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Review paper

## VIOLENCE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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**Summary:** The main goal of this study is to reconsider violence in Western Balkan countries (WBC) compared to global and European averages, questioning negative stereotypes about the Balkan peoples. By examining recent homicide rate data, a widely accepted indicator, the paper positions violence rates in WBC relative to these benchmarks. Additionally, it investigates socioeconomic and cultural factors contributing to variations in homicide rates, analysing elements such as poverty, social inequality, unemployment, and the Global Peace Index. The present study also addresses other forms of violence, including femicide and organized crime rates. Furthermore, it explores the cultural context, particularly the declining influence of the traditional culture of honour historically associated with blood feuds in the pastoral regions of the WBC. This comprehensive approach aims to foster a nuanced understanding of the relationship between sociocultural factors and regional violence.

**Keywords:** *homicide rate, violence, Western Balkan, sociocultural factors, cultural context, stereotypes*

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## INTRODUCTION

The term “Balkans” often carries a stigma, largely due to the conflicts of the 20th century, which are frequently attributed to a perceived culture of violence in the region (Todorova 2015; Kolstø 2016). In the late 1990s, the European Union officially incorporated the term “Western Balkans” into its lexicon to refer to countries in Southeast Europe that were not EU members, including Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania (Kolstø 2016). This region’s name is increasingly mentioned in the media and public discourse. Despite the violent stereotypes associated with these countries, there is a lack of substantial data on this issue.

Compared to the USA, Europe lacks a consistent tradition of studying homicides due to various reasons, such as different legal frameworks across European countries. The most comprehensive studies are the European Homicide Monitor, which does not include Western Balkan countries, and the Balkan Homicide Study, which covers Croatia, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, and Slovenia (Getoš Kalac 2021; Liem 2021). Due to the lack of data, this paper aims to analyze violence in the WCB region<sup>1</sup>. The homicide rate is considered the least controversial indicator of the level of violence because it is the easiest to observe and record, making it a common measure in comparative and historical studies (Mišambled 2015).

The Western Balkans, as a post-conflict region, face numerous tensions and unresolved ethnic conflicts that contribute to various forms of violent extremism, including Islamic and right-wing extremism. Evidence of this is seen in individuals from this region traveling to war zones and joining terrorist organizations in recent decades. It is assumed that these types of violent extremism are closely linked to organized crime and often use sports as a channel for recruitment and spreading ideology (Djoric 2023). Right-wing ideologies, closely associated with violence, foster xenophobia, nationalism, and racism (Pazhoohi and Kingstone 2021). Given the region’s conflicted history and pervasive negative stereotypes, analyzing

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<sup>1</sup> Violence is a much broader concept than homicide. Despite the lack of a universally accepted definition of violence, it can be broadly defined as a form of behavior aimed at causing harm, injury, or death to oneself, others, and/or groups (Pejković 2023). However, since there are many forms of manifestation and they are not easy to quantify. In this sense, the homicide rate per 100 inhabitants stands out as the most suitable for quantification of violence (Liem 2021).

contemporary data within Western Balkan countries (WBC) is crucial. Therefore, this study will examine secondary data of statistical indicators of violence in the WBC to contextualize the region in comparison to global and European averages (where the WBC belongs territorially).

However, quantifying the degree of violence is challenging due to its multifaceted nature. Homicide rates, being one of the most serious and least disputed indicators of violence, provide a suitable basis for cross-national comparison. Global homicide statistics face several limitations, including differences in how homicide is defined and reported across nations, as well as discrepancies in data accuracy and availability (Oberwittler 2019).

Additionally, global averages are heavily influenced by the wide disparities among countries' homicide rates, ranging from minimal rates in countries like Japan (0.25) and Singapore (0.10) to significantly higher rates in nations like Jamaica (52.13) and Honduras (38.25) in 2021 (UNODC 2023).

Homicide, as a form of violent death, is distinct from wartime casualties. Violent deaths can be classified into four categories: (1) killings in war and conflicts, (2) non-conflict deaths, (3) self-inflicted deaths, and (4) killings during civil unrest. Within non-conflict-related deaths, self-defenses, legal interventions, and unintentional homicides (both negligent and non-negligent) are not classified as homicides (UNODC 2013). While different types and classifications of homicide exist, deliberate and unlawful killings are typically considered homicides.

These are often associated with criminogenic activities, interpersonal dynamics, and socio-political contexts. Such homicides serve as significant indicators in violence research, generating fear, anxiety, and social instability (UNODC 2013).

According to 2021 data, the global count of homicide victims stands at 458,000, with 81% being men and 19% women. Africa records the highest number of victims (176,000), while Europe and Oceania have the lowest counts (17,000 and 1,000 victims). The global homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants remained relatively stable from 2015 to 2021, standing at 5.9 and 5.8 (UNODC 2023).

**Table 1.** *Victims of intentional homicide - Regional Estimate (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.).*

Region	Subregion	2015.	2016.	2017.	2018.	2019.	2020.	2021.
Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	13.91	13.86	14.04	13.81	13.78	13.48	14.09
	Northern Africa	5.79	5.82	5.94	5.85	5.90	5.82	6.27
	All Africa	12.37	12.33	12.52	12.32	12.31	12.07	12.66
Americas	Northern America	4.58	4.96	4.90	4.62	4.67	5.98	6.32
	Latin America and Caribbean	22.55	23.44	23.91	23.16	21.10	20.30	19.91
	All America	15.96	16.68	16.96	16.38	15.10	15.08	14.96
Asia	Western Asia	4.64	5.01	5.23	5.29	4.90	4.49	4.99
	Southern Asia	3.46	3.17	3.06	3.04	3.01	3.01	3.01
	South-eastern Asia	2.73	2.89	2.36	1.90	1.72	1.78	3.68
	Eastern Asia	0.69	0.65	0.60	0.56	0.55	0.53	0.52
	Central Asia	2.53	2.81	2.59	2.16	1.85	1.74	1.75
	All Asia	2.40	2.32	2.19	2.10	2.04	2.02	2.33
Europe	Western Europe	1.05	1.10	1.02	0.99	0.90	0.94	0.91
	Southern Europe	0.87	0.81	0.79	0.76	0.73	0.70	0.70
	Northern Europe	1.19	1.27	1.26	1.19	1.21	1.16	1.17
	Eastern Europe	7.17	6.84	5.91	5.17	4.83	4.62	4.34
	All Europe	3.46	3.34	2.94	2.62	2.46	2.37	2.24
Oceania	Polynesia	2.77	2.39	3.59	5.45	2.30	3.32	3.32
	Micronesia	3.74	3.17	3.17	3.41	4.19	4.18	3.75
	Melanesia	7.90	7.92	7.94	7.96	7.97	7.98	7.99

	Australia and New Zealand	1.00	0.96	0.83	0.99	1.17	0.96	0.88
	All Oceania	2.91	2.88	2.82	2.98	3.07	2.95	2.90
World	World	5.92	5.96	5.93	5.76	5.56	5.51	5.79

According to UNODC 2023, the annual homicide rate per 100,000 people in the WBC is below the global homicide rate (5.8). The regions with the highest homicide rates in 2021 were Latin America and the Caribbean (19.91) and Sub-Saharan Africa (14.09), while the lowest homicide rates in 2021 were recorded in Eastern Asia (0.52), Southern Europe (which includes the WBC) (0.70), Australia and New Zealand (0.88), and Western Europe (0.91).

Based on this data, Southern Europe that include WBC ranks as the region with the second-lowest homicide rate globally and the lowest rate in Europe. Since some countries outside the Western Balkans are also included in Southern Europe (UNODC 2023), the average is calculated accordingly.

Homicide rates in the Western Balkans are significantly lower ( $t = -10.60$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than those in some developed societies, such as North America, which had a homicide rate of 6.81 in 2021. In 2021, the WBC had the following homicide rates: Albania 2.31; Bosnia 0.98; Kosovo 1.99; Montenegro 2.39; North Macedonia 0.67; and Serbia 1.06. All WBCs have homicide rates lower than the global average, with Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo having higher rates compared to other WBCs (UNODC 2023).

The level of violence in the Western Balkans also depends on the comparison with other countries. If the WBCs are analysed in comparison to the global average, it can be concluded that they have a very low homicide rate. However, when compared to Western and Northern European countries, they have a slightly higher homicide rate, but still a lower rate compared to Eastern Europe.

**Table 2.** *Victims of intentional homicide in the Western Balkans countries (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.).*

Rate per 100,000 population (UNODC)	2015.	2016.	2017.	2018.	2019.	2020.	2021.	2022.
Albania	2.22	2.74	2.01	2.29	2.26	2.13	2.31	1.65
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.62	1.29	1.22	1.15	1.25	1.30	0.98	1.08
Kosovo under UNSCR 1244	2.39	2.17	2.77	2.57	1.42	2.21	1.99	?
Montenegro	2.68	4.42	2.37	2.22	3.65	2.86	2.39	2.55
North Macedonia	1.19	0.90	1.47	1.18	1.09	0.52	0.67	0.86
Serbia	1.33	1.55	1.15	1.41	1.19	1.14	1.06	1.02

Therefore, the data on homicide rates in the WBCs contradict the negative stereotypes about the violent Balkans. A similar trend is observed across the rest of the Balkans, as evidenced by recent research (Getoš Kalac 2021). Although homicide rates in the Western Balkans are slightly higher than in some countries in Northern, Western, and Central Europe, they are far below the rates observed in Eastern Europe and certain regions of Asia, Africa, and the Americas (Getoš Kalac 2021).

Despite the contradicting homicide rate data, stereotypes about the wild and violent Balkans persist due to historical, sociopolitical, and cultural circumstances, as well as the ethnic diversity of the region (Župančić and Arbeiter 2016). Some authors suggest that the development of negative stereotypes about the Balkans is strongly linked to the oppressor-oppressed relationship, shaped through negative interactions with occupiers or oppressors, such as the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. These stereotypes extend to various aspects of life, including politics, culture, music, and literature (Župančić & Arbeiter 2016).

Moreover, due to these historical circumstances, the Balkans have been labeled as “the other,” more primitive and violent compared to the rest of Europe. The discourse on Balkan countries has been shaped by Eurocentric thinkers in the

West, though it is important to note that the West does not hold a homogeneous view of the Balkans. These negative stereotypes often overlook the region's unequal power dynamics and historical circumstances (Todorova 2015). While violence in the Western Balkans can be understood in a historical context due to the region's tumultuous past, this study focuses on the contemporary situation and modern data.

### **Method and Materials**

This work is based on the analysis and comparison of secondary data related to violence and associated socioeconomic factors and cultural contexts. The rates of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in countries were analyzed as available and the least controversial general indicators of violence. In addition, femicide rates and homicides connection with the use of firearms were analyzed associated to cultural context. The mentioned data were analyzed through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) website, which collects these data from national statistics annually. UNDOC provides the most comprehensive and accurate statistics regarding these variables.

Data on socioeconomic factors most commonly linked to homicide rates through previous research, such as inequality rates or the Gini coefficient, poverty rates relative to the national level, and unemployment rates, were analyzed using data from the World Bank website, which provides up-to-date, comprehensive, and accessible data.

As additional indicators of violence, the Global Peace Index (GPI) and the Global Organized Crime Index were analyzed. The Global Peace Index (GPI) is a measure developed by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) that ranks countries around the world based on their level of peacefulness. The index is composed of 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators from highly respected sources, which are grouped into three key domains: (1) ongoing domestic and international conflict - this domain assesses the degree of conflict within the country and its involvement in external conflicts; (2) societal safety and security - this domain measures the levels of safety and security in society, including factors such as crime rates, terrorist activity, violent demonstrations, and the presence of a well-

functioning government; (3) militarization - this domain evaluates the extent of a country's militarization, including military expenditure, the size of the military, and the ease of access to weapons. The GPI provides a comprehensive analysis of the state of peace in countries, allowing for comparisons over time and between different nations. It aims to identify the key factors that drive peace and to help governments, organizations, and societies improve their policies and actions to foster a more peaceful world. The index is updated annually and covers 163 countries, representing over 99% of the world's population. The Global Organized Crime Index is a tool that provides a detailed analysis of the state of organized crime across different countries. It assesses the level of organized crime presence and the ability of states to respond to these challenges, examining various forms of organized crime, criminal networks, and state resilience through legislation and institutions. The scale ranges from 1 to 10, with 10 indicating the highest level of organized crime presence. It is conducted by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

During the data analysis, in cases where it was necessary to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference, a t-test for statistical significance was conducted. This test was performed in the SPSS program.

### **Socioeconomic conditions and violence in the Western Balkans**

Different social and economic conditions such as unemployment rates, social inequality, poverty rates, and organized crime are associated with the homicide rate in a country level. In research, economic factors such as poverty and income inequality have been highlighted as having a significant impact on crime and homicide rates (Williams 1984). However, a large number of studies investigating the correlation between socioeconomic factors and homicide rates are limited to a few economically developed countries, making it difficult to establish universal patterns. According to a cross-national study covering 165 countries (Ouimet 2012), it was found that economic development, inequality rate, and poverty rate, which is also often manifested through excess infant mortality, are significant predictors of homicide rates in country level. Furthermore, it was observed that in countries with medium development, income inequality has a greater influence on homicide rates compared to poverty rate and economic development (Ouimet



2012; Wilkinson & Pickett 2016). This is explained by the assumption that poverty, low income levels, and income disparities contribute to the creation of relative or absolute deprivation among individuals who are inclined to commit homicide. A study in China, based on an analysis of court verdicts from 2014 to 2016 and census data from 2005, concluded that in addition to the aforementioned factors, internal rural-urban migration from more violent areas contributes to the increase in homicides in destination areas (Dong, Egger & Guo 2020).

The countries of the Western Balkans have been in transition for more than two decades. Although the post-war period is characterized by modest progress and reduced inflation, processes such as deindustrialization, privatization, and job cuts have led to an increase in unemployment rates and the maintenance of a poor standard of living in the past decade. The negative consequences of these processes include mass emigration, brain drain of highly educated and skilled workers, increased unemployment rates, and widespread poverty among the population during this period (Ganić 2019).

Of all socioeconomic factors, the distribution of wealth and income inequality have the greatest impact on the prevalence of violence and social problems in general. Even in wealthy countries with significant social inequalities, social problems multiply, thereby undermining social well-being (Wilkinson & Pickett 2016). According to recent World Bank data, the Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality, is most pronounced in South Africa (63.0) and least pronounced in Nordic and Central European countries. The WBC's belong to middle-income states and all have lower levels of social inequality compared to the global average, but higher compared to some European neighbours.

**Table 3.** *Gini coefficient at Western Balkans countries (World Bank n.d.).*

Country	Gini	Year
Albania	29.4	2020
Bosnia and Herzegovina	33.0	2011
Kosovo under UNSCR 1244	29.0	2017
Montenegro	34.3	2021
North Macedonia	33.1	2021
Serbia	35.0	2020

According to World Bank data, the Gini coefficient in the WBC does not significantly differ from that of European Union countries ( $t = .698$ ,  $p = .490$ ). Some WBC have higher Gini coefficients for the year 2021 compared to certain EU countries, such as Slovenia (24.3), Belgium (26.6), Denmark (28.3), and Croatia (28.9). Conversely, they have lower or similar coefficients compared to others, such as Germany (31.7 in 2019), Spain (33.9 in 2021), and Italy (34.8 in 2021). It is important to note that for some WBC, newer data is missing, especially for Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the last available data is from 2011, and for Kosovo, where data is available only up to 2017. When comparing WBC with EU countries that have lower Gini coefficients, the impression of greater inequality arises. According to some authors (Orovcanec 2017), this region is characterized by pronounced inequality and insecurity, which pose security risks and undermine trust in democratic processes. Although some WBC have improved their fiscal policies, efforts should continue to reduce these inequalities, which lead to negative consequences such as emigration, hindered economic growth, and regional destabilization (Arsić 2022: 20). It is commonly assumed that poverty is associated with violence. Most authors agree that violence can be a consequence of certain living conditions in poverty, such as poor housing conditions, stressful environments, neighbourhood, and family problems. Additionally, violence through a feedback loop produces poverty, hindering economic progress and forcing those unable to leave such environments to coexist (Crutchfield and Wadsworth 2003). Therefore, poverty stands out as one of the structural societal conditions for violence, and it needs to be analysed in that context. There are various ways to determine a country's poverty, and here we will present World Bank data on the poverty rate relative to the national poverty threshold in the WBC.

**Table 4.** *Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population) (World Bank n.d.).*

Country	Most recent value	Most recent year
Albania	22.0	2020
Bosnia and Herzegovina	16.9	2015
Kosovo under UNSCR 1244	17.6	2015
Montenegro	20.3	2021
North Macedonia	21.8	2019
Serbia	21.0	2021

The WBC have a slightly higher poverty rate compared to some European countries, and newer data is missing for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. According to data from 2021, most European Union countries have a lower poverty rate compared to the WBC, but some have similar or higher rates, such as Estonia (22.8) and Bulgaria (22.9). Therefore, the poverty rate in the WBC ( $M = 20.11$ ,  $SD = 2.25$ ) does not significantly ( $M = 16.53$ ,  $SD = 4.35$ ) deviate from the European Union average ( $t = 1.947$ ,  $p = .061$ ), nor does the homicide rate.

Another extensively studied socioeconomic aspect of violence is the unemployment rate. Data on unemployment rates in countries are not entirely reliable due to changes in the nature of jobs. Unemployment, especially among youth, is considered one of the key causes of riots and civil wars in developing countries (Cramer 2011). Unemployment is linked to criminal behavior and violence in several ways, with economic survival and the presence of anomie among youth being two primary factors. However, older research has shown that crime often increases even during periods of low unemployment, with criminal acts committed by both employed individuals and those of school age.

Thus, the unemployment rate is intricately linked to violence through economic hardships and social deprivation (Tarling 1982; South & Cohen 1985). For example, recent research in Europe indicates that an increase in the unemployment rate leads to an increase in both violent and non-violent crime. It has also been found that the crime rate decreases during periods of economic expansion (Jawadi et al. 2021).

According to research in the United Kingdom, the relationship between unemployment and domestic violence is quite unexpected (Anderberg 2016). According to their assumption, supported by data to a large extent, male and female unemployment have opposite effects on domestic violence. Increased male unemployment is associated with reduced frequency of domestic violence, while increased female unemployment is associated with increased frequency of domestic violence. This theory can also be linked to the fact that economically dependent women are often victims of violence (Anderberg 2016). In contrast, a study of European countries on the relationship between suicide and homicide found a correlation between unemployment (especially among men) and the homicide rate, as well as suicide (Ritter & Stompe 2013). Research conducted

in the USA during the COVID-19 pandemic clearly showed significant changes, namely, an increase in unemployment and an increased number of homicides and armed conflicts, but not other forms of crime (Schleimer et al. 2022).

**Table 5.** *Unemployment rate, total (% of total labour force) (World Bank n.d.).*

Country	Most recent year	Most recent value
Albania	2023	11.1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2023	11.8
Kosovo under UNSCR 1244	-	-
Montenegro	2023	14.4
North Macedonia	2023	13.2
Serbia	2023	7.8

When it comes to the WBC, there is no apparent association between higher unemployment rates and higher homicide rates. Although Montenegro has the highest homicide rate among the WBC and the highest unemployment rate, Serbia, which has the lowest unemployment rate, also has a lower homicide rate compared to other WBCs. North Macedonia, despite having a higher unemployment rate, just below Montenegro, has the lowest homicide rate among the WBC. There is no evident difference in unemployment rates among the WBC, except between Serbia and Montenegro. The global average for 2023 is 5.1, and the European average is 6.5. Thus, on average, the WBC (11.6) have a noticeably higher unemployment rate compared to both averages mentioned. This fact can be considered a concerning factor for the manifestation of violence in the future, depending on the direction of unemployment rate development in these countries. This socioeconomic factor can be considered as part of the explanation for why the WBC have a slightly higher homicide rate compared to some European Union countries. Peace can be defined in multiple ways in relation to violence and social goals. When considered in relation to violence, peace can be understood as the absence of violence, but also as a state in which it is possible to resolve conflicts non-violently and creatively. When considered in relation to social goals, peace can be understood as the absence of direct, structural, and cultural violence (Galtung 1969; 1996).

Determining the safety and level of peace in countries is not straightforward. Currently, the most authoritative indicator of these characteristics is the Global Peace Index (GPI), which the Institute for Economics and Peace measures annually for 163 nations worldwide. This index is based on 23 indicators categorized into four categories: militarization, safety and security, domestic conflicts, and international conflicts (Institute for Economics & Peace 2023). A lower GPI indicates a higher level of peace in a country. According to the latest data from 2023, Iceland has the lowest GPI and the highest level of peace (1.124), while Afghanistan has the highest GPI and the lowest level of peace (3.448) (Institute for Economics & Peace 2023).

**Table 6.** *Global Peace Index 2023 by Western Balkans (Institute for Economics & Peace 2023).*

Country	Most recent year	Most recent value
Albania	2023	1.745
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2023	1.892
Kosovo under UNSCR 1244	2023	1.946
Montenegro	2023	1.772
North Macedonia	2023	1.713
Serbia	2023	1.921

Europe is the most peaceful region in the world, although it has become less peaceful compared to 15 years ago due to the war between Russia and Ukraine. Of the ten most peaceful countries in the world, seven are located in Europe. Levels of peace are categorized as very high, high, medium, low, very low, and countries not included in the categorization. Four WBC fall into the category of countries with high levels of peace, namely Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, while Serbia and Kosovo fall into territories with medium GPI (Institute for Economics & Peace 2023). Based on reports on peace over the past decade, it can be concluded that WBC vary from high to medium levels of peace. In structures of organized crime, violence is an integral part of life. Therefore, the level of organized crime is often related to the homicide rate in countries. Members of organized crime are generally willing to kill, which is part of their business, so the level of organized crime is an important predictor

of violence in a country (Geis 1966). The increase in organized crime can hinder the functioning of the state apparatus in the long run, which should represent the regulatory authority in controlling violence due to the increase in corruption. Such a situation may create fertile ground for an increase in homicides (Van Dijk 2007). An example of this is the countries of South America with an extremely high homicide rate because it is assumed that gang-related criminal activities account for a third of homicides in the Western Hemisphere (UNODC 2023).

However, the relationship between regulatory authority, organized crime, and the homicide rate is not one-sided. It is assumed that in countries with an extremely high homicide rate where state structures lack the capacity to deal with violence, the role of organized crime structures is to regulate violent crimes and homicides (Garzón-Vergara 2016). Supporting this are data showing that in countries with a strong state apparatus like Great Britain, homicides associated with organized crime are very rare. In Great Britain, such homicides are usually associated with tensions within the group, intergroup rivalry, and resistance from citizens and police during organized robberies (Hopkins, Tilley & Gibson 2013).

In contrast to studies on the homicide rate, there are many studies on organized crime in the WBC. After the wars of the nineties, this region was recognized for the influence of organized crime. Although there has been noticeable progress in this regard, the WBC are still recognized in literature and reports on organized crime as an unstable region with increased security risks in Europe (Tărteață 2021). In addition to past military conflicts, contemporary risks in WBC include potential threats from terrorist groups of Islamic extremism and fundamentalism and transnational crime due to their transit position (Tasić & Blagojević 2017; Tărteață 2021).

The Global Organized Crime Index (GOCI), compiled based on the analysis of the criminal market and criminal actors in the WBC, is on average slightly higher compared to European average (4.74). What is noticeable is a higher GOCI in Serbia, followed by Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is no data available for Kosovo. However, it cannot be established a association between organized crime and the homicide rate in WBC because, for example, Serbia has the highest GOCI but a lower homicide rate compared to other WBC.

**Table 7.** *GOCI (Global Organized Crime Index 2023) (OECD, n.d.)*

Country	Most recent year	Most recent value
Albania	2023	5.17
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2023	5.85
Kosovo under UNSCR 1244	-	-
Montenegro	2023	5.90
North Macedonia	2023	5.03
Serbia	2023	6.22

In the WBC, patriarchal values continue to persist, which are reflected in specific forms of violence such as domestic violence and femicide as an extreme consequence of violence against women. In WCB, the institutional and societal response to this type of violence can still be characterized as unsatisfactory, and this is contributed to by widespread gender stereotypes and prejudices (Beker 2023). Based on the analysis of data from criminal reports in Serbia, it can be concluded that risk factors contributing to femicide include: women's exposure to domestic violence, abuse of alcohol and psychoactive substances, availability of weapons, presence of mental disorders, etc. (Spasić, Kolarević & Luković 2017).

The average global rate of femicide per 100,000 population in 2020 was 2.0. Data varies by year, and according to the latest reliable data, the average femicide rate in WCB is below the global average rate, and do not deviate from European Union averages. Following the global pattern, the majority of femicides are committed either by the woman's intimate partner or by a family member (UNODC 2023).

**Table 8.** *Intentional homicide, female (per 100,000 females) (World Bank, n.d.)*

Country	Most recent year	Most recent value
Albania	2021	0.8
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2021	0.4
Kosovo under UNSCR 1244	2020	1.0
Montenegro	2021	0.6
North Macedonia	2019	0.4
Serbia	2021	0.7

According to global data from 2021 (UNODC 2023), it has been concluded that homicides have a pronounced gender characteristic. Although 81% of homicide victims worldwide are men and boys, women are much more likely to be victims of homicides committed in the home (54%) and by a partner (66%), while 11% of men are victims of similar killings by a partner or family member.

### **Honour Culture and violence in the Western Balkans**

The region of the Western Balkans is highly diverse in terms of culture and history. It is inhabited by members of various religious, ethnic groups, and traditions. This cultural diversity has led to periods of peaceful coexistence as well as ethnic-religious conflicts in the Western Balkan countries (WBC) as a result of negative perceptions of 'the other' - individuals belonging to different religions, nations, or ethnic groups (Akova & Unal 2015). The enduring impact of ethnic conflicts and wars in these areas on the perception of others and mutual national relations is evidenced by the fact that all national states promote different narratives about their violent past. These remembrance culture, endorsed by state elites, continue to be sources of conflict. Such narratives about the past are often one-sided, intolerant, exclusive, and selective (Vuković 2021).

In addition to ethnic and religious diversity in the Western Balkans, there is another cultural specificity associated with everyday violence, namely the culture of honour that was until recently prevalent in the mountainous regions of the WBC. It is assumed that the culture of honour is a universal form of social control in the history of human societies. In some communities around the world, this violent form of culture has persisted, although it has disappeared in the majority. Therefore, prehistoric and contemporary societies with a tradition of frequent conflicts and retaliatory violence can be considered honour cultures (LeBlanc 2014). This form of cultural norms can also be considered a form of cultural violence because they make violent behaviour acceptable. Such norms directly justify retaliatory violence and are often uncritically passed down from generation to generation (Galtung 1969). In the context of honour culture values, honour refers to one's self-evaluation or self-esteem based on a subjective sense of what others think and self-perceived reputation (usually male). Members of this culture are more willing to act aggressively, sometimes lethally, to seek



revenge when they perceive that someone else has injured their honour, family, or values (Nisbett and Cohen 1996). Consequently, honour culture is associated with increased violence and homicide rates.

There are various forms of expressing honour culture, and its most extreme expressions are honor killings, which can be individual or group, carried out by multiple individuals. In certain parts of the Western Balkans, especially in Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, and to a lesser extent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the culture of honour with its violent form of blood revenge has persisted for a long time (Karan 1973). However, it is surprising that there is a small number of papers on this topic (Karan 1973; Boehm 1986; Herco 2012). In most cases, the phenomenon of blood revenge has not been analysed in the context of what is called the culture of honour, i.e., the connection between the phenomenon of blood revenge and this cultural context has not been recognized. The reason for this may be the diversity of violent practices associated with the culture of honour, as well as different names such as dignity culture or face culture, which are more often associated with the Balkan region (Yao et al. 2017). What they all have in common is the possibility of expressing retaliatory violence to preserve reputation. In the scientific literature, blood revenge in the Western Balkans has been primarily considered from the perspective of legal sciences, and it has been explained as a form of social control that preceded laws banning this violent practice. In this sense, blood revenge in the Western Balkans represents a form of customary law or an informal way of regulating social life and sanctioning generally accepted social norms and values (Herco 2012). In other words, blood revenge represented a violent way of resolving violent situations and disputes that were common between families, clans, and even especially within tribal communities in the mountainous parts of the Balkans, as evidenced by ethnographic data (see Boehm 1986).

At the core of the culture of honour and the practice of blood revenge is the importance of male reputation and retaliatory violence. Although honour culture varies from society to society, a common factor that influences its presence is food production. Previous research has found that honour culture is more prevalent in pastoral communities compared to agricultural ones (Grosjean 2014). This may explain the difference in the presence of blood revenge in regions of the WBC, as it was most present in pastoral parts of the Balkans such as Montenegro, Albania,

Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Karan 1973; Boehm 1986). One explanation for this difference is the weak regulatory authority present in such areas and the possibility of livestock theft (Grosjean 2014). It is possible to notice, according to contemporary data on the homicide rate, that Montenegro, Albania, and Kosovo, where blood revenge was most prevalent in the Western Balkans, have, on average, higher homicide rates compared to Serbia, North Macedonia, and even Bosnia and Herzegovina, where it was less present or absent.

An important question regarding the influence of honour culture on violence is the existence of this culture. Some authors wonder whether there are unique values that can be called honour culture and whether they differ from the values of for e.g., gun culture (Felson & Pare 2010). At the heart of this is the assumption about the influence of weapon carrying (firearms or sharp objects) on lethal violence. According to data from 2021 (UNODC 2023), the highest percentage of homicides in the world was committed with firearms, accounting for 40%, and sharp objects for 22%. Other homicides were committed by other means (24%), and for 14%, the mechanism was not determined. In Europe, 12% of homicides were committed with firearms, 30% with sharp objects, 28% with other methods, and the method was not determined for 30%. The majority of homicides in the Western Balkans were also committed with some type of weapon (firearms, explosives, sharp objects, etc.), with Serbia standing out from other WBC in the large number of homicides with undetermined mechanisms.

**Table 9.** Mechanism of intentional homicide at WBC per 100,000 people (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.).

Country	Mechanism	Year
Albania	Another weapon - sharp object 0.35 Firearms or explosives 1.75 Other mechanism 0.21	2021
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Another weapon 0.40 Sharp object 0.34 Firearms or explosives 0.43 Other mechanism 0.12	2021
Kosovo under UNSCR 1244	-	-

Montenegro	Another weapon - sharp object 0.48 Firearms or explosives 1.11 Unspecified means 0.64 Other mechanism 0.16	2021
North Macedonia	Another weapon - sharp object 0.24 Firearms or explosives 0.24 Other mechanism 0.14	2021
Serbia	Another weapon - sharp object 0.33 Firearms or explosives 0.16 Unspecified means 0.37 Other mechanism 0.19	2021

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of secondary data on the homicide rate in the Western Balkan Countries (WBC), it can be concluded that they do not conform to the perceptions and negative stereotypes about violent Balkans. Southern Europe, which includes the WBC (UNODC 2023), is the second region in the world with the lowest homicide rate. The homicide rates in the WBC are significantly lower compared to the global average and some developed countries like the USA. If the level of violence in relation to the homicide rate in the WBC is compared to the global average, WBC have very low homicide rates. When compared to the countries of Western and Northern Europe, they have a slightly higher homicide rate but still a lower rate compared to Eastern Europe and do not deviate much from the overall European average. The same rule is observed for femicide rates in the WBC, which do not deviate from the European average and they are lower compared to the global average.

Additionally, according to World Bank data, socioeconomic factors often associated with the homicide rate, such as the level of inequality (Gini coefficient) and poverty rates, although somewhat higher, do not deviate significantly from European averages. Although the WBC have slightly higher unemployment rates compared to the European and global averages, no link was found between unemployment rates and homicide rates in the WBC.

However, the area where the WBC could be characterized as slightly more violent is the Global Organized Crime Index (GOCI) and the Global Peace Index (GPI), which

are higher compared to European averages and are linked to structural violence. Regarding organized crime, according to data from The Global Organized Crime Index, the WBC have, on average, a higher GOCI compared to the European and global averages. However, it cannot be established that there is an association between organized crime and the homicide rate in the WBC because, for example, Serbia has the highest GOCI but a lower homicide rate compared to other WBCs.

Europe is the most peaceful region in the world according to the Global Peace Index (GPI), although this situation has slightly worsened due to current wars. Of the WBC, four are classified as countries with a *high level* of peace, and two with a *medium level* of peace. Compared to Europe, these indicators are worse because a large number of European countries are classified as countries with a *high level* of peace and *very high level* of peace.

In addition to religion and ethnic diversity, which contributed to conflicts in the Balkans, the culture of honour can also be linked to the manifestation of violence, which is characteristic of mountainous parts of the WBC and was present in the form of blood revenge, i.e., revenge killings. Although the influence of this cultural pattern has almost completely weakened, it is noticeable that in countries where it was more present, such as Montenegro, Albania, and Kosovo, there is a higher homicide rate compared to other parts of the WBC where blood revenge is not present.

It is important to highlight the limitations of this paper, including the analysis of secondary statistical data, the credibility of national statistics data (UNDOC), and the lack of data analysis of other forms of direct violence, cultural violence and structural forms of violence by institutions and the state apparatus (due to difficulties in quantifying them, but it acknowledges the significance and impact of such forms of violence on the lives of citizens). However, this raises questions for future analysis.

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## NASILJE NA ZAPADNOM BALKANU

**Sažetak:** Cilj ovog rada je pozicioniranje nasilja u zemljama Zapadnog Balkana u odnosu na svjetski i evropski prosjek, te time rasvjetljavanje negativnih stereotipa vezanih za nasilnost balkanskih naroda. U tu svrhu analizirani su savremeni podaci o stopi ubistava u ovim zemljama, kao najmanje kontroverzni pokazatelji nasilja na određenim područjima. Ti podaci će biti upoređeni sa svjetskim i evropskim prosjecima stopa ubistava. Osim toga, bit će analizirani socioekonomski i kulturni faktori u ovim državama koji se često dovode u vezu sa stopom ubistava. Kao indikatori socioekonomskih faktora, razmotrit će se stope siromaštva, društvene nejednakosti, nezaposlenosti, Globalni indeks mira, ali i drugi oblici nasilja u ovim zemljama, poput stope femicida i organiziranog kriminala. Također će se analizirati kulturni kontekst zemalja Zapadnog Balkana, posebno kultura časti, koja je donedavno bila prisutna u većini ruralnih područja zemalja Zapadnog Balkana kroz oblik krvne osvete, iako njen utjecaj slabi.

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**Ključne reči:** stopa ubistava, nasilje, Zapadni Balkan, sociokulturni faktori, kulturni kontekst, stereotipi