings by the special rapporteur and human rights organizations could be one step forward in generating awareness of the frequency and magnitude of this form of armed violence.

## Disappearances

Typically described as ‘enforced disappearances’, such acts constitute yet another facet of illegitimate armed violence. In certain cases, disappearance may include the eventual killing of the person who is abducted. In many cases, the victim’s family does not know whether the disappeared person is alive, contributing to their pain and suffering. Disappearances are also frequently linked to criminal violence, including social cleansing; executions; displacement; and, in certain circumstances, rape, sexual violence, and forced recruitment.

The category of ‘enforced disappearances’ is invoked by human rights specialists to describe violence by state officials. While exceptions exist, the term does not usually refer to disappearances committed by non-state actors.<sup>6</sup> The illegitimacy of such actions is enshrined in a number of legal instruments, including the 2006 International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances. Included in the definition are those who suffer:

arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the

### Box 7.3 Gender-based violence by state officials

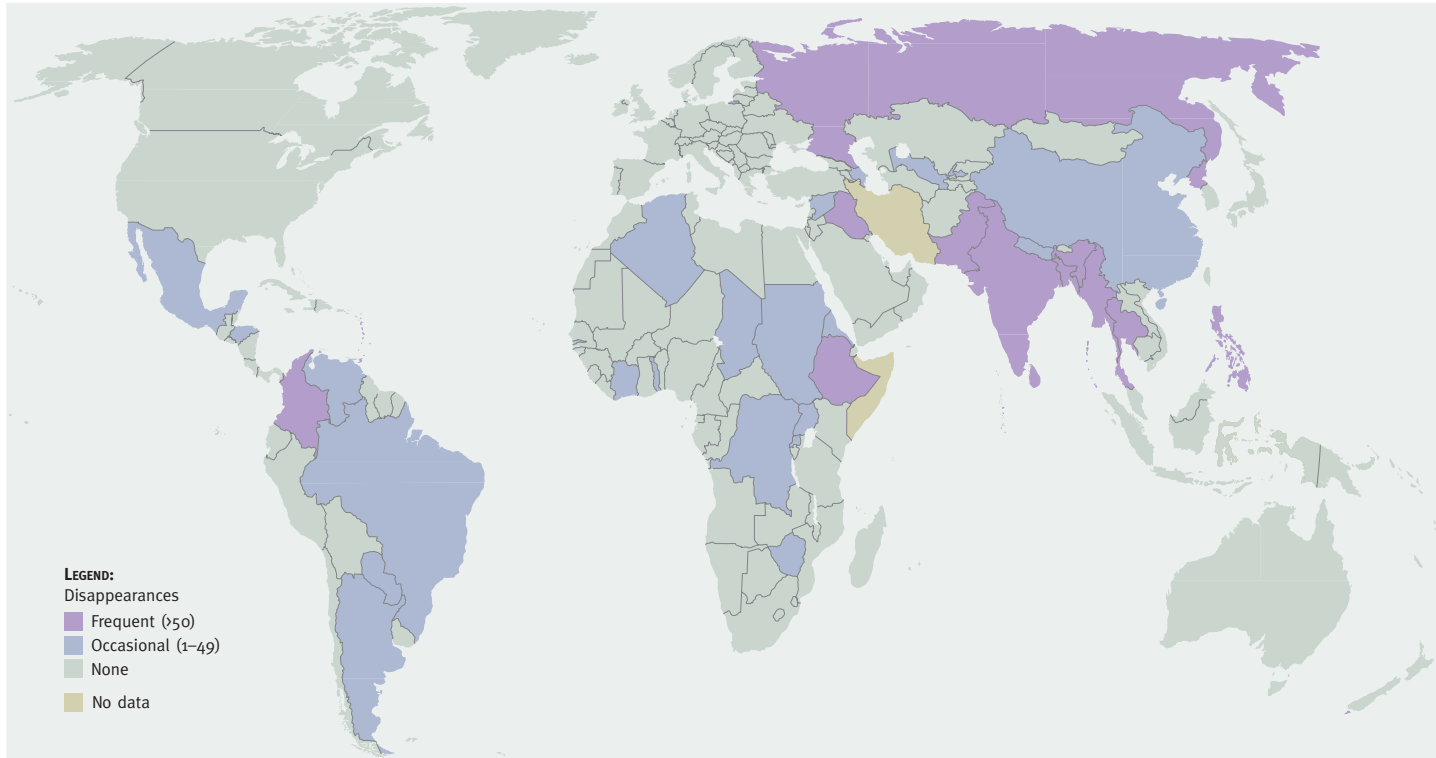
State security and justice agencies bear the responsibility to protect citizens and to ensure the protection of human rights and the maintenance of public order. However, all too often, these agencies are involved in gender-based violence (GBV) in the execution of their tasks. GBV occurs either through discriminatory laws and policies, their inadequate implementation, or granting impunity for acts of GBV committed by state officials, including police officers, prison guards, and soldiers.

The absence of an impartial and effective criminal justice system often protects delinquent state officials. GBV includes, for example, the abuse of persons in custody by supervising authorities or other detainees. As required by Rule 8 of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, men and women should be detained separately. But due to a lack of facilities or inadequate policies, women and girls share facilities with men in many countries. This exposes women to a high risk of sexual violence by other detainees.

In the United States, at least two-thirds of imprisoned women have experienced violence, sexual harassment, and abuse by male guards, and at least one out of four women has been sexually assaulted while in state custody (Vlachová and Biason, 2005, pp. 96–97; HRW, 1996). The police can also perpetrate acts of GBV through the mistreatment and revictimization of survivors, or their unwillingness to investigate such crimes. In Haiti and Zimbabwe, for example, ‘political rapes’ against women were committed by government officials in retaliation for supporting political opposition groups (Bastick, Grimm, and Kunz, 2007, pp. 67, 79).

State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law (UNGA, 2006, art. 2).

The distribution of enforced disappearances around the world suggests that they are highly concentrated (see Map 7.2). Although probably an undercount, there appear to be at least 12 countries where such disappearances are frequent (defined as 50 or more cases annually) and another 22 countries where such actions are more occasional (defined as fewer than 49 cases annually).<sup>7</sup>

**MAP 7.2** Enforced and involuntary disappearances, 2006

**NOTE:** Data for Somalia is not available in this map as there was no central political authority in the country in 2006. No information was available for Iran.

**SOURCE:** Cingranelli and Richards (2008a)

The global magnitude of enforced disappearances remains poorly understood. The Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded a total of 51,763 cases between 1964 and 2007. At least 41,257 of these cases—some 80 per cent—remain unresolved in 2008 (HRC, 2008b, pp. 104–6). It should be noted, however, that most of these reported incidents occurred before 2000. In Iraq, for example, 15,853 out of 16,517 cases occurred before 1989. In Sri Lanka, 9,443 out of 12,085 cases were recorded in 1989 and 1990.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, between 2000 and 2007, the Working Group recorded just 1,307 cases, which represent approximately 2.5 per cent of all recorded cases.<sup>9</sup> While this represents only a small proportion of global enforced disappearances, it provides insight into recent figures of recorded enforced disappearances, and suggests that these have declined from an annual average of about 187 between 2000 and 2003 to 140 between 2004 and 2007 (see Table 7.1). Comparing these to the annual average of 1,442 for the period 1964 to 1999<sup>10</sup> further highlights the dramatic decrease of recorded enforced disappearances.

**TABLE 7.1** Recorded cases of enforced or involuntary disappearances, selected countries, 2000–03 and 2004–07

Country	2000–03		2004–07	
	Total cases	Annual average	Total cases	Annual average
Algeria	15	3.75	8	2
Argentina	9	2.25	0	0
China	15	3.75	6	1.5
Colombia	80	20	34	8.5
Ethiopia	0	0	4	1
Guatemala	1	0.25	0	0
Honduras	0	0	2	0.5
India	54	13.5	10	2.5
Indonesia	43	10.75	1	0.25
Iran	1	0.25	2	0.5
Iraq	1	0.25	0	0
Lebanon	3	0.75	0	0
Mexico	16	4	2	0.5
Morocco	1	0.25	0	0
Nepal	307	76.75	153	38.25
Pakistan	6	1.5	31	7.75
Peru	2	0.5	0	0
Philippines	13	3.25	38	9.5
Russian Federation	105	26.25	23	5.75
Sri Lanka	17	4.25	185	46.25
Sudan	54	13.5	61	15.25
Turkey	4	1	0	0
<b>Total/average</b>	<b>747</b>	<b>186.75</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>140</b>

SOURCE: Calculations based on HRC (2008b, pp. 107–20)

Developing a more robust capacity to monitor and track enforced disappearances is a priority, since many cases still go unreported due to factors such as illiteracy, fatalism, fear of reprisal, weaknesses in the policing and judicial system, ineffective reporting channels, or a culture of impunity. These factors do not encourage a victim's kin or family to file a case with local prosecutors, human rights bodies, or ombudspersons, much less with the UN Working Group or other international mechanisms. As in the case of all reported indicators of armed violence, high reporting rates may reveal a higher awareness of reporting practices or a robust surveillance system rather than actual incidence.

### Kidnapping

Unlike disappearances, which are ostensibly 'political', kidnapping is primarily criminally motivated. Kidnapping is frequently undertaken by

armed groups or individuals and involves a high degree of coercive force. Although most kidnapping victims are ultimately freed, the physical and psychological consequences are serious and persist long after the event. Pain and suffering extend to the victim's family, who suffer considerable emotional duress during the period of captivity. In certain cases, the relationships between the victims and their families may also alter permanently, depending on the trauma experienced. Similarly, from Colombia and Haiti to the United States and Western Europe, the financial expenditures associated with freeing victims from kidnappers are frequently substantial. These include ransom payments that deplete household savings, lost income due to the protracted detention of income earners, and protection costs of other family members.

Kidnapping rates—like those of extrajudicial killings and disappearances—are notoriously difficult to monitor. While there are no multilateral agencies devoted exclusively to the task, the firm Control Risks has collated a unique global database on kidnapping extending back to 1975 that includes records for more than 35,600 unique kidnapping cases.<sup>11</sup> 'Kidnap for ransom' cases are defined by Control Risks as 'the abduction of a person or persons with the intent of their detention in an unknown location until a demand is met'. Further, Control Risks determines that 'cases include political and criminal perpetrators and political or financial demands must be met prior to release of the victim'.<sup>12</sup>

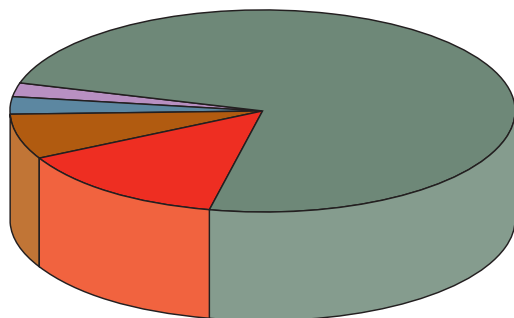
There were at least 1,350 reported cases of kidnapping per year between 1998 and 2002, or some 6,753 cases reported over the entire period. While undoubtedly an undercount, this figure offers insight into the changing patterns and dynamics of kidnapping worldwide. Three-quarters of all kidnap for ransom incidents (74 per cent)

#### Box 7.4 The burden of kidnapping in Venezuela

Between 1996 and 2006 approximately 1,732 kidnapping events were recorded in Venezuela. Kidnapping progressively shifted from an isolated activity to a well-planned and -organized industry. Gangs devoted to kidnap and ransom usually include 10–20 people who are specialized in activities such as identifying victims, researching their movements, valuing their possessions, carrying out the kidnapping, guarding the victim, and negotiating the ransom.

Kidnapping targets include wealthy male executives but also middle-class businesspeople and children. Middle-class victims tend to be viewed as easier targets, since they usually feel less at risk of kidnapping and do not adopt preventive measures. In the first six months of 2007, 147 kidnappings were registered, of which 20 per cent were foreign nationals. In 36 per cent of these cases, victims were released without ransom, while 20 per cent were rescued by the police. Just 19 per cent were released after payment, and three per cent were ultimately murdered. Only three per cent escaped from their captors, while the remainder are still in captivity.

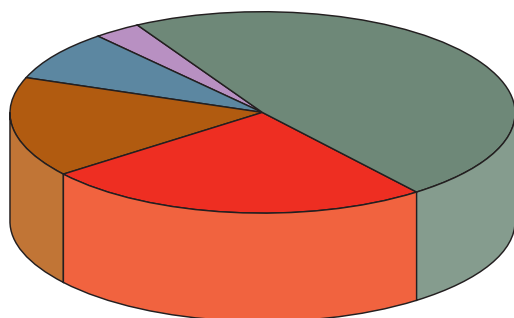
**SOURCE:** Armour Group (2007)

**FIGURE 7.2** Kidnap for ransom cases worldwide, by region, 1998–2002**LEGEND:**

- Latin America (74%)
- Asia (14%)
- Europe and the FSU (7%)
- Africa and the Middle East (3%)
- US, Canada, and the Caribbean (2%)

**SOURCE:**

Control Risks estimates

**FIGURE 7.3** Kidnap for ransom cases worldwide, by region, 2007**LEGEND:**

- Latin America (48%)
- Asia (25%)
- Africa and the Middle East (16%)
- US, Canada, and the Caribbean (8%)
- Europe and the FSU (3%)

**SOURCE:**

Control Risks estimates

took place in Latin America, another 14 per cent of all reported kidnap for ransom events occurred in Asia, and 7 per cent in Europe and the Former Soviet Union (FSU) (see Figures 7.2 and 7.3 and Tables 7.2 and 7.3).<sup>13</sup>

**TABLE 7.2** Kidnap for ransom cases by region, 1998–2002

	1998–2002	Annual average
Latin America	4,997	999
Asia	945	189
Europe and the FSU	473	95
Africa and the Middle East	203	41
US, Canada, and the Caribbean	135	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,753</b>	<b>1,350</b>

**SOURCE:** Control Risks estimates**TABLE 7.3** Kidnap for ransom cases by region, 2007

	2007
Latin America	684
Asia	356
Africa and the Middle East	228
US, Canada, and the Caribbean	114
Europe and the FSU	43
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,425</b>

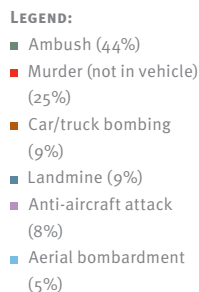
**SOURCE:** Control Risks estimates

Patterns of kidnapping also appear to be dynamic. In 2007 the global total of recorded kidnap for ransom cases increased slightly to 1,425. Although half of all reported cases occurred in Latin America, there appears to be a growing tendency for kidnapping in Asia and Africa (see Figure 7.3). It appears that the overall decline in Latin America can also be attributed to a general decline in kidnappings in Colombia, despite moderate increases in Mexico and Venezuela. The surge of kidnapping in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iraq, and Nigeria accounts for the growth in other regions. The top ten countries for kidnap for ransom cases in 2007 were Mexico, Venezuela, Nigeria, Pakistan, Colombia, India, Haiti, Afghanistan, Brazil, and Iraq.

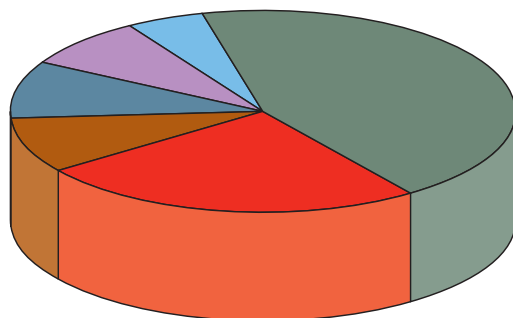
## Armed violence and aid workers

Aid workers provide humanitarian assistance to millions of people around the world. They are a group specifically exposed to armed violence, because most of their work occurs in conflict or post-conflict environments. In this context, the organizations involved in humanitarian assistance find themselves weighing difficult choices between interrupting life-saving relief activities and safeguarding the security of their staff. Violence against aid workers has captured the attention of the media, and various researchers have set out to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of this type of armed violence.

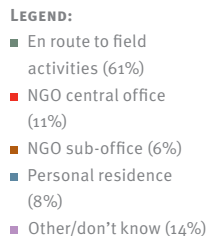
**FIGURE 7.4** Types of fatal attacks against aid workers, 1997–2003



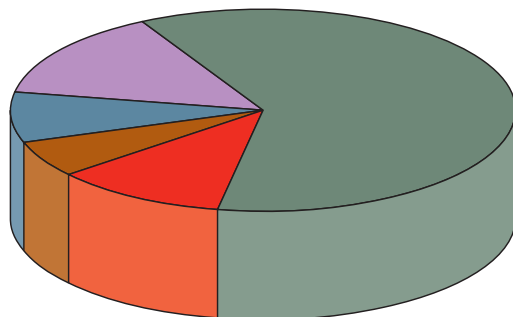
**SOURCE:**  
Fast and Rowley (2008)



**FIGURE 7.5** Location of intentional violence cases against aid workers, 2002–05



**SOURCE:**  
Fast and Rowley (2008)



Intentional armed violence is one of the leading causes of death for aid workers around the world. A recent estimate by researchers at Johns Hopkins University estimated the violent death rate of relief personnel at 60 per 100,000 aid workers per year (Fast and Rowley, 2008). This figure—higher than the intentional homicide rate for almost all countries—shows that aid workers face a high risk of victimization. Although international and local personnel regularly face various threats to their health and well-being, research points to the role of arms availability and misuse as a critical risk factor (Buchanan and Muggah, 2005; Beasley, Buchanan, and Muggah, 2003) (see Figure 7.4).


It is difficult to predict with certainty regional or country-level risks. Nevertheless, it appears that Africa remains the site of most relief worker deaths and injuries. While intentional violence is a threat to aid workers, criminality and other manifestations of routine interpersonal violence also impact on morbidity, stress, and mental health. The most dangerous activity for aid workers is travelling between sites (home and office), while road ambushes—often involving the use weapons—are the most frequently reported type of armed violence (see Figure 7.5). Finally, national (and not international) staff bear the largest brunt of intentional violence, particularly drivers, guards, and those working directly in the field (Fast and Rowley, 2008).

The present evidence base does not necessarily suggest that the overall incidence of intentional violence is increasing, but rather that it has kept pace with the expansion in the number of humanitarian personnel working on the ground. Nevertheless, there is a need to enhance monitoring of these trends in order to develop a better understanding of the risks aid workers face in specific countries. Aid worker deaths have not been fully incorporated into the global cost of

armed violence, since, beyond the direct casualties suffered by aid workers, interruptions to the delivery of assistance have major consequences for conflict-affected populations in terms of their access to food, water, shelter, and other forms of life support. The costs of armed violence against aid workers are therefore high both for those who need the assistance *and* for those who provide it.

## Conclusions

The various forms of armed violence reviewed in this chapter warrant special attention, if only because they are often hidden from view. The violence from armed groups and gangs, extrajudicial killings or forced disappearances, kidnappings, and the victimization of aid workers are part of the global burden of armed violence and need to be recognized as such. However, much remains to be done to develop a better understanding of the magnitude and distribution of these types of armed violence.

The forms of armed violence discussed in this chapter do not lend themselves to simple policy interventions. Gang violence, for example, may be met with robust force, or with policies designed to stem recruitment into gangs and erode their economic foundations. Few policies, either forceful or preventative, have been systematically tested. Similarly, responding to extrajudicial killings is often complicated by competing accounts of the circumstances that led to the killing of an individual or group. But by broadening the optic beyond a simple count of fatalities, the chapter signals how different forms of armed violence generate effects that extend out from victims, to families, households, communities, and society at large. 

## Abbreviations

<b>CIRI</b>	Cingranelli–Richards (Human Rights Data Project)
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>FSU</b>	Former Soviet Union
<b>GBV</b>	gender-based violence

## Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, Marchal (2006); Esser (2004); Rodgers (2004); Hillier, Greene, and Gesyllas (2000).
- 2 The legal doctrine on extrajudicial killings is based on the ‘right to life’ as enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In 1982 the UNOHCHR underlined that states are required to prevent and punish deprivation of life by criminal acts, as well as by killings committed by their own security forces (UNOHCHR, 1982, para. 3). In 1982 the UN Commission on Human Rights established a special rapporteur on extrajudicial, arbitrary and summary executions with a mandate to investigate situations of extrajudicial killings around the world by holding governments to account when state agents were responsible for killings, or when the state has not done everything in its power to prevent or respond to killings committed by others. Article 4 of the 1989 Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary, and Summary Executions further enshrines the protection of the right to life.
- 3 Thresholds were determined from the CIRI database. In cases without numerical estimates, categorization relies on the wording within the reports. In cases where extrajudicial killings occur frequently, language describing the violations includes adjectives such as ‘gross’, ‘widespread’, ‘systematic’, ‘epidemic’, ‘extensive’, ‘wholesale’, ‘routine’, or ‘regularly’. In cases in which extrajudicial killings occur occasionally, adjectives include ‘numerous’, ‘many’, or ‘various’ (Cingranelli and Richards, 2008b, pp. 7–10).
- 4 Countries in which extrajudicial killings occur frequently include Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, China, Colombia, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, DRC, Côte d’Ivoire, Dominican Republic, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jamaica, Kenya, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, Uganda, and Venezuela.

- 5 Countries in which extrajudicial killings occur occasionally include Afghanistan, Angola, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Barbados, Bolivia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nicaragua, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Republic of the Congo, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Swaziland, Syria, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United States, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.
- 6 The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is an exception, since it makes reference to political groups as potential perpetrators and to 'the intention of removing [the victim] from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time'.
- 7 This information is based on the CIRI Human Rights database, which codes annual reports from the US State Department and Amnesty International (Cingranelli and Richards, 2008b, pp. 13–17). Countries in which disappearances occur frequently include Bangladesh, Colombia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Countries in which disappearances occur occasionally include Algeria, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Burundi, Chad, China, DRC, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Gambia, Honduras, Mexico, Nepal, Paraguay, Sudan, Syria, Togo, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe.
- 8 A statistical analysis is presented in the online methodological appendix at <http://www.genevadeclaration.org>.
- 9 This figure is based on counting together all cases from 22 countries presented in Table 7.1 amounting to 1,307 cases and relating them to the total of 51,763 cases as reported in HRC (2008b, pp. 104–6).
- 10 This figure is based on 50,456 recorded enforced disappearances for the 35 years between 1964 and 1999, resulting in an annual average of 1,441.6.
- 11 The kidnapping database is maintained by a team of four analysts who carry out daily searches for such cases worldwide using a variety of sources and who update the database accordingly.
- 12 This is Control Risks' working definition of 'kidnap for ransom' cases (correspondence, 10 June 2008).
- 13 The distribution of this relative weight was stable over the five years. The Former Soviet Union includes the Russian Federation as well as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.