



Trends and Patterns of Lethal Violence

On the basis of comprehensive national, regional, and global data on violent deaths, this chapter presents an overall portrait of the global burden of armed violence and a general reading of regional and global trends. Using sources from the criminal justice, health, and conflict studies sectors, the GBAV 2011 database—which covers data on lethal violence perpetrated worldwide from 2004 to 2009—reveals that:

- At least 526,000 people are killed violently each year. This figure includes an estimated 55,000 direct conflict deaths, 396,000 intentional homicides, 54,000 so-called ‘unintentional’ homicides, and 21,000 killings during legal interventions.
- One in every ten of all reported violent deaths around the world occurs in conflict settings or during terrorist activities.
- The average annual global violent death rate between 2004 and 2009 was 7.9 per 100,000.
- At least 58 countries exhibit violent death rates above 10.0 per 100,000. These countries account for almost two-thirds of all violent deaths (63 per cent) or 285,000 individuals killed.
- El Salvador was the country most affected by lethal violence in 2004–09, followed by Iraq and Jamaica. Central and Southern Africa, Central America and the Caribbean, and South America are the regions that exhibit the highest levels of lethal violence.

While casualties from war are frequently featured in media headlines, their actual number is far lower than that of victims killed in many ostensibly non-conflict countries (see Figure 2.14). 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.

An estimated 54,000 additional people (accounting for 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 per year, or 4 per cent of all violent deaths.

This chapter 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 than 30 violent deaths per 100,000 people; these comprise 4.6 per cent of the global population and account for an estimated 124,000 violent deaths. In other words, more than one in four deaths is concentrated in these 14 countries,

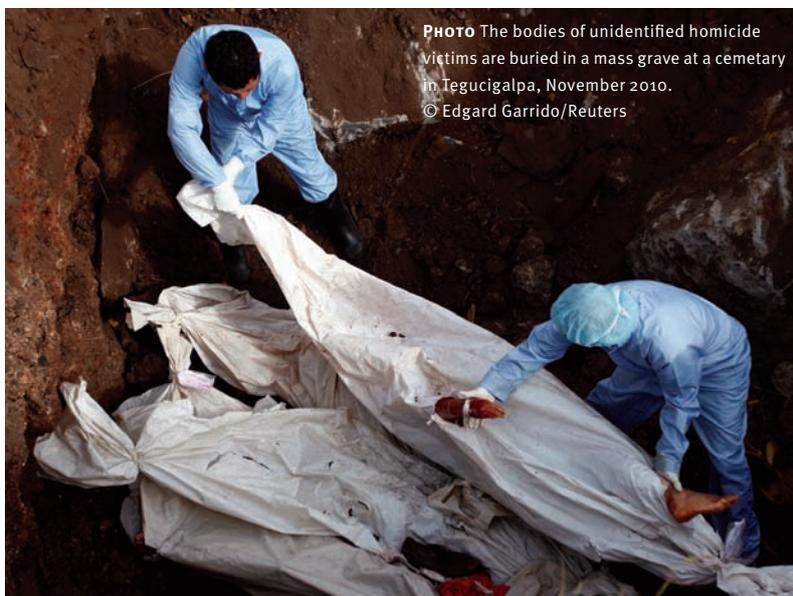
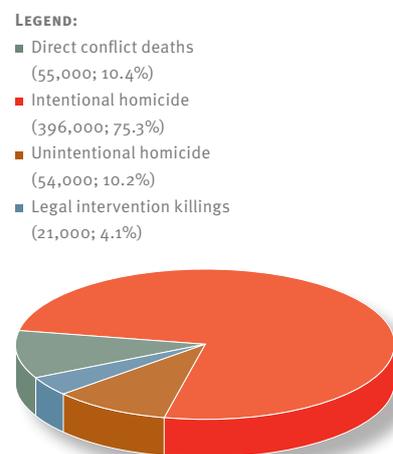
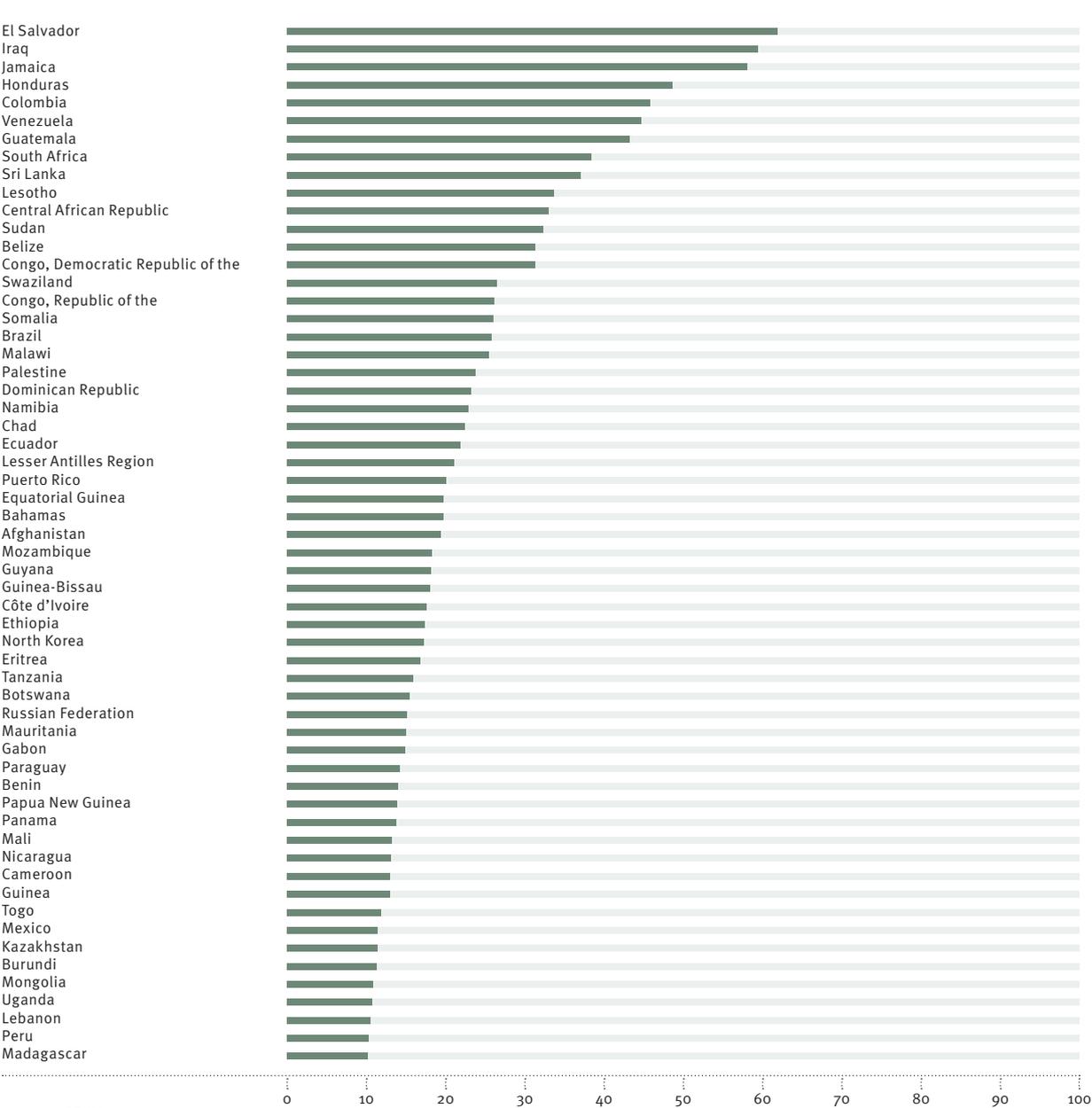


FIGURE 2.14 Disaggregating the global burden of lethal violence



SOURCE: GBAV 2011 database

FIGURE 2.3 Countries ranked by violent death rate per 100,000 population, 2004–09



SOURCE: GBAV 2011 database

which are home to less than five per cent of the world’s population. Armed violence is thus concentrated in specific regions and in a comparatively small number of countries. At the country level, El Salvador experienced the highest overall annual average violent death rate between 2004 and 2009, followed by Iraq and Jamaica.

Although six years of data—covering 2004 to 2009—is not enough for detailed trend analysis, it is possible to tease out some possible patterns. In 2009 Sri Lanka experienced the highest violent death rate and the greatest increase since 2004, mainly due to the intense armed conflict that year. But other countries also exhibited significant upward shifts between 2004 and 2009, including Afghanistan, Honduras, Iran, Mexico, Pakistan, Palestine, Panama, Peru, and Uganda. The violent death rates in these countries in 2009 were at least twice the rates of 2004. In contrast, a cluster of countries—including Burundi, Georgia, Iraq, Lebanon, Nepal, and Somalia—reported significant decreases in lethal violence between 2004 and 2009.

In the absence of contextual analysis, these shifts—both upward and downward—do not reveal anything about the factors driving changes in patterns of armed violence in particular countries. This chapter thus provides only a partial picture of the magnitude and the characteristics of lethal violence at the national and local level. In order to design appropriate violence prevention and reduction programming, a more fine-grained analysis is needed. Yet by drawing attention to the most violent contexts worldwide, and to the significant role of armed violence in so-called non-conflict settings, this chapter widens the lens for policy-makers, practitioners, and researchers. 🔄