Briefing Paper

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DARKENING HORIZONS

Global Violent Deaths Scenarios, 2018–30

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Credits and contributors

About the authors

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Acknowledgements

Front cover photo

Relatives of victims mourn near a crime scene in San Salvador, March 2017. Source: Marvin RECINOS/AFP

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Overview

This Briefing Paper analyses trends in global violent deaths based on data updated to 2017, which provides a benchmark for the scenarios for the period 2018–30 that constitute the main focus of the paper. The year 2017 was characterized by a marked increase in lethal violence, primarily due to a rise in homicides (that is, non-conflict deaths). The paper presents three different, but plausible scenarios reflecting possible trends in global violent deaths in the period 2018–30. These are: (1) a 'business-as-usual' scenario, where international efforts to reduce lethal violence continue as at present; (2) a positive scenario, where concerted efforts lead to reductions in global violent death rates; and (3) a negative scenario, where inaction and escalating lethal violence cause a significant increase in global violent death rates. All three scenarios are derived from longer-term trends and underline the need for policy-makers to renew efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Target 16.1.

Key findings

- The year 2017 claimed the lives of 589,000 people around the world—including 96,000 women and girls—which corresponds to a rate of 7.80 violent deaths per 100,000 population. This was the second highest annual rate over the period 2004–17.

- Most of this increase in lethal violence was caused by homicides in non-conflict settings, especially in South and Central America, while there was a marked decrease in such violence in Northern Africa (due to a decrease in conflict deaths), Western Asia (reductions in both conflict deaths and homicides), and Northern America (reductions in homicides).

- This significant rise in violent deaths in 2017 could mark the start of a major deterioration of the global outlook for violence reduction, with the 'business-as-usual' scenario likely to result in around 660,000 annual violent deaths by 2030.

- Global lethal violence trends could still be reversed and 1.45 million lives saved if states were to take immediate action and replicate the results of countries that have been most successful at preventing and controlling such violence.

- Almost half the lives that could be saved by concerted policy action to prevent lethal violence would be in South and Central America and the Caribbean.
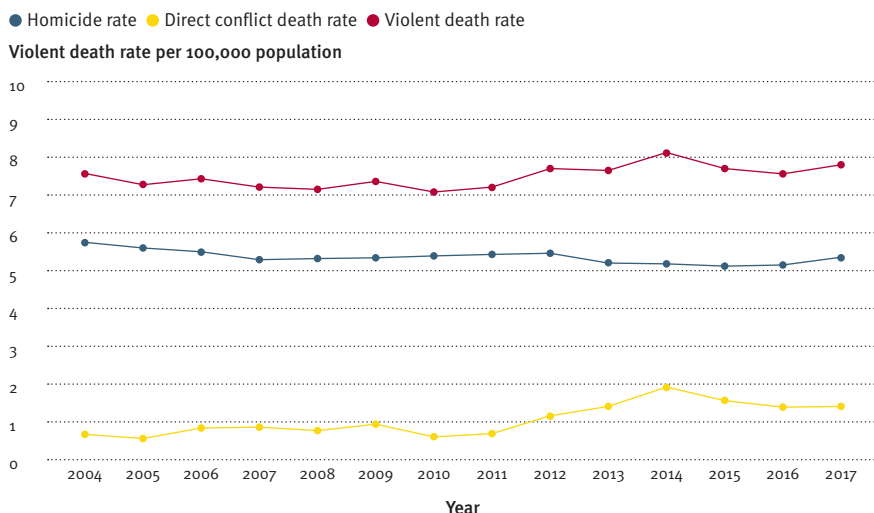
Introduction

The 2017 data on violent deaths shows not only the second-highest absolute number of violent deaths over the 2004–17 period,[1] but also the third-largest annual change over the same period. While armed conflicts caused previous jumps in the recorded numbers of violent deaths (Mc Evoy and Hideg, 2017, p. 21), the increase in 2017 was due mainly to higher homicide rates.[2] Moreover, the effects of this violence are unevenly distributed across the world's regions, with the heaviest burden of increased lethal armed violence affecting the regions of South and Central America and the Caribbean. These trends add urgency to global commitments to prevent lethal armed violence and reduce all forms of violence in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

While the links among violence, conflict, and development have often been pointed to in international discussions, the 2030 Agenda was the first universal policy framework to commit all states to make concrete efforts to reduce conflict and violence, and focus on development. Specifically, Target 16.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) commits states to significantly reduce 'all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere' (UNGA, 2015, p. 25). This will be measured using four progress indicators, including one focused on intentional homicides and another on conflict-related deaths.[3] These indicators are the primary instruments for countries to monitor their progress towards achieving Target 16.1 within the 2030 Agenda timeframe. Thus far, the results of these efforts— while lowering rates of violent deaths in a number of countries—have been insufficient to achieve an overall reduction of lethal violence at the global level in the period 2016–17, and that in fact the opposite was the case. It may yet be too early to tell whether current policies to prevent lethal violence will have the desired effect over the longer term, but the 2017 increase in the rate of violent deaths suggests that global efforts are simply not dealing adequately with the scale of the problem.

The 2030 Agenda still has the potential to tackle the problem of underinvestment in violence prevention. This message is also supported by the UN Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament, which identifies more robust data collection as an important practical step for implementing SDG 16,[4] and more specifically for saving lives (UNODA, 2018, pp. 31–47). Measuring progress towards achieving SDG Target 16.1 will depend on the credible tracking of global violent deaths and plausible estimates of the relative effectiveness

Figure 1 Global annual rates of violent deaths, homicides, and direct conflict deaths, 2004–17

● Homicide rate ● Direct conflict death rate ● Violent death rate

Violent death rate per 100,000 population

Note: Violent deaths include intentional and unintentional homicides, direct conflict deaths, and deaths due to legal interventions.

Source: Small Arms Survey (n.d.)

of policies to reduce violence. The data- and scenario-based analysis presented in this Briefing Paper seeks to contribute to both these goals.

Violent deaths in 2017

The year 2017 saw a dramatic increase in the absolute number of violent deaths, with approximately 589,000 people losing their lives violently.[5] This figure is significantly more than in 2016 (565,000),[6] and nearly as many as in 2014, which was the deadliest year of the last two decades, with violence claiming 592,000 lives globally.

Remarkably, the 2017 data shows not only the second-largest absolute number of violent deaths over the 2004–17 period, but also the third-largest annual change over the same period. In terms of deaths per 100,000 population, the rate of violent deaths was substantially higher in 2017 (7.80) than in 2016 (7.56) and 2015 (7.70). Sharper increases were observed only in 2012 and 2014, but were primarily a result of escalating armed conflicts, mostly in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. This 2017 spike in violence is part of a longer-term trend of noticeable global increases in violent deaths that started in 2011 with the violence associated with the Arab Spring and its aftermath, peaking in 2014 (see Figure 1). Within this overall upward trend, lethal violence briefly decreased globally in 2015–16, but in 2017 this short-term downward trend reversed.

If the increase in 2017 marks a new stage in the post-2011 upward trend in global violence, it was driven primarily

by increases in the global homicides rate (see Figure 1), especially in South and Central America. In 2017 some 403,000 people were the victims of intentional homicides, compared to 106,000 who were casualties of war or other conflict, while the estimated remainder died violently in unintentional homicides or during legal interventions.[7] After a long period of general decline between 2004 and 2015, 2016 recorded a—marginally—higher rate of homicides than in the previous year. Homicide rates then increased substan-

tially from 5.15 per 100,000 population in 2016 to 5.34 per 100,000 in 2017, which was the year that saw the highest number of homicides ever recorded (403,000 globally).
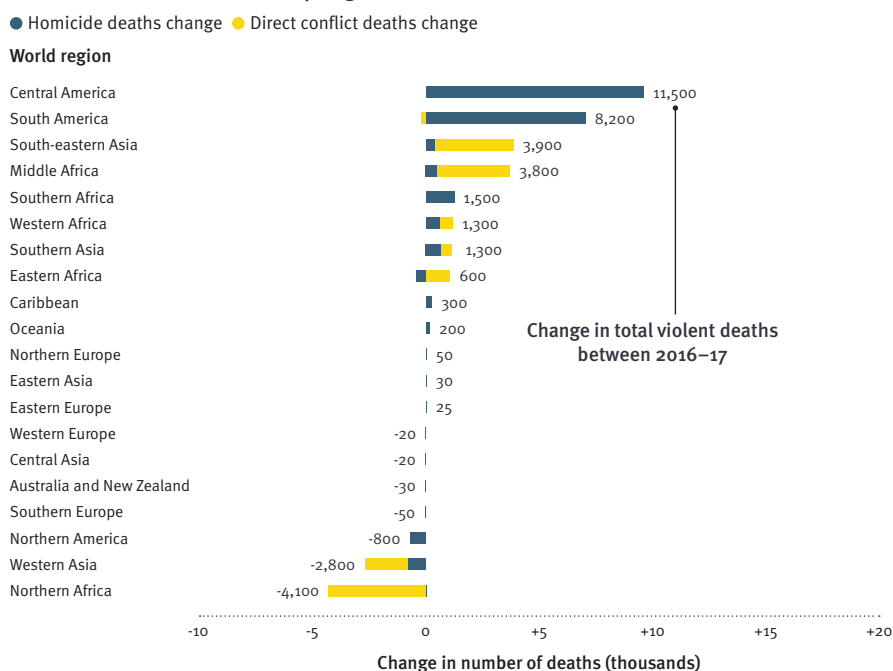
Trends in conflict and homicide deaths differed by region from 2016 to 2017. In this period violent deaths decreased significantly in Western Asia and Northern Africa, primarily through the reduction of conflict fatalities (see Figure 2).[8] In terms of the number of homicides, substantial reductions were only detected in three regions: Western Asia, Northern America, and Eastern Africa. In all other regions the number of homicides did not decrease significantly or even increased between 2016 and 2017.

Recent declines in homicide rates in Western Asia are especially positive, given the ongoing challenges of violent conflicts that affect the region as a whole and the high rates of violent deaths affecting certain countries in particular (for example, Syria).

Increases in homicide rates were especially noticeable in Central America (driven by a record number of homicides registered in Mexico) and South America (where most of the increases were recorded in Venezuela and Brazil), and to a lesser extent in Southern Africa, where homicides increased most markedly in South Africa.

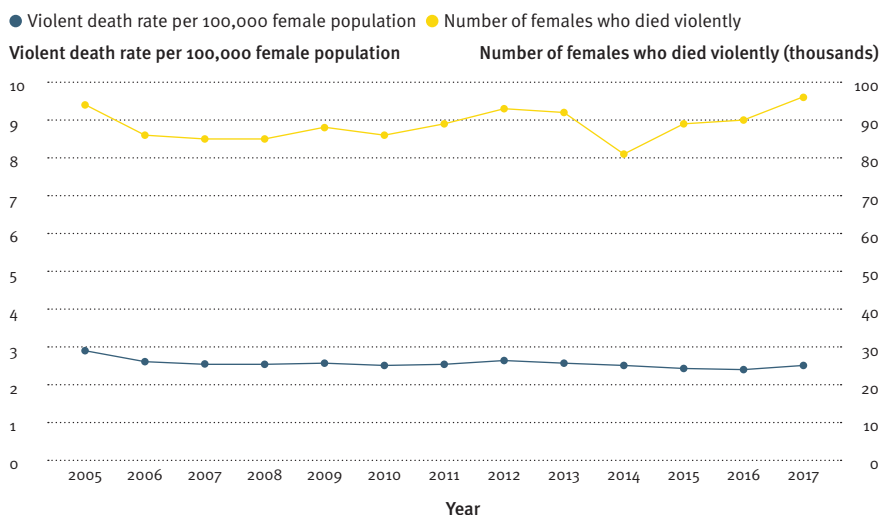Increased homicide rates in South and Central America are especially significant when seen in the context of existing efforts to tackle a long-term upward trend in violent death rates in these regions.

Figure 2 Changes in absolute numbers of homicides and direct conflict deaths between 2016 and 2017, by region

● Homicide deaths change ● Direct conflict deaths change

World region

Source: Small Arms Survey (n.d.)

Figure 3 Global evolution of female violent deaths, 2005–17

● Violent death rate per 100,000 female population   ● Number of females who died violently

Note: Violent deaths include intentional and unintentional homicides, direct conflict deaths, and deaths due to legal interventions.

Source: Small Arms Survey (n.d.)

From this perspective, the fact that these regions are driving the long-term rise in homicides could indicate that policies implemented there on a trial basis may have been too short term in their application or may have failed for other reasons, including political instability. The failure to stem rates of violent death indicates the need for both more policy attention and political stability.

The 2017 increase in global violent deaths also resulted in a record number of women being killed: 2017 saw approximately 96,000 female victims of lethal violence, 6,000 more than the previous year, and more than any other year in the observed period. While significant in absolute terms, these fatalities must be read in the context of increased total population compared to, for example, 2005, when almost as many women and girls fell victim to lethal violence. Thus, the female violent death rate in 2017 (2.51 per 100,000 women and girls), while higher than in past years (2.43 in 2015; 2.40 in 2016), is still below the levels detected in the previous decade (see Figure 3). In 2017 the overall proportion of female victims of lethal violence remained stable at 16 per cent globally.

The regional dynamics of violent death rates also contributed to their gender dimensions. The overall proportion of females killed globally did not increase in proportion to increases in lethal violence more generally, because the highest increase in violent deaths occurred primarily in regions where the predominant proportion of victims of violence are men (with nearly nine out of ten victims being males in South America, Central America, and Southern Africa).

In light of this analysis of contemporary rates of global violent deaths, the following sections describe how the modelling of policy scenarios can provide plausible estimates of the consequences of both action to reduce the global burden of lethal violence and inaction in this regard.

Global violent death scenarios

How many people will die violently if current trends continue until 2030? And how many lives can be saved if states take effective action to reduce and prevent violence? The type of action that policy-makers take to reduce and prevent violence is a key factor that will determine how the various possible scenarios play out until 2030. The *Global Violent Deaths 2017* report made a first landmark attempt to develop plausible scenarios for the future of lethal violence (Mc Evoy and Hideg, 2017, p. 33), and the scenarios presented below use the same methodology, updated with the 2017 lethal violence data.

Three scenarios are considered for the period 2018–30:

● the 'business-as-usual' scenario: nothing changes in terms of existing policies and programmes to reduce or prevent violent deaths;

● the 'positive' scenario: states take effective further action to reduce and prevent violence; and

● the 'negative' scenario: efforts to control global crime and violence are insufficient or prove to be significantly less effective than expected.

The projections resulting from these scenarios provide a credible, objective, and comparative basis to gauge the relative effectiveness of current efforts to reduce lethal violence. For example, if current trends continue, the 'business-as-usual' scenario indicates an expected lethal violence count of 660,000 by 2030 (see Figure 4). If states were able to further intensify their efforts to achieve SDG Target 16.1 in the same way that best-performing countries already have—thus shifting to the positive scenario—the annual number of violent deaths could drop to 439,000 by 2030 (see Figure 5). The difference between concerted action and a business-as-usual approach can be measured by the approximately 1.45 million lives that could be saved between 2018 and 2030 by the concerted implementation of more proactive policies. In contrast, the negative scenario indicates that the number of violent deaths could rise to 1,060,000 *annually* by 2030. This number could be significantly underestimated, however, given that it is impossible to predict the possibility of a widespread global or regional armed conflict, which could vastly increase the number of conflict-related deaths.
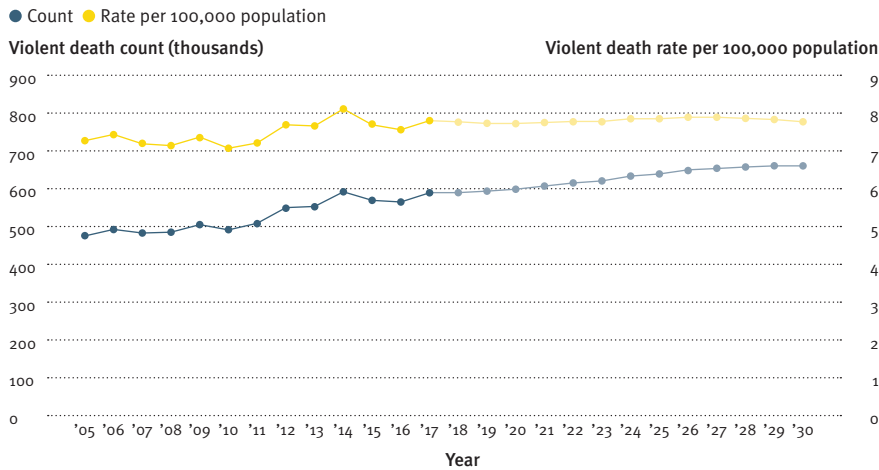
It is obviously impossible to reliably and accurately predict the future in the highly complex field of lethal violence, which means that these scenarios should certainly not be taken as *actual forecasts*; however, they do provide a formalized way of thinking about what is possible and plausible. In other words, the scenarios

Box 1 The Small Arms Survey's Global Violent Deaths database

Based on data from its Global Violent Deaths database, the Survey uses national indicators to track changes in lethal violence worldwide. The database contains data reaching back to 2004 and is updated on a yearly basis; the cut-off date for the data presented in this paper was 30 September 2018. Work on the three scenarios for the period 2018–30 was undertaken in late 2018. The database has served as the basis for a stream of reports and studies, such as the *Global Burden of Armed Violence* reports (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008; 2011; 2015), the Research Note on *Monitoring Trends in Violent Deaths* (Widmer and Pavesi, 2016), and the *Global Violent Deaths 2017* report (Mc Evoy and Hideg, 2017).

Figure 4 Business-as-usual scenario: global violent deaths trends and projections, 2005–30

● Count ● Rate per 100,000 population

Note: Violent deaths include intentional and unintentional homicides, direct conflict deaths, and deaths due to legal interventions.

Source: Small Arms Survey (n.d.)

in this paper provide a reasonable and statistics-based approach to estimating a range of plausible eventualities in the years to 2030.

The art of reading the future: a credible methodology for plausible estimates

The usefulness of modelling scenarios for violence reduction depends on the credibility of the methodology applied and the quality of the data used. The Small Arms Survey's methodology is based on a unified approach to lethal violence[9] and the conviction that the prevention of all forms of violence and violent deaths is necessary to achieve

A child's shoe in the rubble of a destroyed building in Mosul, July 2017. Source: SAFIN HAMED/AFP/Getty Images

'peaceful and inclusive societies', as envisaged in the 2030 Agenda. The analysis presented below relies on the latest data from the Small Arms Survey's Global Violent Deaths database (see Box 1), including data from both conflict and non-conflict settings, homicides, and direct conflict deaths, as well as estimates of the potential numbers of violent deaths that are not usually adequately recorded; that is, unintentional homicides and deaths due to legal interventions.

The term 'violent deaths' is understood as a composite indicator that combines data on lethal violence in both conflict and non-conflict situations. The analysis focuses on violent deaths as measured by the number of:

- homicides;
- direct conflict deaths;[10] and
- other violent deaths (unintentional homicides and deaths due to legal interventions).[11]

This approach to measuring violent deaths is broadly consistent with the SDG framework for monitoring lethal violence trends by using global indicators.

The scenarios presented in this Briefing Paper derive from an analysis of data on violent deaths from 223 countries and territories. Estimates and projections were calculated from national and cross-national specialized data sets that are based on the latest available data.

Table 1 Overview of scenario methodology

Scenario and research question	Assumptions	Notes
Business-as-usual scenario What happens if current trends continue unchanged?	**Homicides**: Current trends continue, as reflected by regional averages.	Homicide projections are derived from current trends using regression analysis.[a] Most regions display logarithmic trends,[b] which are projected to continue until 2030.[c] For regions that exhibit exponential trends, extrapolations were made more cautiously, to avoid a rapid inflation or deflation of homicide rates.
	Direct conflict deaths: A moderate increase is foreseen.	While current trends reflect a general decrease in conflict deaths since 2014, this scenario anticipates a logarithmic curve that starts in 2005 and remains around 120,000 direct conflict deaths for most of the third decade of the 21st century and 2030.
Positive scenario How many lives could be saved if states increased their efforts to achieve SDG Target 16.1?	**Homicides**: Countries start to progress towards, and eventually reach, the average homicide rate changes recorded by the best-performing states in their respective world regions.	This scenario assumes that countries will gradually be able to replicate the performance of states in their respective world regions that exhibited the greatest annual rates of decrease (or, in the absence of decrease, the lowest rates of increase) in homicides in the period 2005–17 (based on up to three top performers, depending on the number of countries in a particular region). It is anticipated that immediate policy action could bring countries close to this performance over a period of about eight years, and that from 2025 onwards each country would improve its homicide rate annually at the rate seen in 2005–17 among the best-performing countries in their respective world regions.
	Direct conflict deaths: Global conflict deaths gradually drop to levels slightly above those recorded prior to the conflicts of the second decade of the 21st century.	This scenario presumes a gradual phasing out of ongoing major armed conflicts, such as the ones in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria; and assumes that by the end of the projection period direct conflict deaths will decrease to about 69,000 annually.
Negative scenario What happens if the situation deteriorates?	**Homicides**: Countries' homicide rates start to regress towards those of the worst-performing states in their respective world regions.	This scenario assumes that countries will regress towards the average annual growth rate in homicides of the worst-performing states in their respective world regions in 2005–17 (based on up to three worst rates, depending on the number of countries in a particular region). It is anticipated that countries will generally not replicate the worst rates, but will gradually deteriorate towards levels that are similar to these rates.
	Direct conflict deaths: Conflict deaths continue to rise, yet not exponentially (as in 2004–17, a period for which an exponential trend line provides the best fit), but rather in a linear fashion. This scenario foresees a slight rise in the number of armed conflicts, possibly in addition to a higher number of fatalities in ongoing or future conflicts.	It is impossible to anticipate the number, duration, or intensity of conflicts that could potentially erupt or continue in the period 2017–30. This scenario presumes that by 2030 the number of direct conflict deaths will be about 50 per cent higher than levels predicted by the business-as-usual model.

Notes:

[a] The analysis is based on the most recent consistent regional trends that have spanned at least four years since 2005 and are still ongoing. If a world region experienced an increase in homicide rates between 2005 and 2010, but a decrease between 2011 and 2017, trends were calculated on the basis of the data points for the period 2011–17. Reference periods thus vary across world regions, but always span at least four years.

[b] A logarithmic trend is indicative of a decelerating pattern of change.

[c] Trends to date show a non-linear pattern. For most world regions projected change is represented by a logarithmic curve, with an ever-decreasing rate of change over time; other regions exhibit an exponential trend, meaning that change there is projected to accelerate to some extent.

For each scenario, the global number of violent deaths is broken down into four categories:

- the projected annual number of intentional homicides, which form the largest single portion of the total;
- the projected annual number of direct conflict deaths;
- the annual number of unintentional homicides, estimated at about 15 per cent of the projected intentional homicides total; and
- the annual number of deaths due to legal interventions, estimated at about 5 per cent of the projected intentional homicides total.[12]

The business-as-usual model was derived from recently recorded trends in violent death rates and thus reflects the possible effects of current policies and programmes on violence reduction and prevention. Plausible positive and negative scenarios were then derived by projecting how rates of lethal violence might change if concerted international action is taken to reduce lethal violence, or if there is a lack of such action.

Table 1 summarizes the statistical approach used in developing the business-as-usual, positive, and negative scenarios of violent deaths for the period 2018–30, with a focus on intentional homicides and direct conflict deaths.

The following analysis will focus on the three scenarios, looking at trends in homicides, direct conflict deaths, and violent deaths for each scenario.

Business-as-usual scenario

This scenario assumes that current trends continue until 2030, with the global homicide rate stabilizing around the level recorded in 2017 of 5.34 per 100,000 population. On this basis, the 2030 rate of homicides is projected to be only slightly lower than it is currently, at 5.31 per 100,000 population.

This business-as-usual scenario does not mean that the *number* of homicides will continue at current levels: the number per year will in fact increase substantially— even if the rate of homicides remains stable—because of a substantial expected global population growth. This means that the annual homicide count is expected to rise from about 403,000 in 2017 to approximately 451,000 by 2030.[13] Thus, data from 2017 clearly reflects a deteriorating outlook for homicides and, in turn, violent deaths in general.

The annual number of direct conflict deaths in 2030 is projected at approxi-

mately 120,000, which is only 13 per cent higher than in 2017, but nearly three times as many as in 2005. The slight increase in 2017 global conflict deaths (2,000 more conflict deaths than in 2016) also affected this estimate, with approximately 14,000 more direct conflict deaths anticipated by 2030 compared to the 2017 model (Mc Evoy and Hideg, 2017).

The business-as-usual analysis projects a fairly linear increase in the absolute number of violent deaths over the period 2018–30, if current trends continue (see Figure 4). Although the annual global violent death count will increase, the rate per 100,000 population modelled for 2030 is predicted to decline somewhat in comparison to 2017 (7.77 for 2030, compared to 7.80 in 2017). While this may sound like a positive outcome, this violent death rate would still be higher than in any year between 2005 and 2016 (with the exception of 2014, which was by far the most violent year of the period). In other words, the world is currently on track towards a substantially elevated rate of lethal violence compared to previous decades. Concerted state action to reduce lethal violence and armed conflict will be necessary to stem this increase in violent deaths.

Positive scenario: progress towards achieving SDG Target 16.1

The global toll of lethal violence could be significantly reduced by 2030 if concrete action is taken to curb rates of both direct conflict deaths and homicides. This means that violent conflicts would need to
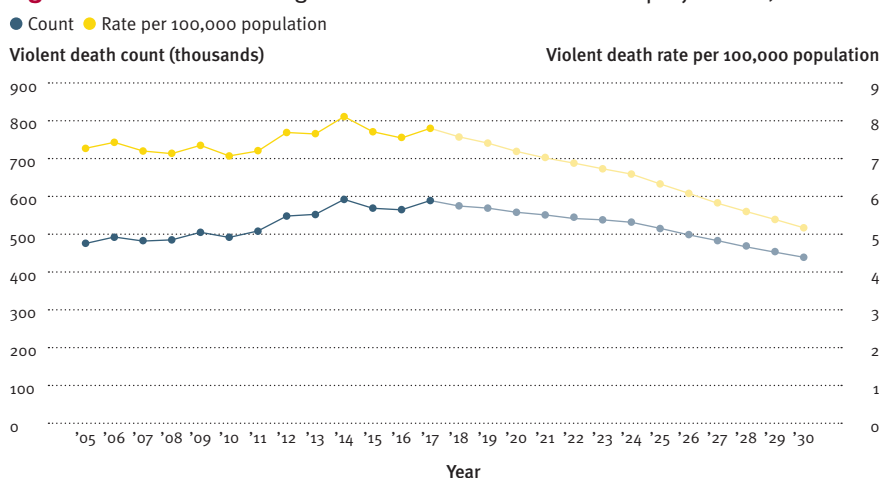
decrease in both number and intensity, and states would need to achieve significant reductions in homicide rates, reversing current trends especially in the world's worst-affected regions.

Homicide projections in this scenario are based on the following assumptions:

- Countries and territories in all of the world's regions are able to use policy and knowledge transfers, on the one hand, and strengthen their focus on violent crime prevention at the national level, on the other, to curb homicide rates at a pace similar to that of the best-performing countries in their respective regions (see Table 1).
- The positive impact of violence reduction policies or strategies will become apparent over time, and all countries and territories in every region will reach optimal performance rates over a span of approximately eight years—from 2018 to 2025.

While they are not factored into the formal assumptions of the model, global policy developments in the areas of conflict prevention and violence reduction may also positively influence the reduction of lethal violence. For example, bringing together the UN's peacebuilding and sustaining peace agenda and commitments to sustainable development, a multi-partner trust facility administered through the Peacebuilding Fund was announced in 2018 to contribute to the achievement of SDG Target 16.4, which aims to stem illegal weapons flows (UNODA, 2018, p. 41), and of Target 16.a, which focuses on strengthening the ability of state institutions to prevent violence, terrorism, and crime (UNGA, 2015, p. 26).

Figure 5 Positive scenario: global violent deaths trends and projections, 2005–30

● Count ● Rate per 100,000 population

Note: Violent deaths include intentional and unintentional homicides, direct conflict deaths, and deaths due to legal interventions.

Source: Small Arms Survey (n.d.)

This positive scenario foresees a potential reduction of annual global violent deaths to about 439,000 by 2030, substantially down from approximately 589,000 in 2017 (see Figure 5). The scenario illustrates that states could achieve a significant reduction in the absolute number of violent deaths, given the necessary political will, and successful, coordinated, and integrated interventions. The positive scenario is based on actual regional best performances observed in the 2005–17 period, and projects a global violent deaths rate of 5.17 per 100,000 population by 2030, which is significantly lower than the prediction for the business-as-usual scenario for the same year (7.77).

Compared to the business-as-usual scenario, the 1.45 million lives that could be saved between 2018 and 2030 can be broken down into more than 355,000 deaths prevented in direct conflict and 1,096,000 deaths prevented from other violent causes (see Figure 7). South and Central America would stand to gain the most from such action, and could save as many as 721,000 lives from 2018 to 2030 (nearly 70 per cent of the global gain in terms of homicide deaths),[14] followed by South-eastern Asia (86,000 lives).[15] With a projection of 70,000 lives that could be saved, Southern Africa[16] is also one of the regions with the most lives at stake if more effective violence prevention policies are adopted and properly implemented.

Negative scenario: escalating lethal violence

In a negative scenario of escalating violence, the number of annual violent deaths could nearly double to reach 1,060,000 by 2030 (see Figure 6). All forms of violence combined would claim approximately 2.1 million more lives in the period 2018–30 than in the business-as-usual scenario,[17] and about 400,000 more lives in 2030 alone.

In this scenario, annual homicide deaths around the world would exceed 741,000 by 2030, corresponding to a homicide rate of about 8.72 per 100,000 population, up from 5.34 in 2017. The negative scenario projects changes in all countries in a given region based on the annual changes in homicide rates observed in the worst-performing countries in that region.[18] Unlike in the positive scenario, the trend anticipates only a relatively slow regression *towards* these rates.[19] In this respect the negative scenario is a relatively conservative and prudent estimate of what a future of increased violence could bring, and not a prediction of a true worst-case scenario.

If we anticipate a slow linear rise in conflict deaths, gradually reaching levels some 50 per cent higher than those predicted in the business-as-usual scenario, 2030 could see some 173,000 battlefield deaths in 2030—approximately 62 per cent more than in 2017. The total violent deaths rate (combining homicides and

A Kenyan rights activist is struck by a tear gas canister during a demonstration against police killings in Nairobi, October 2017.
Source: TONY KARUMBA/AFP/Getty Images

Figure 6 Negative scenario: global violent deaths trends and projections, 2005–30

● Count   ● Rate per 100,000 population

Note: Violent deaths include intentional and unintentional homicides, direct conflict deaths, and deaths due to legal interventions.

Source: Small Arms Survey (n.d.)

conflict deaths, with an estimated number of other violent deaths) would thus reach well above 10 per 100,000 population by 2030 (12.48), 60 per cent up from the 2017 level (7.80).

Such an upsurge in lethal violence could plausibly stem from a variety of factors, including new armed conflicts or the intensification of existing ones, an increase in other types of lethal violence due to serious shortages of food or water on a regional scale, mass displacement or migration, or a global resurgence of organized crime. Failures to address inequality could also exacerbate the drivers of lethal violence, especially

when they are combined with human rights abuses and discrimination based on social, political, and economic exclusion, all of which are drivers of violent extremism.

Conclusion: the need for concerted action on violence prevention

Comparing these three plausible, but distinct scenarios shows how decisive policy action and the implementation of best practices will be in determining the

future course of global lethal violence (Figure 7). If more states are able to replicate past best performances in their respective regions, some 1.45 million lives could be saved between 2018 and 2030, and half of those lives could be saved in South and Central America and the Caribbean.

Ultimately, these scenarios demonstrate the usefulness of data-driven analysis for better policy-making—but also the need to deepen understanding of 'what works' in countries that have been able to achieve significant reductions in rates of violent deaths. Looking at the worst-affected regions such as South and Central America, policy-makers may need support from monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes to understand how best-performing states were able to reduce lethal violence while neighbours in the same region saw dramatic increases in violent deaths; for example, in Mexico, where the homicide rate soared. Identifying good practices on the basis of regional best-performing countries offers a promising starting point for this kind of analysis and a realistic and workable way to achieve progress towards the 2030 Agenda and Target 16.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals. ●
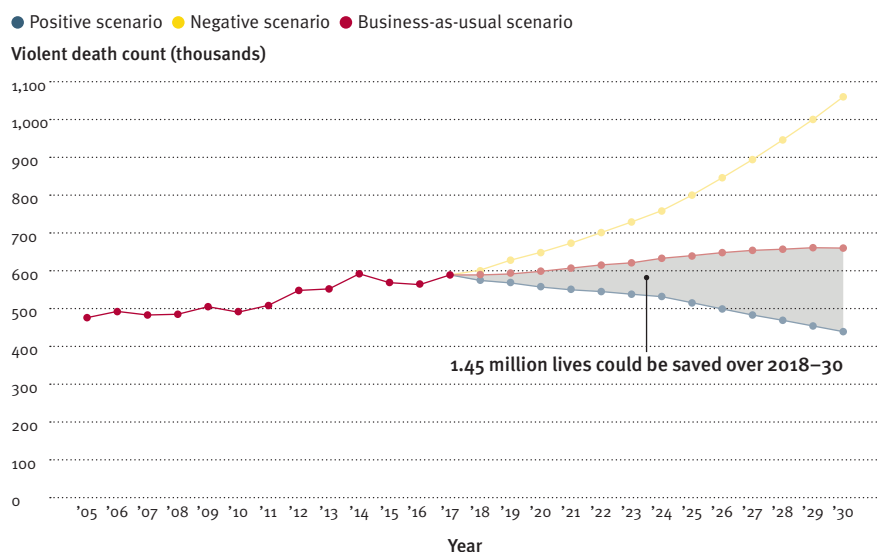
Notes

1   The Global Violent Deaths database contains data going back to 2004, but analysis of trends and of data disaggregated by sex will be presented in the paper starting from 2005.
2   Unless stated otherwise, the term 'homicide' refers to 'intentional homicide', defined as 'unlawful death inflicted upon a person with the intent to cause death or serious injury' (UNODC, 2015, p. 17).

Table 2 Global annual rates and counts of violent deaths, homicides, and direct conflict deaths for 2017, and projected for 2030 according to the three scenarios

	Indicator	2017		2030	
		n	Rate/100,000	n	Rate/100,000
Business-as-usual scenario	Violent deaths	589,000	7.80	660,000	7.77
	Homicides	403,000	5.34	451,000	5.31
	Direct conflict deaths	106,000	1.41	120,000	1.42
Positive scenario	Violent deaths	589,000	7.80	439,000	5.17
	Homicides	403,000	5.34	310,000	3.64
	Direct conflict deaths	106,000	1.41	69,000	0.81
Negative scenario	Violent deaths	589,000	7.80	1,060,000	12.48
	Homicides	403,000	5.34	741,000	8.72
	Direct conflict deaths	106,000	1.41	173,000	2.03

Figure 7 Global violent death trends, as documented for 2005–17 and projected for 2018–30

- ● Positive scenario ● Negative scenario ● Business-as-usual scenario

Violent death count (thousands)

1.45 million lives could be saved over 2018–30

Year

Note: Violent deaths include intentional and unintentional homicides, direct conflict deaths, and deaths due to legal interventions.

Source: Small Arms Survey (n.d.)

3 Indicator 16.1.1 refers to the 'number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age' and Indicator 16.1.2 refers to the 'conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause' (UNGA, 2017, pp. 20–21). The global indicators were developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators as 'a practical starting point' for measuring progress against the SDGs' targets (IAEG, 2017, p. 2).

4 SDG 16 reads: 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels' (UNGA, 2015, p. 25).

5 This total figure aggregates direct conflict deaths and intentional homicides, supplemented with an estimate for unintentional homicides and deaths during legal interventions. Using estimates of unintentional homicides and killings during legal interventions is an unavoidable necessity, because most countries fail to collect this data or to make it available.

6 Because of data revisions based on statistical information that became available or was updated by relevant sources in the meantime, figures for 2016 may differ from those previously published. For example, the total number of violent deaths for 2016 was previously estimated at 560,000 (Mc Evoy and Hideg, 2017, p. 11).

7 The monitoring and reporting of deaths due to legal interventions are very uneven, and available figures are probably underestimates. Sometimes the boundaries between legal intervention fatalities and extrajudicial killings by security forces are also blurred, further complicating these estimations. Trends in unintentional homicides depend largely on legal definitions and the codiﬁon of relevant indicators, which vary widely across states (Widmer and Pavesi, 2016, p. 8). See the discussion on

methodology in this Briefing Paper for definitions of death due to legal interventions.

8 The composition of world regions referred to in this paper is based on the UN's standard country and area codes for statistical use (known as 'M49') (UNSD, n.d.). Population rates are drawn from the UN's 'World Population Prospects 2017' (UNDESA, 2017). The selection of sources used to establish the time series is affected by changes in the availability of data, due to either the discontinuation of a given time series or the introduction of new data sets. This means that the Survey's Global Violent Deaths database (Small Arms Survey, n.d.) is constantly being updated, including retroactively.

9 See Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2011, p. 11).

10 Direct conflict deaths are deaths caused by war-related injuries or attacks.

11 Legal intervention killings are defined as the 'killing of civilians by law enforcement officials, or killings of law enforcement officials on duty' (Carapic and De Martino, 2015, p. 1).

12 The estimated proportions of legal intervention killings and unintentional homicides in this Briefing Paper are based on data samples from countries for which this information is available.

13 The demographic profile of violent deaths may also moderate future projections somewhat because victims are concentrated among young males, yet as populations age over the period 2019–30, a decreasing proportion of the global population will fall within this most vulnerable demographic.

14 Despite the overall increase in homicide rates at the regional level, several countries in these regions managed to improve their situation over time. For example, in South America, Ecuador and Paraguay achieved a –5 per cent average annual reduction in homicide rates since 2005; in Central America the best performers over the same

period were Nicaragua (–4 per cent annual reduction) and Guatemala (–3 per cent).

15 Best performers in the region since 2005 are Thailand and Singapore, both with a –5 per cent annual reduction of homicide victims.

16 Botswana (–4 per cent since 2005) and Namibia (–2 per cent since 2008) produced the best results for lethal violence reduction in Southern Africa.

17 This calculation is based on an aggregation of all annual gains and losses for the entire period.

18 The benchmarks used were the annual homicide rate changes for the period 2005–17.

19 This approach also allows for anticipating a possible *decrease* of homicide rates in some regions, because some of the worst-performing countries may in fact *decrease* their homicide rates, although not as much as other countries in their respective regions.

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The Small Arms Survey is a global centre of excellence whose mandate is to generate impartial, evidence-based, and policy-relevant knowledge on all aspects of small arms and armed violence. It is the principal international source of expertise, information, and analysis on small arms and armed violence issues, and acts as a resource for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and civil society. It is located in Geneva, Switzerland, and is an associate programme of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

The Survey has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies, sociology, and criminology, and collaborates with a network of researchers, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments in more than 50 countries.

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