

# THE WORLD HOMICIDE SURVEY

## *European area*



### *Homicides in the countries of former Yugoslavia*

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## **The World Homicide Survey**

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The World Homicide Survey aims to explain the factors of the homicide rate's variations across the world using concepts which have, according to the dynamic theory of violence, a direct link to the prevalence of homicides, such as the presence of criminal organizations, corruption, firearms, and the general efficiency of criminal justice agencies.

Indeed, the dynamic theory of violence, developed by Marc Ouimet (University of Montreal), upholds the idea that a country's contextual factors (poverty, inequality, numbers of young people, etc.) act on other concepts with a more direct link to homicides. According to this theory, researches using variables such as the country's per-capita Gross Domestic Product or the Gini coefficient of income inequality do not measure what is closely related to homicide.

There are almost no available variables to characterize the most direct causes of homicide, but the project aimed to gather data by asking knowledgeable individuals their opinions on the social conditions in their country, the functioning of the criminal justice and the forms and prevalence of violence and homicide. This methodology is similar to that employed by *Transparency International* when creating its Corruption perception index.

The World Homicide Survey has been carried out by the University of Montreal and, in Europe, by the National Observatory on Crime and Criminal Justice (ONDRP) with the support of the CSFRS (*High Council for Education and Strategic Research*).

<https://inhesj.fr/ondrp/world-homicide-survey>

## **The ONDRP**

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Created in 2003, the National Observatory on Crime and Criminal Justice (ONDRP) is a department of the National Institute for Advanced Studies in Security and Justice (INHESJ).

Its missions are to measure and analyse crime tendencies in France and abroad through victimizations surveys, annual police data and statistics produced by all type of administration services, professional organizations and private bodies. The ONDRP produces regular publications and is involved in national and international research projects.

<http://inhesj.fr/ondrp/english>



## Abstract

This article describes and analyses homicides in the countries of former Yugoslavia between 2007 and 2015. After providing an overview of the specific regional context shaped by the region's recent history, we go on to study the homicide rates in the countries it is composed of. The countries of former Yugoslavia record different homicide rates even though they have a common recent history and this article highlights possible explanations that.

Although most of our statistical analyses suggest that the variation in the homicide rate in this Southern European region is not connected with socioeconomic differences, the authors propose an explanation based on the dynamic theory of homicide.

## Introduction

Homicide is the most serious of all crimes (Liem & Pridemore, 2012; Ouimet & Cusson, 2012); it may be a statistically rare event compared with other types of offence, but it's one of the crimes most often studied by researchers in criminology.

Some regions, however, are studied more often than others, largely due to the availability of information comparable between countries. The countries most often studied are also those with the lowest homicide rates. It is above all important to have comparable indicators to hand, and various international bodies focus on producing them; however, most available data relates to socioeconomic and demographic fields.

Homicides and violence in general have been little studied in certain regions of Europe, the Balkans among them. Due to the recent independence and (political, economic, social, etc.) instability of a number of its countries, this particular region, the countries of former Yugoslavia in particular, have no complete or reliable administrative registers to draw on (Datzler, Muratbegovic, Maljevic, & Budimic, 2006; UNODC, 2008), which is why it is essential to expand existing information by addition of data from alternative sources.

This is what this article attempts to do. In order to study homicide in this region, it will draw mainly on data obtained from the World Homicide Survey (WHS), an international research project seeking to understand what factors may explain the variation in the homicide rate for all the world's countries (Ouimet, 2016; Veselji, Langlade, & Gourdon, 2017). With the help of questionnaires on perception of violence, the survey managed to collect a great deal of information on homicides, economic conditions and justice systems in 150 countries. Data was obtained on countries for which very little information had previously been available, and where figures provided by government agencies were not always reliable.

Apart from the fact that little criminological research had been carried out on the countries of former Yugoslavia, we chose to study them for several reasons. Firstly because of their recent history as independent nations, secondly because they had suffered armed conflicts between 1991 and 1999, and finally, because the region has undergone political and economic transitions: from a communist regime to a democracy and from a State-controlled economy to a market economy.

This article's main objective is therefore to improve the state of knowledge on homicides and, more generally, on levels of violence in the region. We shall first of all present the regional context of the countries under study. Secondly, after providing an overview of homicides and violence in general, we shall present an analysis of homicides in the six countries under study, for which data is available for the years 2007 to 2015. Finally, we shall carry out statistical analyses in order to better understand the differences in homicide rates across the region.

## Regional context

### Geography

There is no standard definition of the Balkans; it varies depending on the field under study and may take several forms: strict or wide, historical, geographical or political. This study focuses specifically on the countries of former Yugoslavia.

Former Yugoslavia refers to the country once known as the “Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia” (SFRY), a federation that was made up of six republics: Bosnia-Herzegovina (Sarajevo), Croatia (Zagreb), Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) (including the regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina) and Slovenia (Ljubljana). The countries of former Yugoslavia are in Southern Europe, bordered by Italy and Austria to the west and north, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria to the northeast, and Greece and Albania to the southeast. Four countries border on the Adriatic Sea, with Croatia having the largest coastal area.

### History of Yugoslavia

The first Yugoslavia, a monarchy, was founded in 1918 and lasted up until it was invaded by the Nazis in 1941. The second Yugoslavia (SFRY), constructed by Tito (Josip Broz) in 1945, fell apart after Slovenia and Croatia declared independence in 1991 and Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina followed suit in 1992, reducing the federation to the third Yugoslavia, consisting of Serbia and Montenegro and renamed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) on 27 April 1992. In 2003, following revision of the constitution, the FRY was renamed the “State Union of Serbia and Montenegro”. This final manifestation, however, disappeared from the map following Montenegro’s official declaration of independence on 3 June 2006 and Serbia’s on 5 June the same year. Kosovo declared its independence in 2008, but is currently only recognised as a country in its own right by a part of the international community .

#### The wars of the 1990s

Yugoslavia’s armed conflicts consisted of three major wars: the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995), the Bosnian-Herzegovinian War (1992-1995) and the Kosovo War (1998-1999).

The first broke out in Croatia on 13 June 1991, when the Yugoslav People’s Army (the JNA, commanded by the Serbs) opened fire on the Vukovar region. A month later, it also attacked Slovenia, but was driven out after ten days of fighting and went on to invade Croatia. The conflict amounted to a series of local confrontations, mainly intended to remove the threat posed to various Croatian towns by the Serb artillery up until 1995.

The Bosnian-Herzegovinian War broke out on 6 April 1992, the day the European community recognised the country’s independence, when Milosevic’s Serb army began the siege of Sarajevo (the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina) while a peaceful demonstration was underway. In May 1993 and in parallel to the ongoing conflict, Croats and Bosniaks (Muslim Bosnians) started to mount military attacks on each other. Armed conflict ceased, however, in March 1994 following pressure from the United States (Robin-Hunter, 2005) and the two parties formed an alliance in order to make a common front against the Bosnian Serbs.

After a period of fierce fighting, the wars came to an end with the signing of the Dayton Accords, at the Elysée Palace in Paris on 14 December 1995, by the Presidents of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia (Sanguin, Cattaruzza, & Chavenau-Le Brun, 2005). These peace agreements resulted in the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina into two entities, each with its own constitution, parliament and

government: the (Bosniak and Croat) Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska (Serb Republic).

There was also a war in Kosovo from March 1998 to June 1999, fought between the Yugoslav (i.e. Serbian-and Montenegrin) army and the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Kosovo was then put under United Nations protection from 1999 to 2008, until its proclamation of independence on 17 February 2008. According to Sundhaussen (2014), the wars of the 1990s that followed Yugoslavia's dismantlement were not only ethnic and national wars but also involved social vendettas and widespread looting.

## **Politics**

As regards their political systems, all seven countries are parliamentary republics. Two of them are members of the European Union, with Slovenia joining in 2004 and Croatia in 2013. Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia are candidate countries – i.e. they have started adapting their national law to European legislation – and finally, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo are potential candidates insofar as they do not yet fulfil the conditions required for membership .

## **Population**

According to World Bank figures for 2016, the total population of all seven countries together is around 21.3 million. Montenegro has the smallest population, with some 600,000 inhabitants, followed by Kosovo, Slovenia and Macedonia, with 1.8, 2.1 and 2.0 million inhabitants respectively. Bosnia-Herzegovina has around 3.5 million inhabitants, Croatia 4 million, and Serbia has the largest number of inhabitants, with over 7 million (The World Bank, 2016).

## **Literacy rates**

There is a high literacy rate among the adult population (15 y/o and above) in six of the region's countries – data is not available for Kosovo. The latest available figures are for 2015 and show that rates in Slovenia (99.7%) and Croatia (99.3%) are the highest. Rates in Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia are 98.7%, 98.5% and 98% respectively. The lowest rate is in Macedonia, with 97.8% of the adult population literate (The World Bank, 2015).

## **Unemployment rates**

According to World Bank figures for 2015, the average unemployment rate for the region as a whole is 20.8%. Slovenia (9%) has the lowest unemployment rate while rates in Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia are almost twice as high: 16.3%, 17.5% and 17.7% respectively. Rates are higher still in Macedonia (26.1%) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (26.3%) with over a quarter of their populations unemployed, and Kosovo has the highest rate with 32.8%.

## Homicides in former Yugoslavia

There is no lack of European criminological research for many countries and almost none at all for others. In 2008, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) made it clear that lack of research on the Balkan region left a significant gap in European criminological research, and the observation remains true today. According to the UNODC, there are no deep-seated structural reasons (percentage of young people in the population, economic inequalities, urbanisation, etc.) to suppose that the region should record high crime rates. It would seem that, generally speaking, there is no great prevalence of violent crime (Getos Kalac, 2014).

The most reliable data relates to homicides. However, there is still little research on homicide and not all countries have been studied. Alvazzi del Frate and Mugellini (2012) observed that the region's socio-political normalisation has been expressed by a drop in homicide rates and that such rates were directly connected with its recent past. Most countries have lower homicide rates than the European average, with the exception of Montenegro. The volume edited by Getos Kalac, Albrecht and Kilchling (2014) brings together articles on criminology and criminality in the countries of the Balkans, which include the countries of former Yugoslavia. Criminological research in the region mainly focuses on organised crime, corruption and transnational offences such as drug- and firearm-smuggling and human trafficking.

At national level, all countries except Bosnia-Herzegovina have various sources of statistical data on crime available (Getos Kalac, 2014). However, given the socio-political instability of some of the region's countries, administrative data must be treated with caution as estimations are less robust than for other European countries. There are also low rates of declaration to the police and as a result available figures are not representative of the scale of certain offences (Datzner, Muratbegovic, Maljevic, & Budimic, 2006). In order to get round this problem, researchers make use of alternative data sources, including victimisation and self-reported crime surveys.

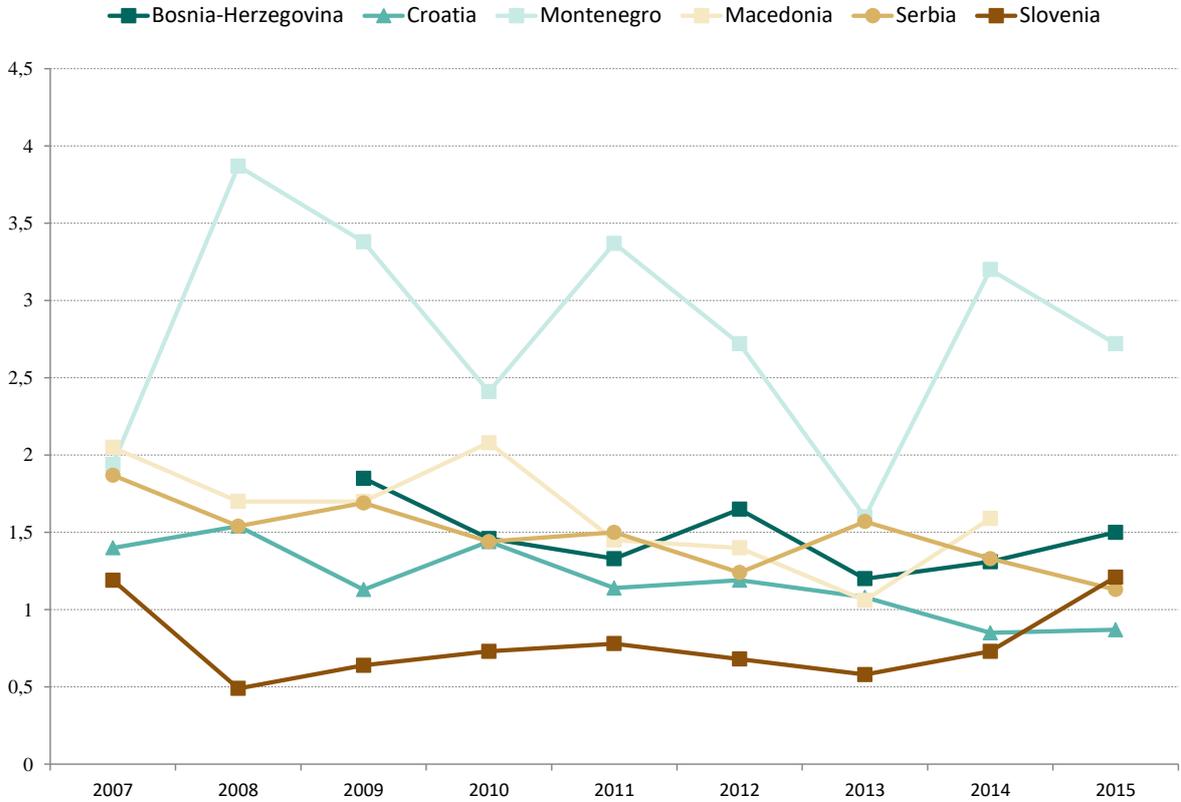
### Homicide trends in the countries of former Yugoslavia, 2007-2015

In this part, we present data on homicides, starting with the evolution of the homicide rate over time and going on to examine the average overall homicide rate, the percentage of female victims and, finally, the average firearm homicide rate.

The definition of homicide employed in this study is that developed by the UNODC (2011): intentional homicide is defined as the killing of a person by another person (objective element), the unlawfulness of the killing (legal element) and the intent of the perpetrator to kill or seriously injure the victim (subjective element). The definition contains three specific elements: the murder of a person by another person, the perpetrator's intention to kill the victim, and the illegality of the intentional act.

We decided not to analyse data from Kosovo as it was only partly available for many indicators. Given Montenegro's recent independence (2006), data on homicide has only been recorded since 2007. As regards the other countries, data is available from 2003 onwards, with the exception of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where data is available from 2009 onwards. We decided to present trends in the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants from 2007 to 2015 [Figure1], a total of nine years of observation. Our choice may be explained by the fact that data for Serbia prior to 2007 also includes data for Montenegro, as the two formed the "State Union of Serbia and Montenegro".

Figure 1. Overall homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants, 2007-2015

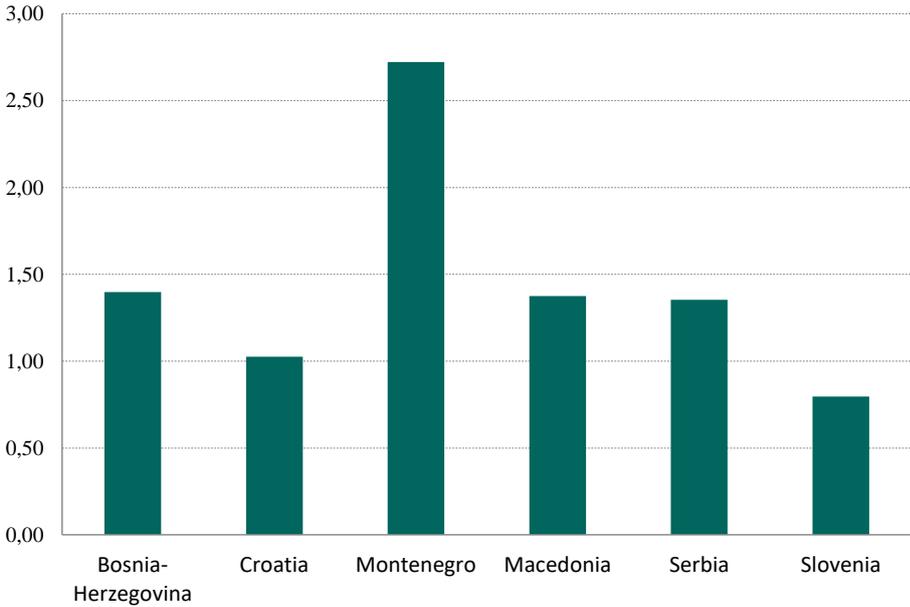


Source: UNODC – processed by the ONDRP

The country recording the greatest fluctuations is Montenegro. Its homicide rate doubled from 2007 to 2008 and from 2013 to 2014: the number of victims increased from 12 to 24 between 2007 and 2008, i.e. from a rate of 1.9 to 3.9 per 100,000 inhabitants. Montenegro recorded its highest homicide rate in 2008 and its lowest in 2013. With the exception of this country, there is a measure of stability in homicide rates in the countries of former Yugoslavia. There are no great fluctuations over the period under study and even though there is a downward trend, there was an increase in four countries’ homicide rates in 2014. The rate in Slovenia increased and in 2015, the country recorded its highest rate in nine years: 1.2 per 100,000 inhabitants.

After presenting the evolution of homicides in the region, we shall go on to take a closer look at overall homicide rates and the rates for two specific types of homicide. In order to ensure concordance between the two data sources – i.e. primary data (WHS) and secondary data (UNODC), we calculated average homicide rates using UNODC data for 2011 to 2015. We did the same for the percentage of female victims of homicide in order to reduce time lag risks. Finally, the average firearm homicide rate (2010–2015) was provided by the Small Arms Survey.

Figure 2. Average overall homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants, 2011-2015



Source: UNODC – processed by the ONDRP

From the data provided in Figure 2, it would appear that three countries, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia, have very similar average homicide rates. Montenegro’s rate is twice as high, with an average of 2.7/100,000 inhabitants. Slovenia’s rate is revealed to be lower than in the other countries, with an average of 0.8/100,000 inhabitants, closely followed by Croatia, which has an average rate of 1.03. The regional average is 1.5, lower than the European rate (37 countries ) and the Southern European rate (8 countries), which stand at 2.2 and 1.9 respectively.

Figure 3. Percentage of female homicide victims

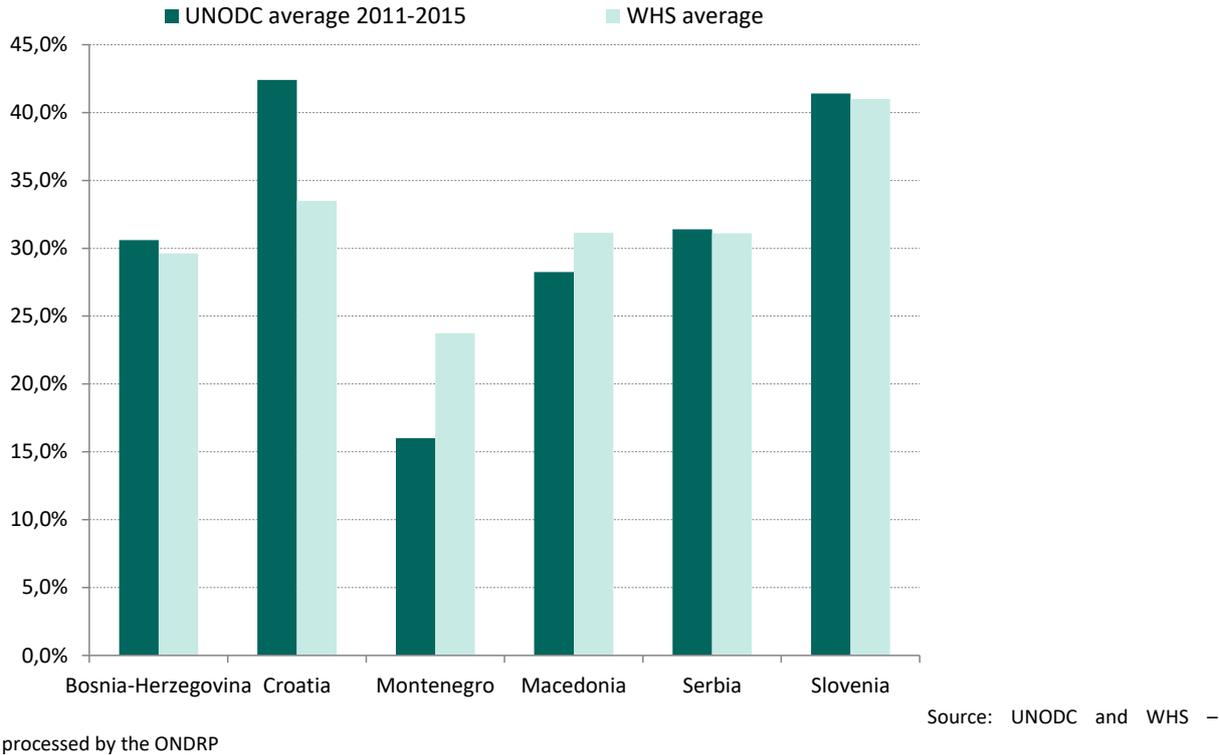
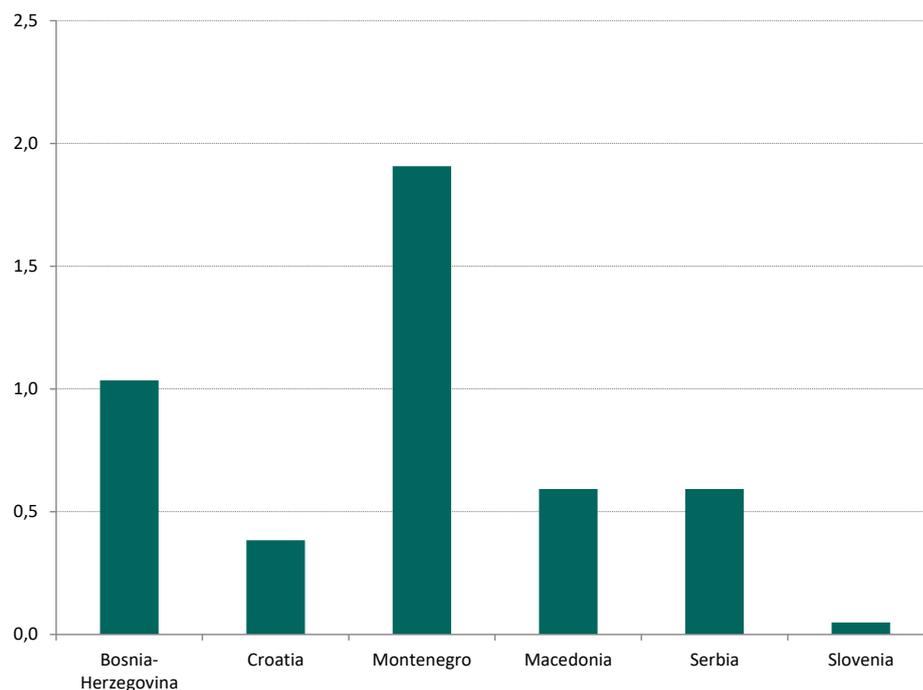


Figure 3 presents percentages of female homicide victims from two sources: WHS and UNODC data. For four of the countries under study, estimations are similar for both data sources. There is an overestimation on the part of Montenegrin respondents and an underestimation by Croatian respondents. There are no great differences overall and we may observe that the perception of specialists who took part in the WHS is similar to data provided by the UNODC. The two countries with the highest rates are Croatia and Slovenia, with over 40% – similar to percentages observed in the countries of Western Europe. Finally, the country that stands out for its low percentage of female homicide victims is Montenegro, with only 16%. Its high percentage of male victims may be explained by the fact that homicides committed would be largely in a context of organised crime, which, according to the literature and testimonies collected by two ONDRP research officers, affects the country significantly.

Figure 4. Average firearm homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants, 2010-2015



Source: Small Arms Survey – processed by the ONDRP

Figure 4 reveals that Montenegro stands out from the other countries in the region as regards its firearm homicide rate, with an average rate of 1.9/100,000 inhabitants over six years. Once again, Slovenia records the lowest rate (0.04/100,000 inhabitants), closely followed by three other countries with rates less than 1. Finally, Bosnia-Herzegovina has the second highest average firearm homicide rate. It is noteworthy that the two countries with the highest firearm homicides are also those which seem to have two of Europe's highest firearm accessibility rates (Veselji, Langlade, & Gourdon, 2017).

### Potential factors explaining homicides in the region

In the preceding part, we found that there are differences between homicide rates in the region's six countries. This being so, we are going to try to understand these differences with variables identified in many comparative research projects as having an effect on variations in homicide rates across the world (Trent & Pridemore, 2012; Ouimet M. , 2016; Veselji, Langlade, & Gourdon, 2017).

Forms of analysis selected for this study reflect the fact that abusive use of multivariate analyses has been criticised by a number of researchers (Breiman, 2001; Freedman, 1991) and that less sophisticated types of analysis, such as visualizing the data prior to exploitation, remain pertinent (Von Hofer & Lappi-Seppälä, 2014). In addition, as our sample is a small one (N=6), more in-depths statistics are not applicable. Consequently, we shall limit ourselves to descriptive analyses and nonparametric bivariate correlations.

Table 1 shows the rates and percentages of a series of "potential" homicide predictors for the six countries under study. Such predictors have previously been highlighted in comparative research on homicide rates (Trent & Pridemore, 2012; Aebi & Linde, 2014) and can be divided into two groups. The first group includes the Gini Index, the Democracy Index, the percentage of urbanised population, the per capita GDP using the PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) method, the median age, the

Human Development Index, pure alcohol consumption per inhabitant in litres per year for 15 y/o and over, and the unemployment rate. These indicators are provided by international organisations for 2015 or the most recent year available. The Table also includes the average homicide rate (2011-2015) per 100,000 inhabitants, averages of percentages of female homicides between 2011 and 2015, and the average firearm homicide rate from 2010 to 2015.

It appears that the most inegalitarian of the six countries under study is Macedonia, which has the youngest population and the lowest pure alcohol consumption in litres per inhabitant, while Slovenia is the most egalitarian and democratic country, with the highest per capita GDP. According to figures for 2015, the least democratic country with the least urbanised population is Bosnia-Herzegovina. Montenegro stands out for its homicide rate in comparison with the other countries in the region but not as regards its socio-economic characteristics. Finally, it is interesting to note that the two countries with the highest pure alcohol consumption in litres per inhabitant are also the ones with the lowest homicide rates.

Table 2 lists the second group of predictors, including indicators that have been measured using the WHS questionnaire and whose averages over four years have been calculated (Veselji, Langlade, & Gourdon, 2017): poverty, firearm accessibility, drug trafficking, fear of crime, the impact of present or past civil war, effectiveness of the police and the justice system, institutional corruption, the proper functioning of the police and the justice system, and satisfaction with institutions .

As regards poverty, the estimated percentage of the population living in extreme poverty (having difficulty feeding themselves) is highest in Macedonia (42.9%) and lowest in Slovenia (10%). Concerning the firearm accessibility measure, Bosnia-Herzegovina's index is the highest, estimated at 41.6 (100 corresponds to total accessibility) while Slovenia's is the lowest, standing at 5.9. Montenegro has the highest average homicide rate. It also records the highest fear of crime, is more impacted by drug trafficking and its police and justice systems are estimated as being the least effective. In contrast, Slovenia, which has the lowest average homicide rate, has the least fear of crime, is the country least affected by drug trafficking and has the most effective police and justice systems. Present or past civil war seems to most affect the quality of life of a segment of Croatia's population and have the least impact in Slovenia. As regards corruption, it turns out that Macedonia is the most affected by the problem whereas Slovenia is least affected. Finally, there is general dissatisfaction with institutions in all six countries of former Yugoslavia.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have examined trends in homicide rates and it would appear that the countries of former Yugoslavia present a measure of stability with regard to their homicide rates over the period under study, with the exception of Montenegro, where there are greater annual variations – a fact that may be explained by the country's low absolute number of homicides and low population. A general downward trend since 2007 is to be observed in the five other countries, with occasional slight increases. Montenegro stands out from the region's other countries due to an average homicide rate over 3.4 times higher than Slovenia's, a firearm homicide rate 39.2 times higher than Slovenia's, and a percentage of female victims 2.7 times lower than Croatia's. All these figures seem to suggest that homicides are committed in a specific context in Montenegro, connected with organised crime as most victims are male and most homicides are committed with firearms. All the

more so as Killias and Markwalder (2012) have shown that, in the European context, firearms are more associated with violent ways of life than with legitimate defence. We cannot confirm this, however, due to lack of information on the circumstances in which homicides are committed in this particular country.

Bivariate analyses have enabled us to observe that predictors identified by research (i.e. socio-economic indicators) do not have a predictive effect on homicide rates recording little variation – a fact that corroborates the results of regional research projects on the countries of Western Europe (Aebi & Linde, 2014). In other words, when the characteristics of a region's countries are largely similar, predictors of variations in the homicide rate differ from those for countries that are fundamentally different (e.g. industrialised countries and developing countries). Out of the first group of predictors, only the Democracy Index and percentage of female victims were significantly connected with the average homicide rate. It is also worth noting that the relationship between the average homicide rate and two variables from the WHS seems significant: the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty and the fear of crime. Overall, our results suggest that when there are no great differences between countries, new potential predictors of the homicide rate must be identified.

Finally, we have seen that certain administrative data should be used with caution, as it is not always of proven reliability and may be subject to local/national manipulation. This shows how important it is to use alternative sources, victimisation and self-reported crime surveys in particular, alongside questionnaires intended for local specialists, in order to extend our knowledge in the field of criminology. The problem over data hampers the carrying out of criminological studies on the region, making use of alternative sources a *sine qua non*. In the countries of former Yugoslavia, given the lack of reliable or detailed data, such alternative sources are of particular importance; collection of more adequate alternative data would seem essential if we are to come up with a full picture of the region's situation with regard to homicide. Consequently, there is work to be done concerning collection of detailed information on homicide in order to be able to compare it with other countries across the world.

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