



# BALKAN CRIMINOLOGY

## (LETHAL) VIOLENCE IN THE BALKANS

ESC 2021 – ESC Balkan Criminology WG Panel – 9/9/2021

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Hosted by University of Zagreb's  
Faculty of Law

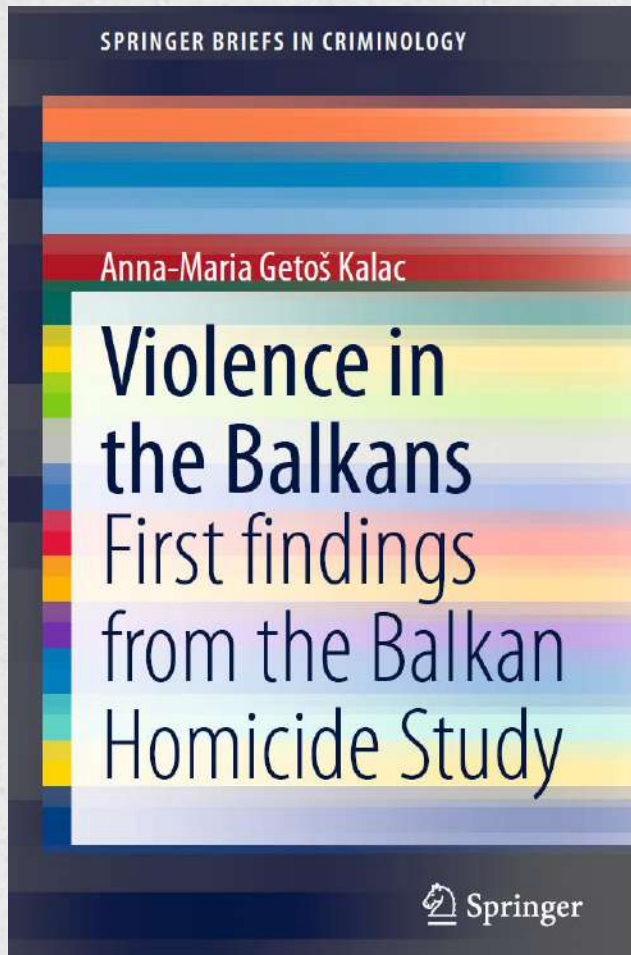
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# The Balkan Homicide Study (BHS)

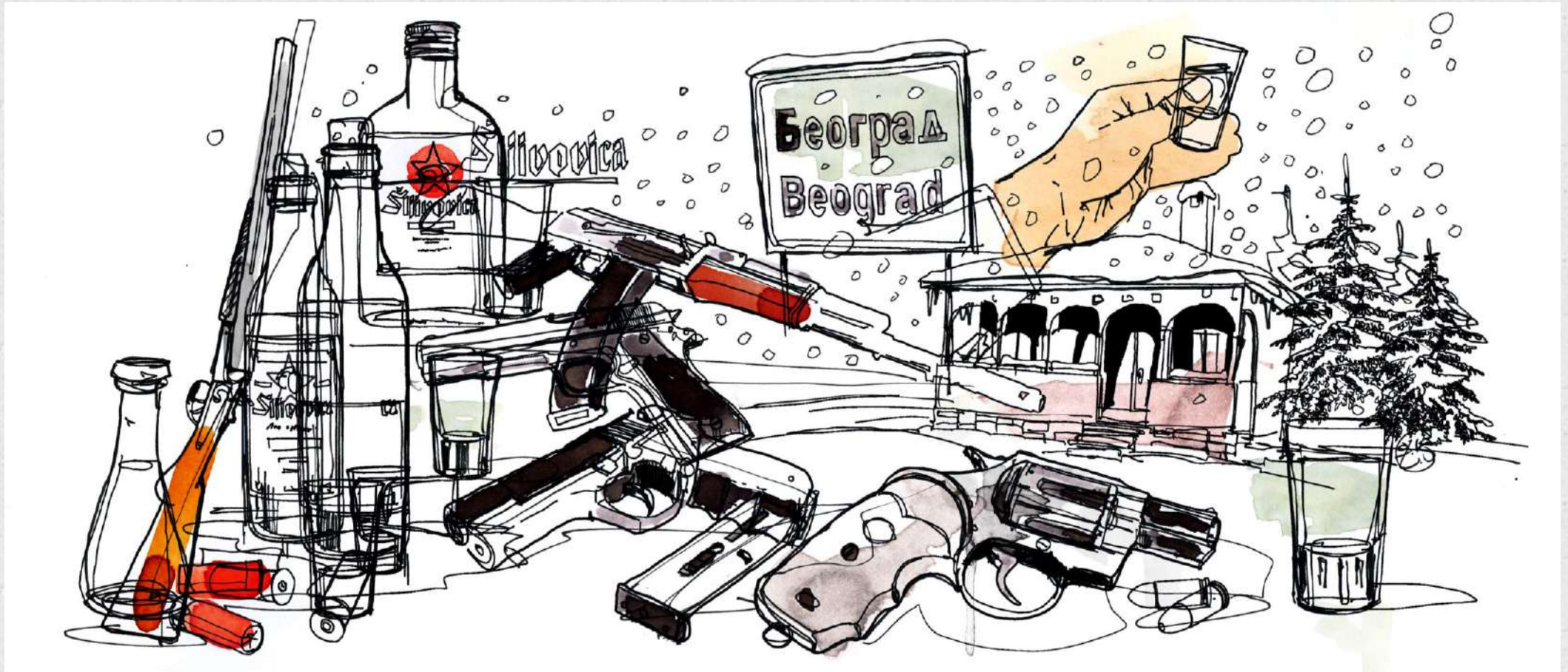


- aim of the panel and the presentation
- preliminary findings: OA publication in the SpringerBriefs in Criminology series  
<https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783030744939>
- background, aim, and goal of the BHS
- 2 main lines of inquiry
  - social construction of (lethal) violence
  - empirical realities of (lethal) violence





# Violent Balkan Images and Stereotypes



Möller-Kaya, T. (2016). Illustration 'Die Stunde des Sliwowitz'. Lufthansa Magazin, 1, 48.





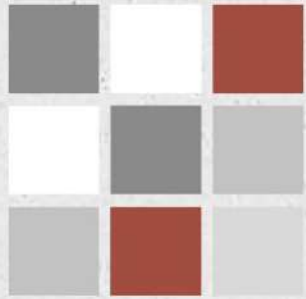
# The BHS Sample and Representativeness of Data

Data collection			Sample					Database			
Country	Time	Stage	Cases	Offenders	Victims	Timeframe/period	Coverage	% Dropout of cases/offenders/victims	Cases	Offenders	Victims
HR pilot	2016–17	P., court	686	743	760	1981–2014/33	National	–	–	–	–
HR	2018	P., court	563	622	650	1989–2014/25	National	7.8/9.3/7.1	519	564	604
HU	2018	P., court	609	732	709	1994–2016/22	National	0.5/0.4/0.4	606	729	706
XK	2018	Court	74	104	97	2003–2012/9	National	1.4/1.0/1.0	73	103	96
MK	2017–18	Court	96	107	142	1997–2014/17	National	0/0/0	96	107	142
RO	2018–19	P., court	598	705	626	1997–2017/20	Regional	4.7/47/4.8	570	672	596
SI	2018	P., court	133	146	155	1999–2015/16	National	0/0/0	133	146	155
BHS	2016–19	P., court	2073	2416	2379	1989–2017/28		3.7/3.9/3.4	1997	2321	2299

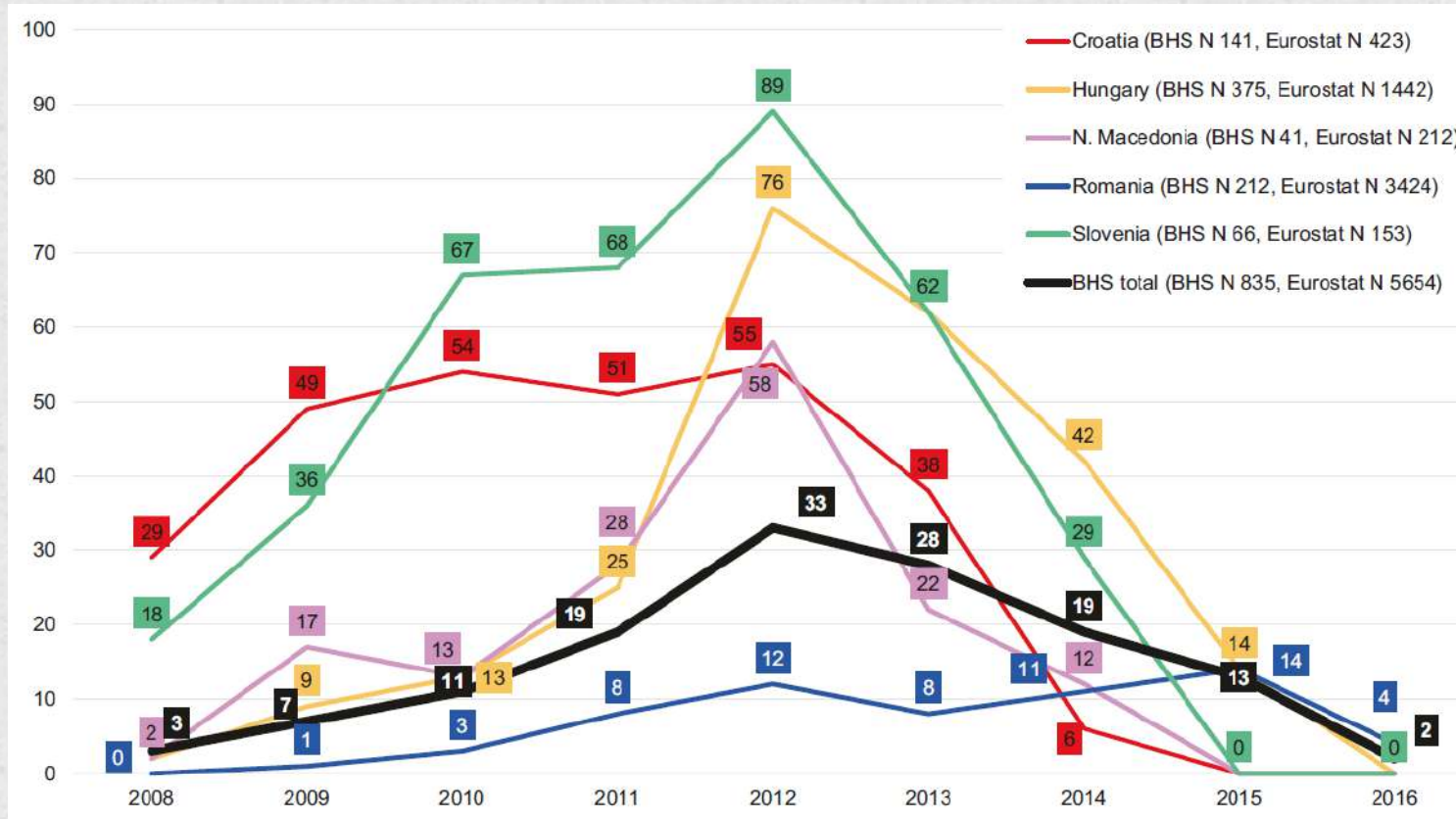
*Legend:* *P.* prosecution; *Time* the year the field work has been conducted; *Stage* the level of final case conclusion; *Sample cases/offenders/victims* the number of cases/offenders/victims sampled and initially analyzed; *Timeframe/period* the years in which the oldest and most recent incidents covered by the BHS sample took place and the length of the covered period in years; *Coverage* indicates whether the sample is a full national one or partial/regional; *% dropout of cases/offenders/victims* indicates the share of cases/offenders/victims that was excluded from the BHS database due to lack of being incidents of (lethal) violence; Database cases/offenders/victims the number of cases/offenders/victims included in the final BHS database and eventually analyzed; HR Croatia; HU Hungary; XK Kosovo; MK North Macedonia; RO Romania; SI Slovenia

## BHS data collection and main sample characteristics





# The BHS Sample and Representativeness of Data



BHS representativeness for BHS suspected homicide offenders as share of Eurostat suspected homicide offenders between 2008 and 2016

- if one were to exclude the Romanian sample, then the representativeness of the remaining 4-country BHS sample would amount to as much as 70% for 2012
- “worst case scenario” presenting the lower range of representativeness
- Kosovo sample not included due to lacking Eurostat data
- Eurostat definition of homicide much broader (includes serious assaults leading to death)







# Normative Context and BHS's Comparability

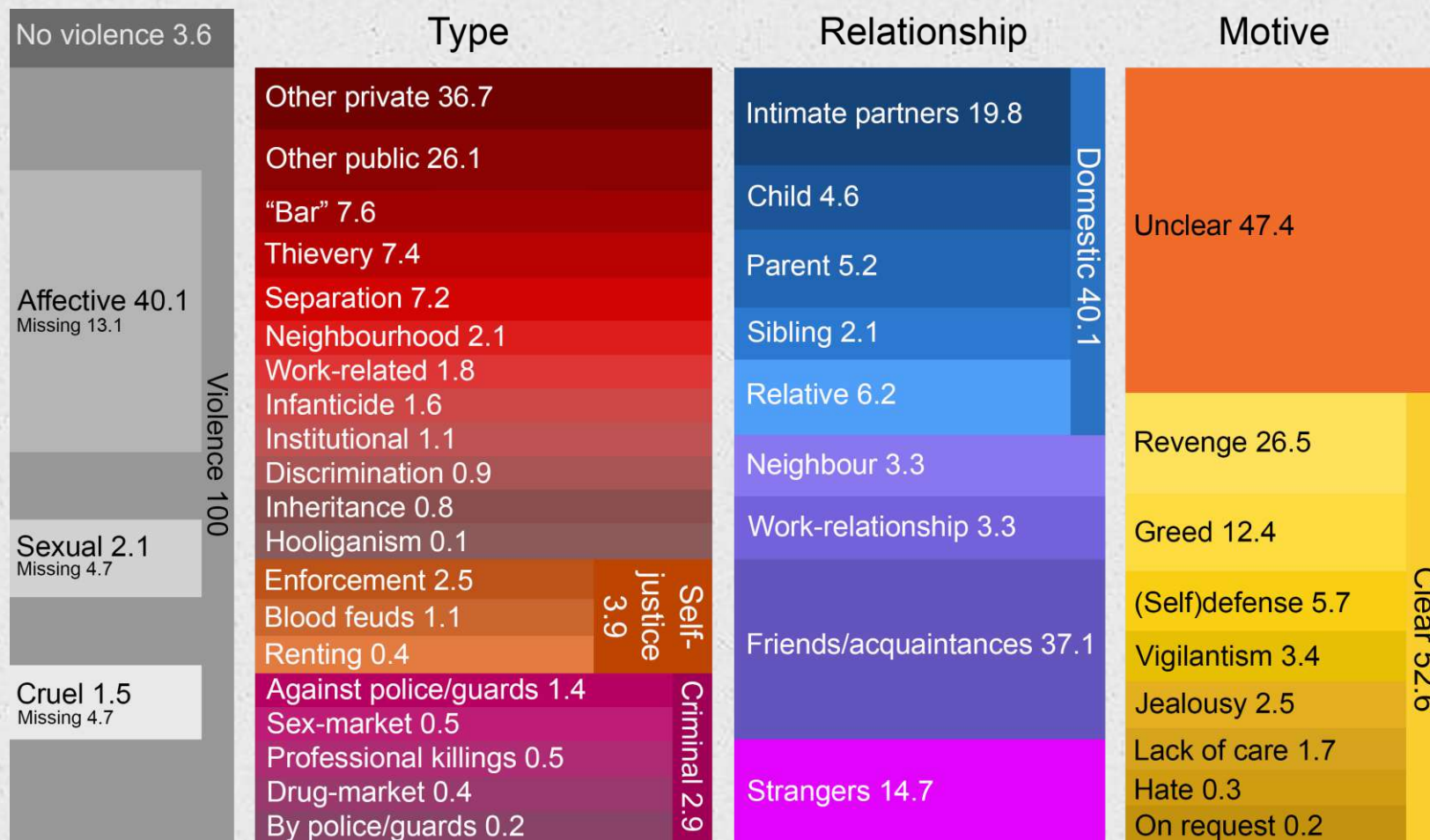
	Basic homicide	Sentence range	Qualified homicide	Sentence range	Privileged homicide	Sentence range	Negligent homicide	Sentence range
HR	Murder	5–20	Aggravated murder	10–40	Manslaughter, infanticide, killing on request	1–10 0.25–8 0.5–8	Negligent homicide	0.5–5
HU	Murder, aiding and abetting suicide of vulnerable person	5–15	Aggravated murder, infanticide	10-Life	Voluntary manslaughter	2–8	Negligent homicide	1–5
XK	Murder	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
MK	Murder	5–15	Aggravated murder	10-Life	Manslaughter, infanticide, murder (noble motives)	1–5 0.25–3 0.5–5	Negligent homicide	0.5–5
RO	Murder	10–20	Aggravated murder	10-Life	Infanticide, instigating or helping suicide, killing on request	1–7 1–20 1–5	Professional negligent homicide, negligent homicide	2–15 1–5
SI	Murder	5–15	Aggravated murder	15–30	Manslaughter, infanticide	1–10 0.08–3	Negligent homicide	0.5–5

Legend: *HR* Croatia, *HU* Hungary, *XK* Kosovo, *MK* North Macedonia, *RO* Romania, *SI* Slovenia

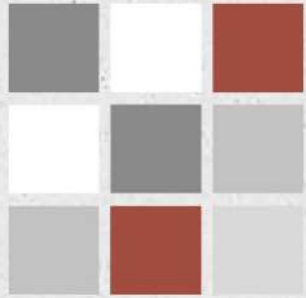
Classification of homicides and sentencing ranges (in years) in six BHS countries



# BHS Violence Typology







# Selected BHS Key Findings: Incident Characteristics

- **attempted vs. completed Homicides:** (completed) homicides – phenomenologically speaking – might not be a special type of (lethal) violence, as (completed) homicides in the BHS sample do not appear to be special enough to be studied outside the scope or even by completely disregarding attempted homicides
- **5 most frequent types of (non)lethal violence:**
- **stranger-violence:** findings show that (lethal) violence is a crime of proximity, and that in 85% of BHS cases, the offenders and the victims know each other (very) well

Victim-offender relationship	BHS	HR	HU	XK	MK	RO	SI
Strangers	15.0	17.6	15.3	20.0	12.5	12.2	13.5
Non-domestics	44.3	48.0	32.3	47.7	50.0	52.8	43.6
Domestics	40.7	34.4	52.3	32.3	37.5	35.0	42.9
Cases	1966	517	606	65	88	557	133

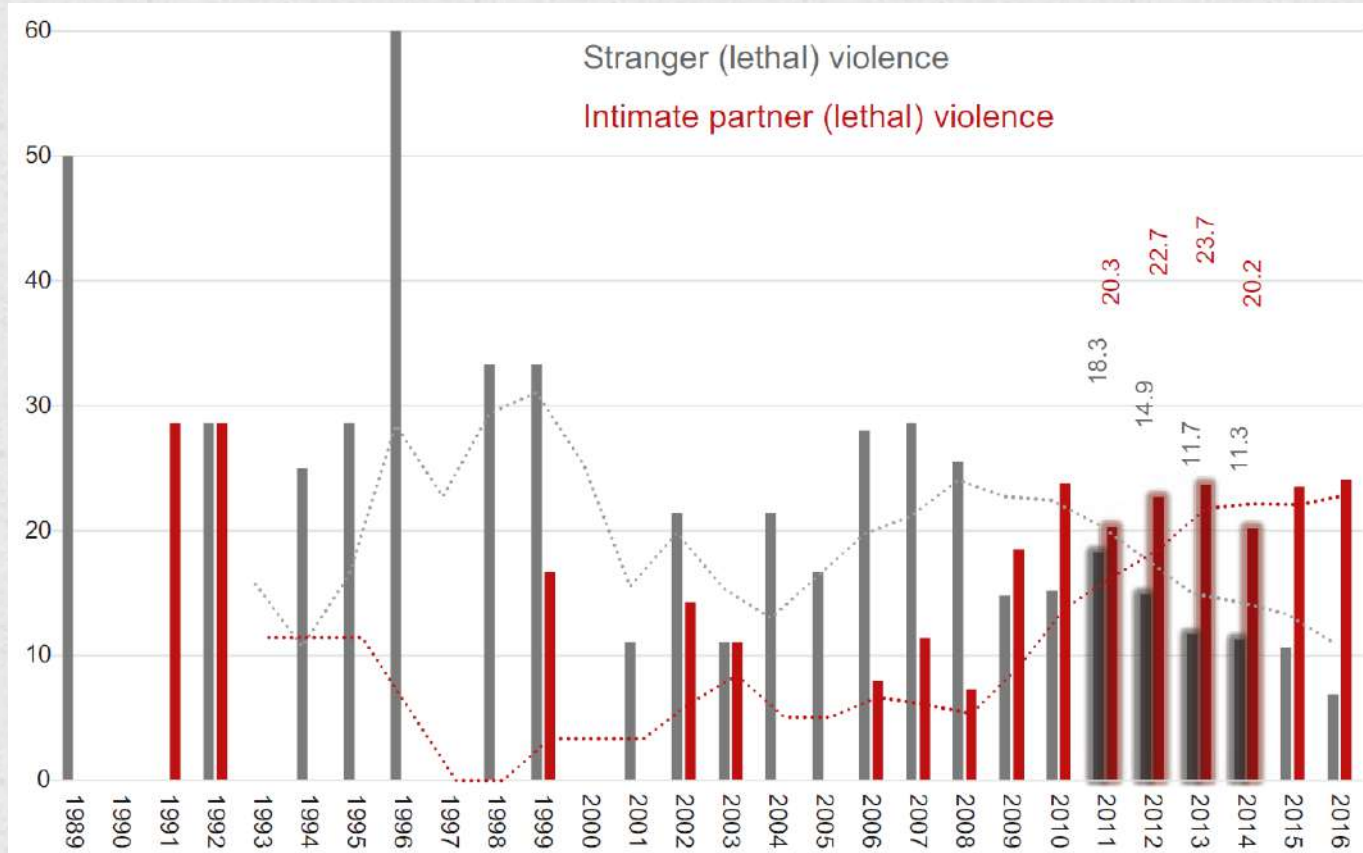
Legend: *HR* Croatia, *HU* Hungary, *XK* Kosovo, *MK* North Macedonia, *RO* Romania, *SI* Slovenia







# Selected BHS Key Findings: Incident Characteristics



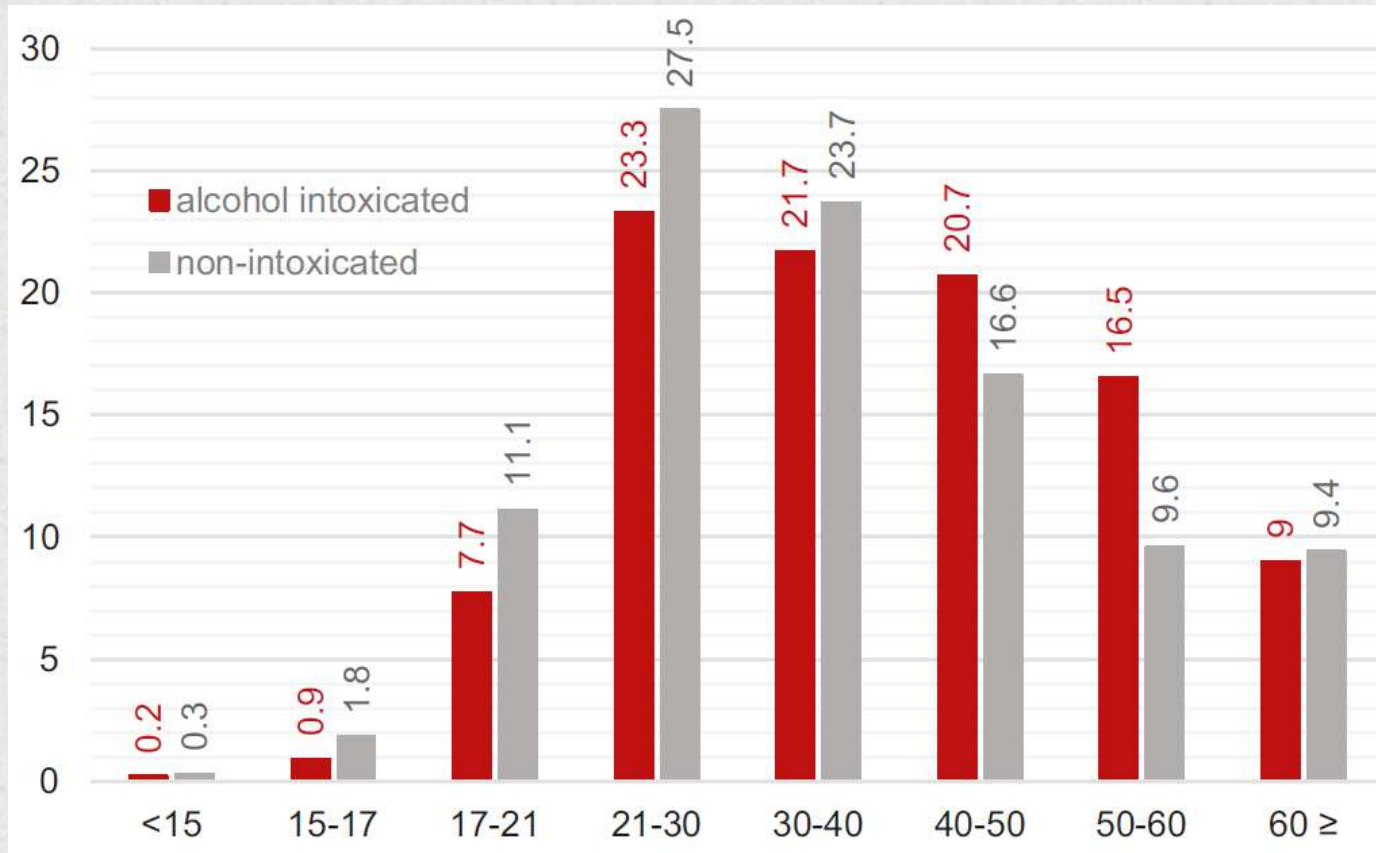
Share of stranger and intimate partner (lethal) violence in BHS sample with 5 year moving average (counting unit: case; N<sub>valid</sub> 1963; 1.7% missing data)

- stranger violence is predominantly committed by males (96.2%) and only exceptionally by females (3.8%)
- 18.8% of male offenders in our sample committed stranger violence compared to only 5.8% of females
- in case of intimate partner violence, 25% of offenders are females and 75% males, but out of all offenders, 39.4% of females committed intimate partner violence compared to only 15.3% males





# Selected BHS Key Findings: Incident Characteristics



BHS offenders by age and alcohol intoxication *tempore criminis*  
(counting unit: offender; N<sub>valid</sub> 2097; 9.7% missing data; in percentages)

- alcohol intoxication plays a much more important role when it comes to lethal violence committed by offenders aged 40–50 and 50–60 than those younger than 40
- no markable difference between completed and attempted homicides with regard to the offenders' alcohol intoxication
- out of those offenders under the influence of alcohol, 52.9% acted affectively compared to only 32.6% among the non-intoxicated ones







# Selected BHS Key Findings: **Incident** Characteristics

Homicide %	Victim and offender intoxicated	Neither victim nor offender intoxicated	Only offender intoxicated	Only victim intoxicated
Completed	33.4	45.4	14.2	7.1
Attempted	31.3	42.3	20.9	5.5

BHS (lethal) violence victims and offenders by alcohol intoxication and (completed) homicide  
(counting unit: victim/offender; N<sub>valid</sub> 1389; missing data 14.1%)

- no apparent difference between the constellations when both victim and offender are alcohol intoxicated as opposed to when neither of them is intoxicated, when it comes to completed and attempted homicides
- however, when looking at those violent incidents where only the victim or only the offender is alcohol intoxicated, offender intoxication is more frequently found among completed homicides, whereas victim intoxication is more frequently found among attempted homicides
- findings also show that there is a considerable country-specific difference when it comes to victims' alcohol intoxication in case of male-on-male (lethal) violence, both with regard to the share of (non)intoxication and (non)lethality of the incident





# Some Preliminary Conclusions

- **findings do not indicate that homicides are a *unique phenomenon***, something essentially different than lethal violence or the deadly outcome of violence
- no major differences between attempted (58%) and completed (42%) homicides regarding the **place where the incidents occurred**, their **micro-locations**, the **time of day** of the incident, the **period of the week**, the **number of offenders and victims**, (non)premeditated commission of the offense, the offenders' **main motives**, the **general victim-offender relationship** and the offenders' **alcohol intoxication** *tempore criminis*
- most (lethal) violence in the BHS occurs in **rural cities**, closely followed by urban ones, with the **least taking place in the countries' capitals** that are also the biggest cities in each of the sampled countries







# Some Preliminary Conclusions

- as throughout Europe, **(lethal) violence between complete strangers is the exception** (less than 15% of cases) and most stranger-violence can be classified as other public violence, followed by thievery and bar violence
- **stranger-violence is predominantly committed by males**, whereas out of all offenders **only 15% of males committed intimate partner violence**, compared to as much as **39% of females committing intimate partner violence**
- despite the easier availability of firearms, due to the region's recent war-legacy, we found that in the BHS **only 13% of offenders used firearms**, compared to as much as 62% who used cold weapons or even 21% who used no weapons at all





# Some Preliminary Conclusions

- similarly, the **organized crime violence nexus could not be confirmed** by BHS findings, as even after adopting a very broad concept of organized crime related (lethal) violence, only 1.6% of all offenders could be at least vaguely linked to the criminal underworld  
→ **most likely a consequence of unknown offenders in such cases**, resulting in their no-show in the BHS sample (no prosecution against unknown persons)
- violent Balkan images and stereotypes? → most likely a consequence of **lacking cultural knowledge** needed for **contextualisation and interpretation** of violent incidents







# Food for Thought

If one is interested in finding out whether or why one country or region is “more violent” than another, as differences in homicide rates might imply, then it is **not enough to simply look at incident, offender, or victim characteristics**, let alone normative classifications, typologies, or mode of operandi. One needs to somehow **capture and measure the actual violence that occurs in each incident** and thereby focus on the tangibles of violence, not their (re)interpretation by various different actors, oneself included. In essence, one would need to **capture the mere physics of violence and then come up with a purely criminological weighting and classification system of violence** → ESC Violence Research Lab Panles





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