THE WORLD HOMICIDE SURVEY
european area

Methodology

The World Homicide Survey

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

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

1. The new conceptual framework

Figure 1 illustrates the new conceptual model. Contextual factors create a particular environment for each country, leading to different forms and prevalences of crimes. Such factors have an indirect impact: they might have an influence on precipitating factors (closer to the criminal act) or on certain formal social controls such as the effectiveness of police or justice services, which themselves would have a more direct influence on variations in homicide rates.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the World Homicide Survey
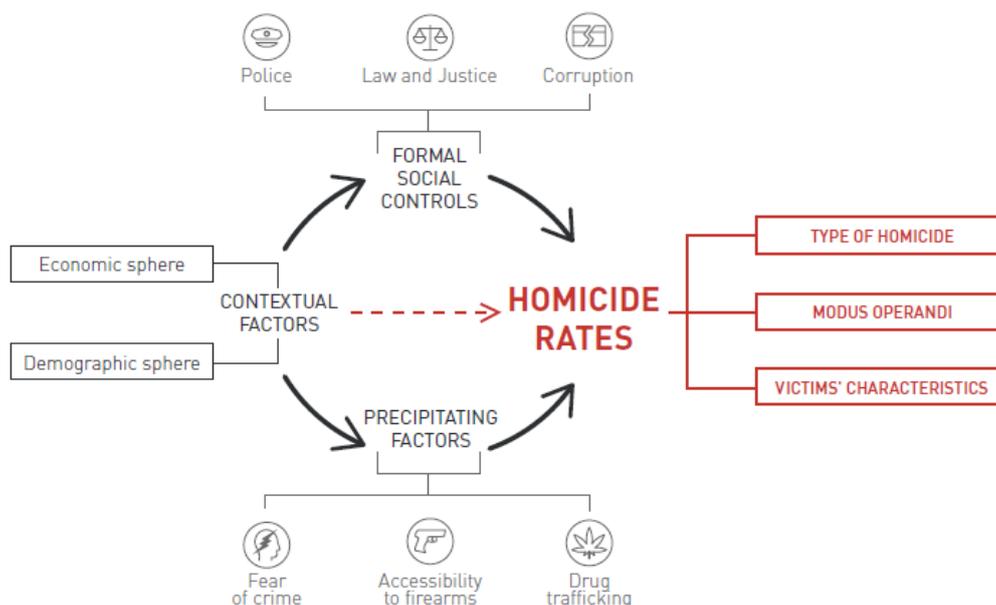
Violence precipitators are social facts that can be considered as proximal causes of violence: fear of crime, drug trafficking, availability of firearms and also armed conflicts.

Formal social controls are handled by the three major criminal justice agencies, the police, the courts and the prisons. It is hypothesized that weak criminal justice institutions will produce a great deal of violence and homicide: would be criminals will feel that theirs risks are low and therefore will decide to act upon their impulse, and people will be encouraged to take the law into their own hands.

2. Data collection strategy

The collection of data is centered on the idea that knowledgeable people can provide interesting estimates of a social phenomenon. Asking knowledgeable people is the method used by Transparency International to produce its Corruption Perceptions Index, a measure used by thousands of people around the world[1]. Respondents for the World Homicide Survey are local experts who have written on the problem of violence in their country or who have first-hand knowledge and are familiar with the crime problems, the functioning of the police and justice institutions in their country. They have been identified on the occasion of direct contact during

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[1] http://files.transparency.org/content/download/2183/13748/file/CPI_2017_Technical%20Methodology%20Note_EN.pdf

international colloquia, on the internet and through networks of contacts, during missions carried out in various countries in the context of the WHS and also via national research centres for two countries.

A questionnaire intended for such specialists, confidential and the same for all countries, has been developed. It is made up of 12 series of questions mostly bearing on the perception of violence and institutions in countries concerned: overview of the breakdown of homicide paterns based on the gender of the victim, the weapon used to commit the crime and the general type of homicide ; questions on the prevalence of various forms of rare homicides, the efficiency of the criminal justice system (reportability rate, clearance rate and convivtion rate) and other factors that affect directly the level of violence (availability of firearms, organized crime, etc.).

Figure 2 shows an example of questions the respondents must answer.

Figure 2. Example of questions

For the whole country, what would be …

	2% and less	5%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90% and more
The proportion of households that possess a firearm	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The proportion of men that frequently carry a firearm with them (on them or in their car)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The proportion of the population that are sometimes required to pay a bribe to police officers	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The proportion of the population living in extreme poverty (have difficulty feeding themselves)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The proportion of the population living in areas where the police are virtually absent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The proportion of women afraid to walk alone in their neighborhood at night	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The proportion of men afraid to walk alone in their neighborhood at night	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Give your opinion on the following questions:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Judges are independent and are not subject to external pressures	○	○	○	○	○
Civil courts protect property rights (land, goods)	○	○	○	○	○
People charged before the courts have access to a fair trial	○	○	○	○	○
The police protect the interests of people in power rather than the interests of the population	○	○	○	○	○
The police are intimidated by criminal organizations	○	○	○	○	○
People are afraid of the police	○	○	○	○	○

The questionaire has been translated into seven languages. 1398 have been filled out in more than 150 countries across the world, including 618 in Europe, enabling the constitution of an initial database.

The methodology employed has been scientifically validated (Ouimet & Montmagny-Grenier, 2014). The ONDRP checked the validity of European data before exploiting it, through three steps: the first one consisted of checking the questions' intelligibility, the second of checking the coherence of the responses provided by the specialists questioned, and the third one consisted of checking statistically that the indicators measured the concepts under study correctly. For that, one way to establish the validity of the data was to see if the country to country measures of corruption covary with measures of corruption perception provided by *Transparency International*. Figures 3 and 4 present the scatterplots.

Figure 3. Comparison between the proportion of people that are sometimes required to pay a bribe to police officers (WHS European corruption measurement) and Transparency International's Corruption Index
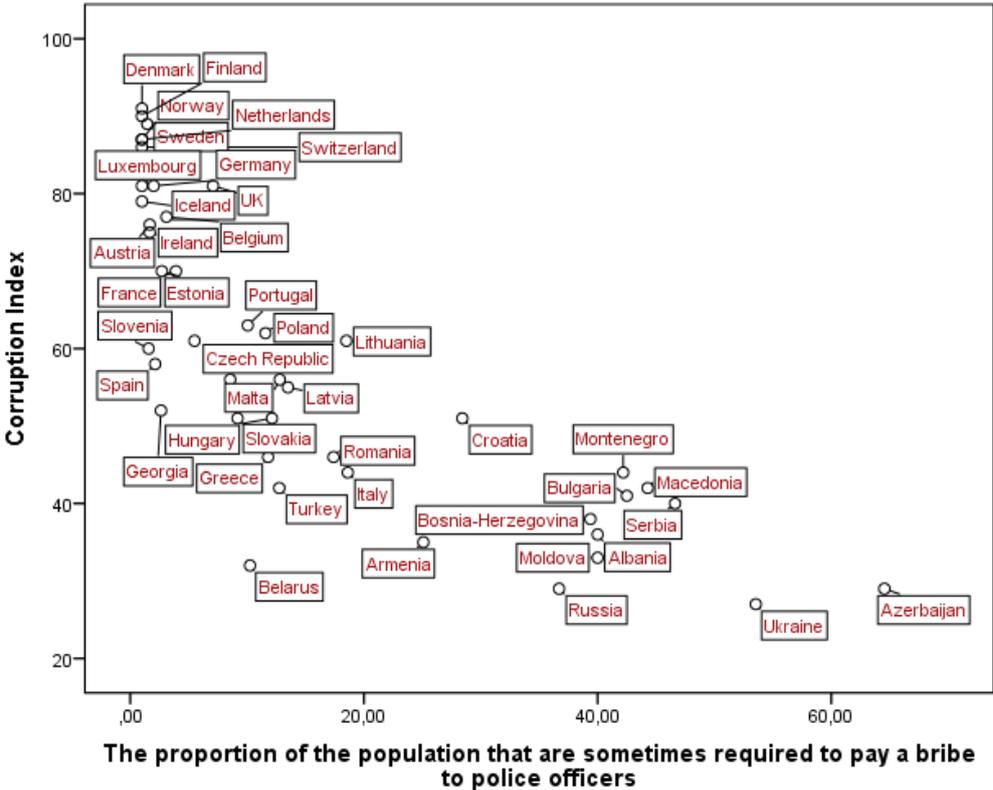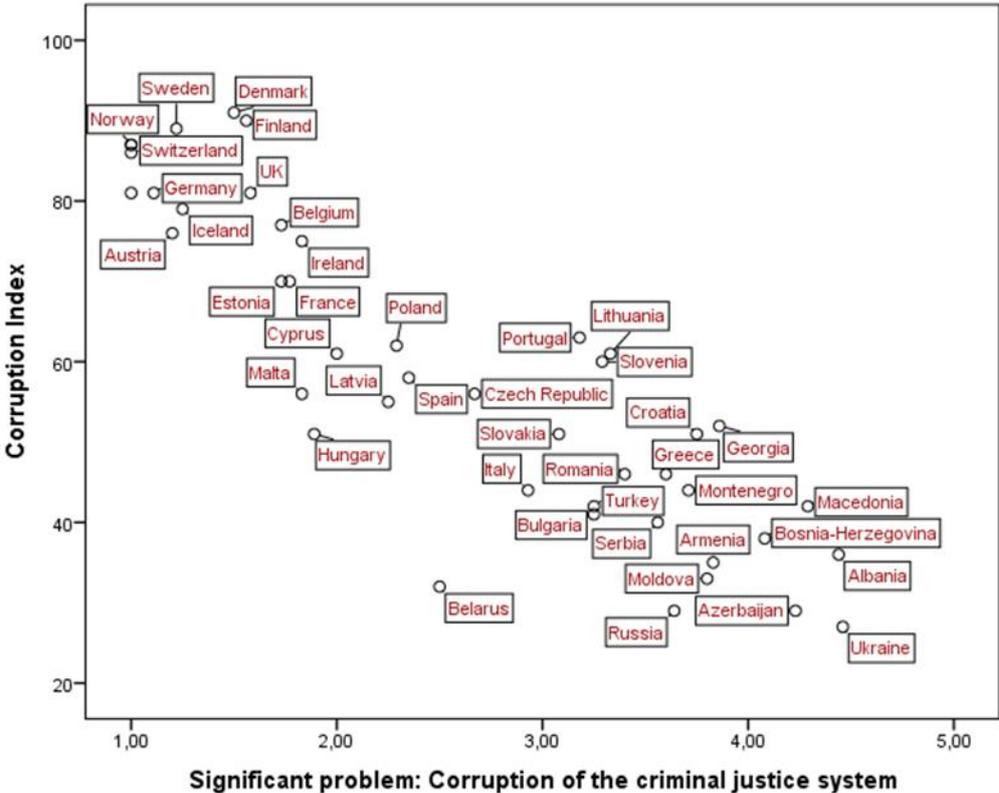
Figure 4. Comparison between measurement of corruption of the criminal justice system (WHS European measurement) and Transparency International's Corruption Index

Figures 3 and 4 show that WHS corruption measurements are significantly close to Transparency International's Corruption Index ($p<0.001$). Similarities are especially close as Pearson coefficients show: -0.79 and -0.88. Thus, the higher (and therefore not corrupt) the Transparency International Corruption Index is for a European country, the less corrupt it is according to WHS results. Similarities are so close (as explained above) that we can deduce that the questions posed on corruption in the WHS questionnaire measure the same concept as Transparency International's Index.

Lastly it has been verified how much responses could differ depending on respondents' activity sectors: it is reasonable to think that a journalist may not see questions of security or effectiveness of institutions in the same way as a police officer. In such a situation, respondents with all the similar profile could slant the country's responses. Therefore it has been checked whether there were any significant differences between respondents' responses depending on their activity sectors, with Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests comparing averages, as the independent variable is made up of several components: academic and research, government, police, judicial and correctional, and others. These statistical tests enabled to observe that overall there were no differences in respondents' responses depending on their activity sectors, with the exception of a few questions, where differences were apparent between the "police" group and the "others" group but none between all groups: there is no bias between respondents due to their professions.

3. Measurement of concepts

In order to measure concepts, the following indicators have been created.

a *Contextual factors*

The WHS's conceptual model postulates that the characteristics of a territory's ecosystem have an indirect impact on homicides, affecting the quality of formal social controls and the presence of violence triggers, both of which have a direct influence. With the exception of the estimation of the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty ("having difficulty feeding themselves"), which comes from the WHS questionnaire, such factors are measured using indicators provided by international organisations:

4. Per capita GDP, as measured by the World Bank in purchasing power parity,
5. Income inequality, as measured by the GINI Index, also provided by the World Bank,
6. Democracy Index (index created by the Economist Intelligence Unit),
7. Median age of the population,
8. Percentage of urbanised population.

b *Violence triggers*

Violence triggers comprise forms of social or criminal behaviour that may have an impact on the prevalence of homicides :

9. Availability of firearms
10. The importance of drug trafficking as a social problem
11. Fear of crime
12. Impact of actual or past civil wars

c *Formal social control*

13. Levels of institutional corruption (police and judiciary)
14. Proper functioning of the police and the judicial system
15. Quality of judicial and police functioning
16. Effectiveness of the penal system (identification and conviction rates)
17. Levels of satisfaction with criminal justice agencies.

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