

VIOLENCE IN THE BALKANS

Between Myths and Realities in Times of Penal Populism

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BACKGROUND

Balkan Criminology

- early on (2010) we detected a **criminological vacuum**
- criminological knowledge was scarce, scattered and being produced **unsystematically**
- solution: **capacity building through research**
- 2012 **Max Planck** funded research group
 - joint research projects
 - joint publications (criminology, victimology, violence, penology)
 - annual scientific conferences and courses
 - joint ESC involvement, ISRD3, ESB etc.

BACKGROUND

Balkan Criminology



- **'balkanization'** used pejoratively in European criminological discourse
- with the Balkan Criminology Network and its outputs we **hope to have disproved such negative stereotypes** – at least in the research discourse
- **negative Balkan images & stereotypes** – terminology

Holm Sundhaussen (2014)

The Balkan Peninsula:
A Historical Region

Sui Generis

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

BALKAN proper

Europe



Balkan Region



Southeastern Europe

Getoš & Donlon (2015)

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INTRODUCTION

Violence in the Balkans

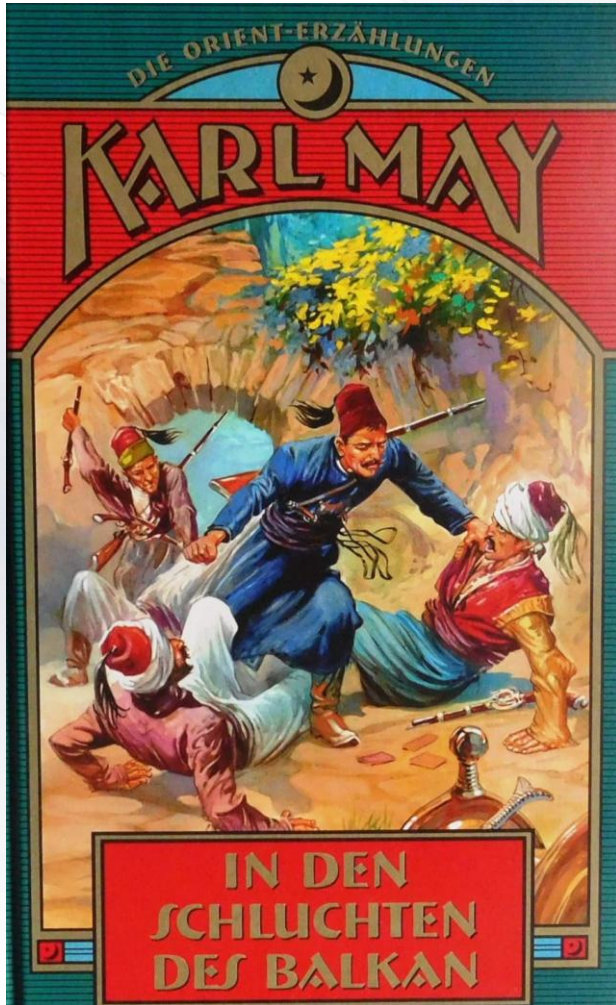
- hardly any other European region is as burdened with **violent images and stereotypes** as are the Balkans
- although compared to the rest of Europe the Balkans appear to be a **low-crime region**
- rates of intentional homicide victims have been rather stable or even slightly declining throughout the past decade, while not much deviating from the rates found in most other parts of Europe
- nevertheless, the Balkans have been and still are commonly **perceived as wild and violence-prone**

2 examples of
popular violent
Balkan images

1892 and 2016

INTRODUCTION

Violent Images of the Balkans



Karl May (1842-1912)

Germany's most popular novelist

Through the Gorges of the Balkans (1892)

"Banditry can never be vanquished on the Balkan Peninsula. Especially in recent days the newspapers have been falling over themselves to report on the constant attacks on travelers, assassinations, hired hits, arson and other such incidents, which are due to the chaotic conditions there..."



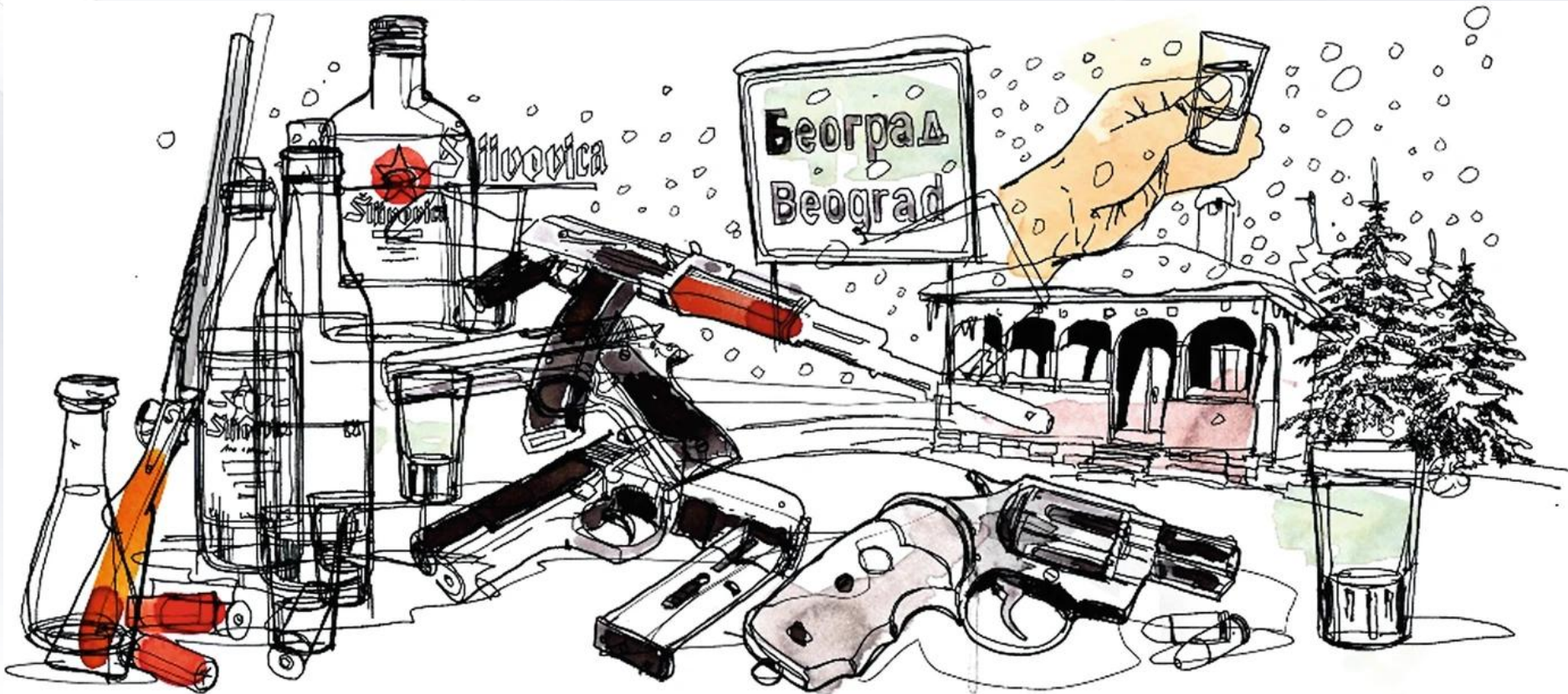
Serie 8. Karl May: In den Schluchten des Balkan. Bild 3.

INTRODUCTION

Violent Images of the Balkans

violent Balkan images nowadays

Helge Timmerberg (2016) Die Stunde des Sliwowitz, **Lufthansa Magazin**





INTRODUCTION

Violent Images of the Balkans

- such violent Balkan-images have been shaping an **internal and external discourse about crime and security in the Balkans that fuels penal populism**
- coupled with the region's transitional challenges, the lack of evidence-based crime policy, a still developing criminological community and a strong civil society sector, **myths and ideologies continue to dominate over facts and realities**



ULITAMTE GOAL OF THE PRESENTATION

- with the plenary, as with Balkan Criminology more generally, an attempt is made to:
- **debunk such myths and ideologies** through facts and figures, while hopefully also
- incentivizing the Balkan as well as the European criminological community to more vigorously **engage in science activism aimed at taming growing penal populism**

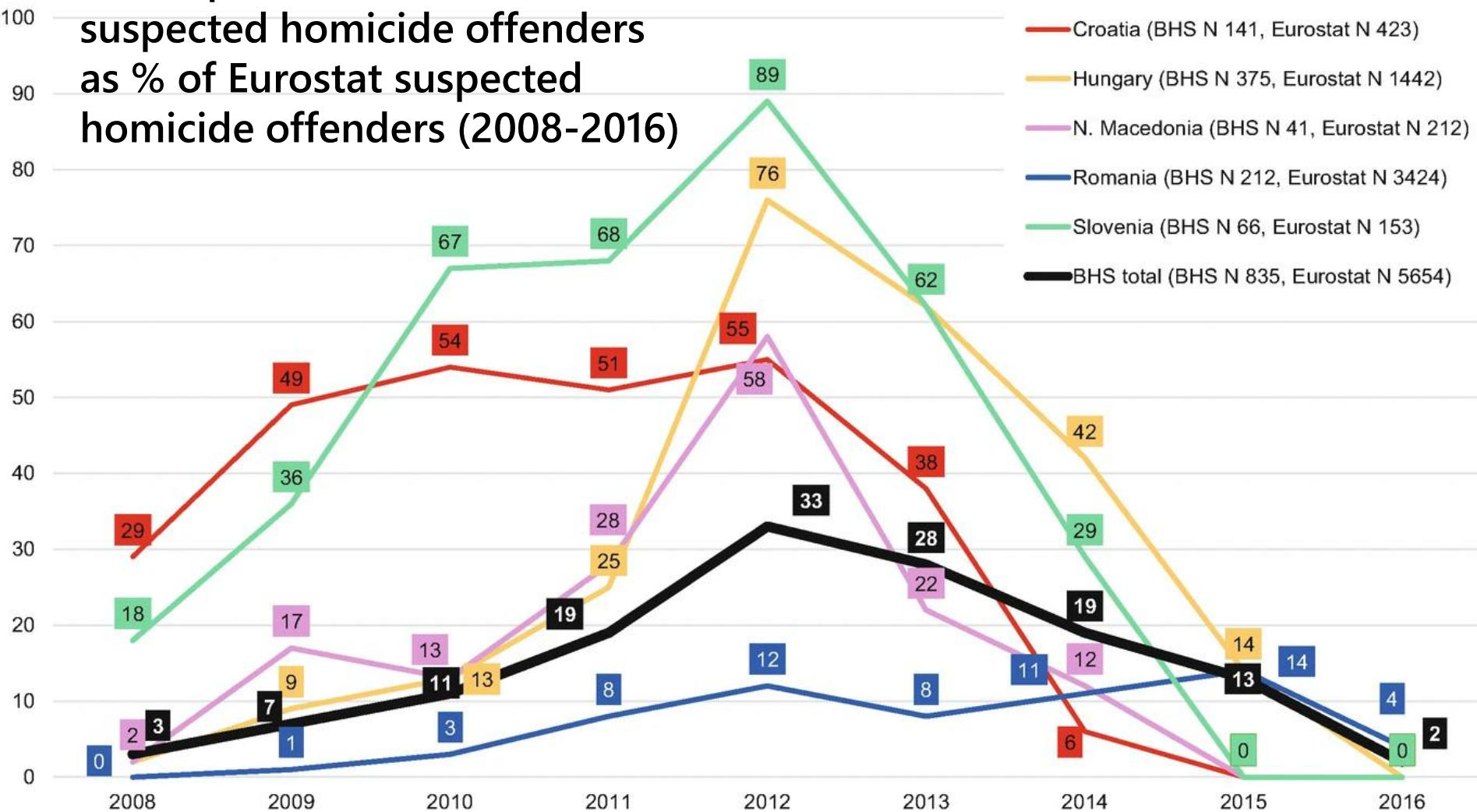


VIOLENCE IN THE BALKANS: Balkan Homicide Study

- court/prosecution **case file analysis of 1.997 (lethal) violence incidents**, involving **2.321 offenders** and **2.299 victims** (attempted and completed homicides)
- data collection **2016-2019** in **6 countries**: Croatia, Hungary, Kosovo, N. Macedonia, Romania and Slovenia
- **team effort**: Andra-Roxana Trandafr from Romania, Gorazd Meško and Rok Hacin from Slovenia, Gordana Lažetić from North Macedonia, Eszter Sárík and Orsolya Bolyky from Hungary, and Xhevdet Halili from Kosovo; Hans-Jörg Albrecht and Michael Kilchling MPI Freiburg; Reana Bezić and Petra Šprem Zagreb BC

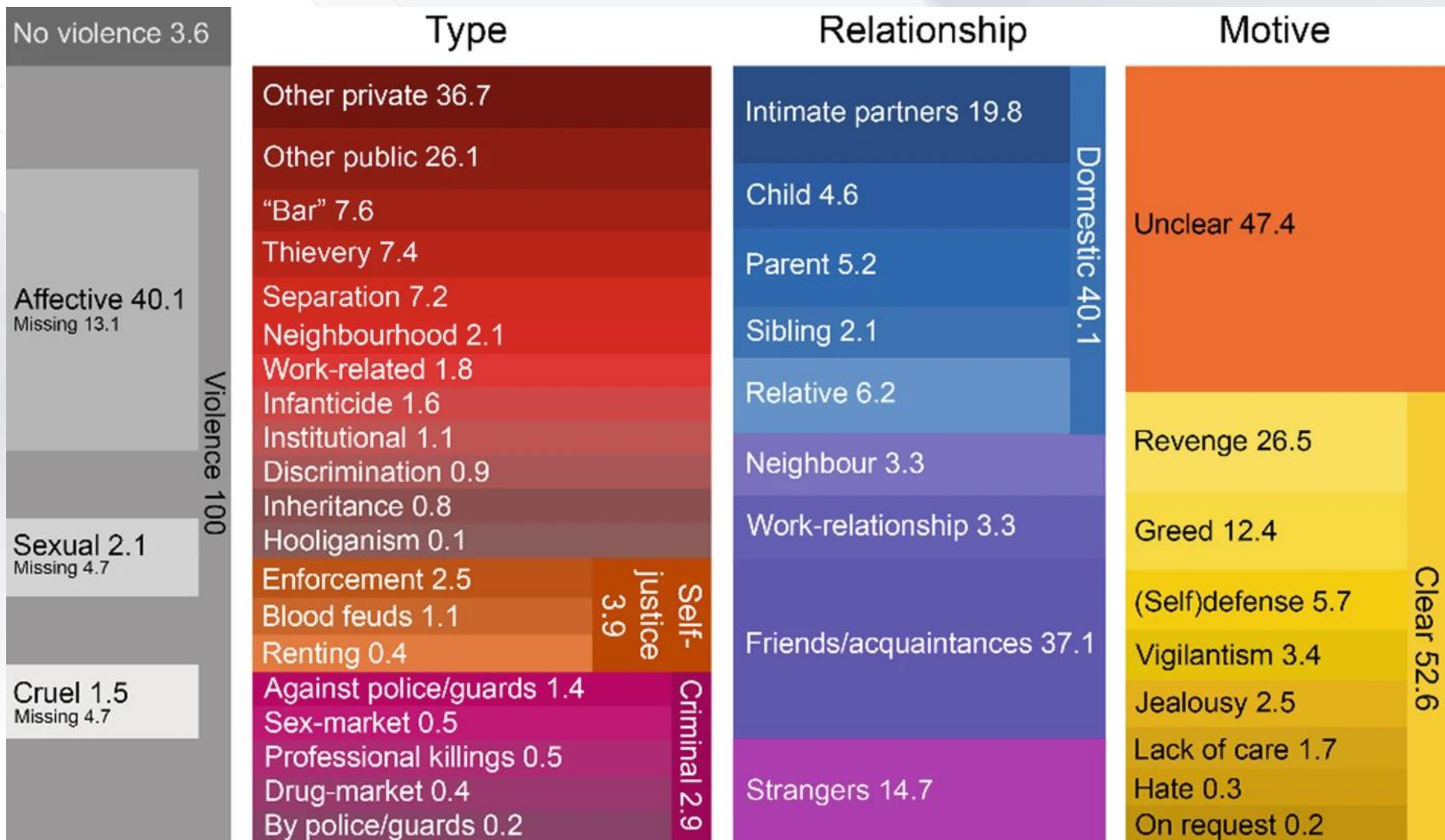
VIOLENCE IN THE BALKANS: Balkan Homicide Study

BHS representativeness for BHS
suspected homicide offenders
as % of Eurostat suspected
homicide offenders (2008-2016)



BHS Violence Typology

with shares of subcategories within each category





VIOLENCE IN THE BALKANS: Balkan Homicide Study

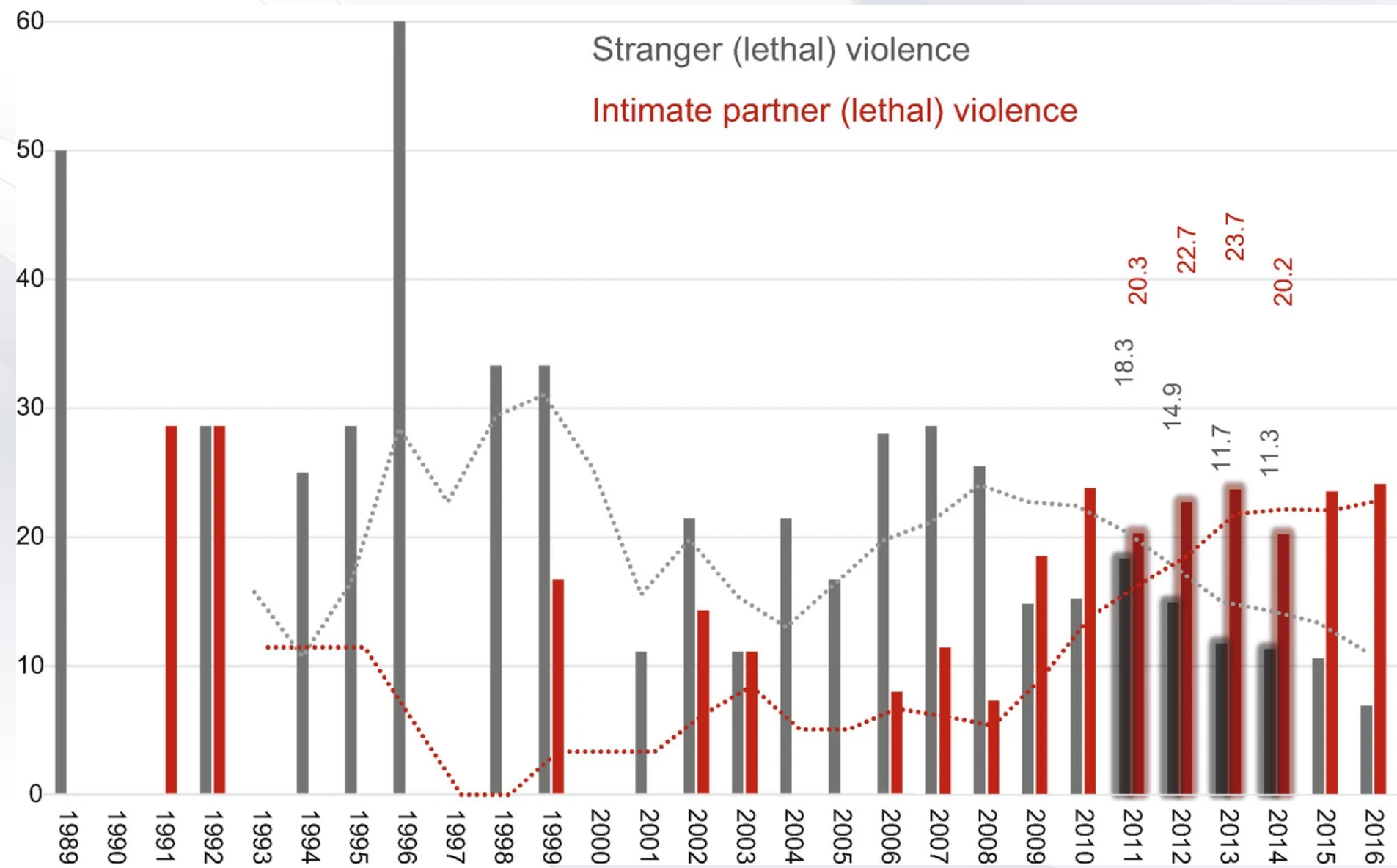
- none of our study's findings provide grounds for justifying said violent and violence-prone Balkan images and stereotypes
- (lethal) violence is predominantly **not stranger-stranger violence** (15%), but occurs between persons who know each other (very well)
- the majority of incidents (excl. Hungary) involves **non-domestics** (friends/acquaintances): **44.3%**
- the share of (lethal) **violence between domestics** (intimate partners, children, parents, siblings, and relatives) is slightly smaller: **40.7%**



VIOLENCE IN THE BALKANS: Balkan Homicide Study

- **stranger violence** is predominantly committed by males (96.2%) and only exceptionally by females (3.8%)
- focusing on offenders' sex and the victim-offender relationships, we found that **18.8% of male offenders** in our sample **committed stranger violence** compared to only 5.8% of females committing stranger violence
- in case of **intimate partner violence**, **75% of offenders are males and 25% females**, but out of all offenders, **39.4% of females** committed intimate partner violence compared to **only 15.3% males committed intimate partner violence**

Share of stranger and intimate partner (lethal) violence with 5 year moving average

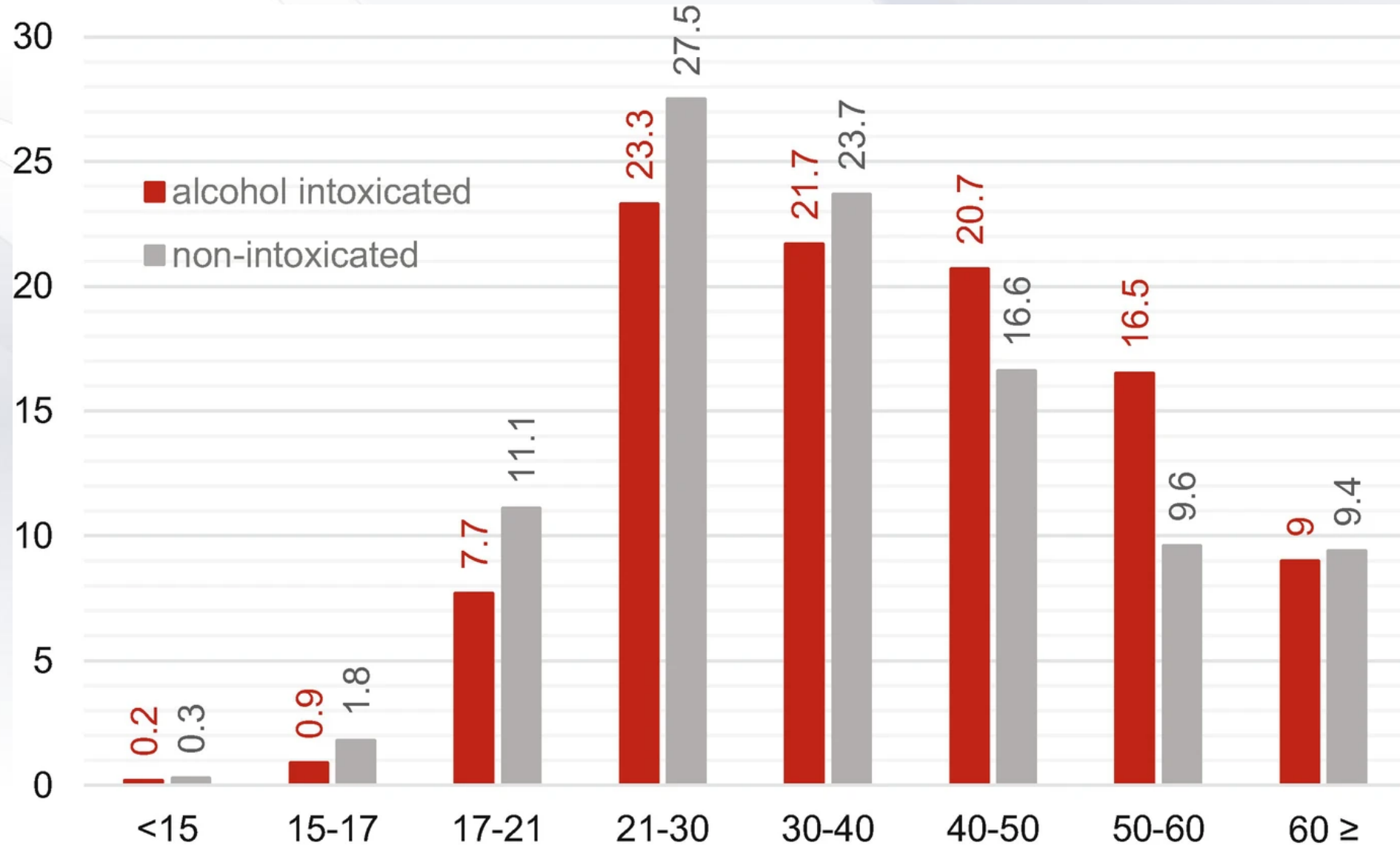




VIOLENCE IN THE BALKANS: Balkan Homicide Study

- from the standpoint of violent Balkan images and stereotypes, the **relevance of firearms** in connection to (lethal) violence is practically self-evident
- assumption: higher (illegal) firearms availability leads to more (lethal) violence
- **merely 12.7%** of all offenders in our sample used **firearms**, in contrast to 21.0% who used no weapon at all, or in even sharper contrast to those 62.2% of offenders who used cold weapons
- (lethal) violence along **ethnic lines** as well as **honor killings/blood feuds are extremely rare**

BHS (lethal) violence offenders by age and alcohol intoxication *tempore criminis*





VIOLENCE IN THE BALKANS: Balkan Homicide Study

- the **nexus between organized crime and (lethal) violence** in the Balkans?
- there are plenty of cases of lethal violence connected to the criminal underworld throughout the region, but in the whole BHS sample, only 6 offenders were linked to organized crime-related violence
- this is **only a snapshot** of some key findings (OA book!)
- violent Balkan images and stereotypes seem to be **myths lacking factual grounds**



VIOLENCE-DISCOURSES & PENAL POPULISM

- most of the region is **already extremely punitive** when looking at their sentencing frameworks
- discourses/studies about violence in the Balkans focus on '**sensitive**' **topics** (e.g. violence against migrants, against women or ethnical violence)
- such discourses are still under the influence of said violent Balkan images which in an era of growing penal populism puts the region before **additional challenges**



~~CONCLUSION~~ FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- (how) can criminological studies, such as the BHS, bring (back) reason into such violence discourses or even contribute to creating a (political) culture of evidence-based crime policies?

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR
ATTENTION!**