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About the authors

G H is a survey specialist and methodology adviser to the Small Arms Survey. Since 1999 he has conducted multi-country, policy-relevant quantitative social research, with a focus on well-being, crime victimization, and discrimination, primarily for the European Union. Currently he is advising private research institutes and international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

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Acknowledgements

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

Canada

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

V⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯ 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,

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 predomi-

'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.

T____1 Overview of scenario methodology

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.

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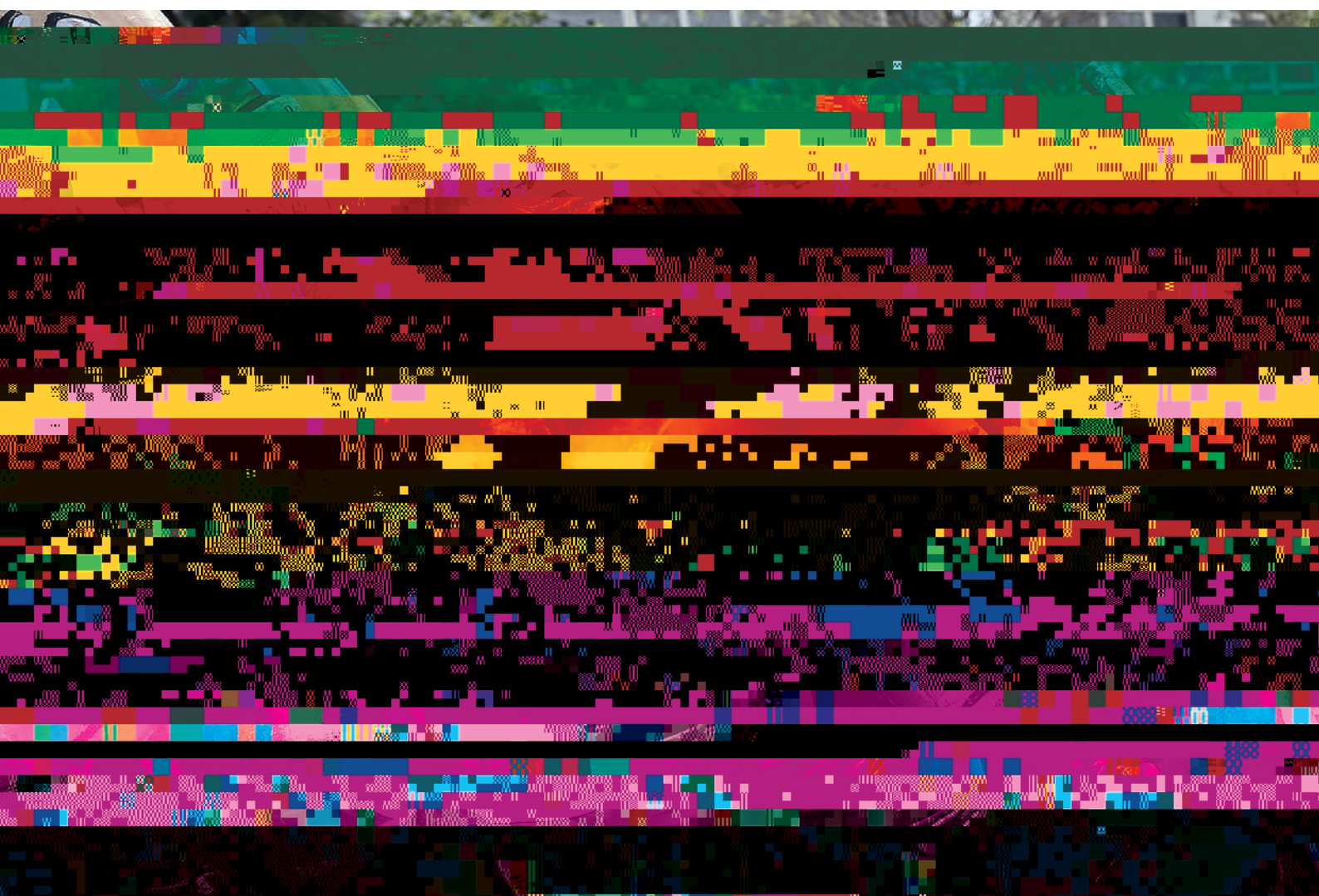
A Kenyan rights activist is struck by a tear gas canister during a demonstration against police killings in Nairobi, October 2017.
Source: TONY KARUMBA/AFP/Getty Images

T____ 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

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).

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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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