

What are Violent Deaths?

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GReVD BRIEF #2

Toward a more accurate count of violent deaths.

WHAT ARE VIOLENT DEATHS?

There are many ways to interpret violent death. At the minimum violent deaths include intentional homicides and conflict-deaths between armed groups.

To most, violent death will likely also include assassinations, extra-judicial killings, drone strikes, terrorism deaths, deaths from landmines and explosive remnants of war and deaths from communal violence. Some 'grey-zone' or 'hybrid' conflict deaths might also be included as violent deaths.

The 'edge' of what is a violent death may differ by culture, norm or definition in international law. It is debated whether domestic executions (capital punishment), unsolved political disappearances, prison deaths, deaths in internment camps and detention centres, migrant deaths in transit would/should be counted as violent deaths.

Finally, deaths from unintentional vehicular manslaughter, by suicide, or indirectly as a result of war or other violence (indirect conflict deaths) were intended by the language around violence and all "related deaths" (Target 1 of SDG 16).

GReVD will build a common ontology and standard definitions of violent deaths and other important terms across the consortium for use by the wider peacebuilding community and future coding.

COUNTING UP AND COUNTING DOWN

All current reported numbers of violent deaths are estimates. As discussed in the GReVD Gaps Report, this can be attributed to a variety of reasons—definitional issues, coding challenges and political will. The GReVD consortium is building the research infrastructure that will be necessary to register and count all violent deaths recorded by date and location. On the way to building the Registry, the GReVD consortium will contribute to increased precision by reducing uncertainty of these estimates. This uncertainty is represented in figure 1 by the height of the bar between lower bound and upper bound.

The upper bound of violent deaths is the difference between all deaths and all non-violent deaths. This is the "counting down" method—subtracting all deaths that are not conceivably violent from all deaths.

Counting up is conservative as it includes all deaths that are known/can be documented. There are many violent deaths (including the categories described above) that go un-reported or underreported through media or administrative sources every year. These are left out of conservative estimates.

A FIRST ESTIMATE OF "COUNTING UP" VIOLENT DEATHS

The Small Arms Survey (member of GReVD) produces the annual Global Violent Deaths (GVD) database. GVD estimates 589,000 violent deaths in 2017. The GVD methodology includes the following four categories:

A. **HOMICIDES** (criminal or non-conflict violence), including intentional homicides or murder

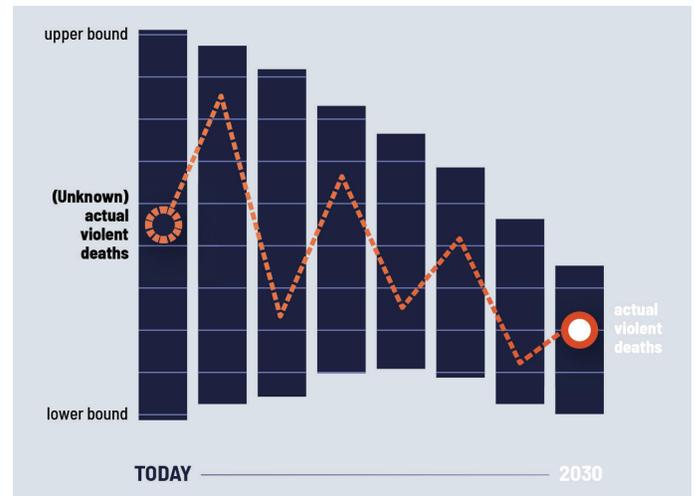


FIGURE 1

Estimates of the number of violent deaths depend on the definition of violent death.

Counting up from deaths that are known yields a conservative lower bound.

Counting down (subtracting all deaths that are not violent from total deaths) yields an upper bound.

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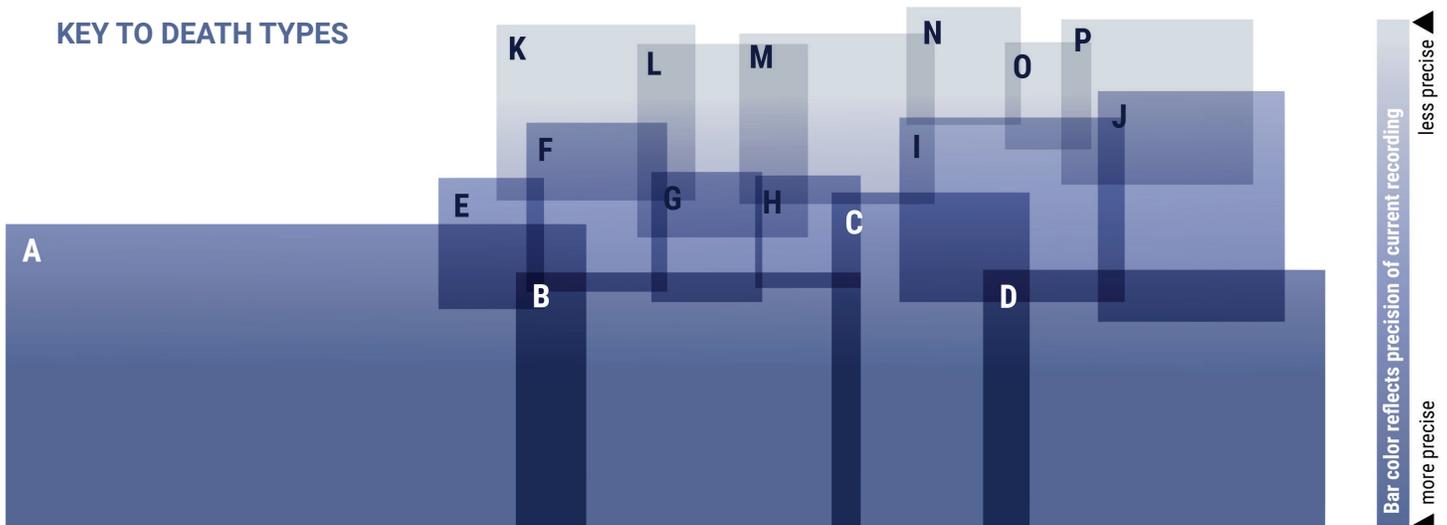
B. **HOMICIDES** (criminal or non-conflict violence), including unintentional homicides unintentional killing (manslaughter)

C. **EXTRA-JUDICIAL KILLINGS** or victims of legal interventions by state security forces

D. **DIRECT CONFLICT DEATHS** (battle-related deaths, civilian deaths, victims of terrorism)

For a variety of reasons (discussed in the GReVD Gaps Report), the counting up estimate from GVD is conservative as it includes only violent deaths that have been reported and coded through media and administrative sources in the four categories listed (A. Intentional Homicides, B. Unintentional Homicides, C. Killings in Legal Interventions/Extra-Judicial Killings and D. Direct Conflict Deaths). A number of these categories overlap with others listed below, with varying precision in recording.

KEY TO DEATH TYPES



- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| A. Intentional Homicides | E. Assassinations | K. Police Killings* |
| B. Unintentional Homicides | F. Extra-Judicial Killings* | L. Unsolved Disappearances |
| C. Killings in Legal Interventions | G. Deaths during protests that turn violent | M. Deaths in Prison, Internment and Detention Centres* |
| D. Direct Conflict | H. Communal violence that results in death | N. Capital punishment* |
| | I. Deaths from drone strikes | O. Unexplained deaths by poison, chemical or biological weapons* |
| | J. Deaths due to explosive remnants of war (landmines and unexploded ordinance) | P. Deaths of migrants, refugees and the displaced in transit or camps |

* Some countries report these categories as part of deaths due to C. legal interventions by state forces. In cases not reported by administrative sources, these may be reported by media or through civil society (violence observatories).

In addition to the above, many consider indirect conflict deaths, suicides and unintentional vehicular manslaughter as a violent death. These are areas for future research and dialogue.

THE ARGUMENT FOR COUNTING ALL VIOLENT DEATHS

The GReVD consortium is not an advocacy organization, however, members of the consortium agree that what is counted as a violent death should be based on objective criteria with maximum transparency in reporting, coding and aggregation. As technology improves and allows coding from multiple sources and disaggregation by time and location, the only limits to recording every violent death will be political. In the spirit of the SDGs, “leaving no one behind”, the GReVD consortium contends that every violent death should be registered and counted.

GReVD is convened by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and The Brookings Institution. The GReVD Consortium includes the Armed Conflict and Location Database (ACLED), The Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM), The Center for Peace and Security Studies (cPASS), Cline Center for Advanced Social Research, The Community Robotics, Education and Technology Empowerment (CREATE) Lab, The Global Terrorism Database (GTD), The Igarape Institute, The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), the Small Arms Survey (SAS) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP).

See the GReVD Gaps Report for a discussion of current estimation and coding methods