



PROJECT INSIGHT

Drug-related Violence and Firearms in the European Union

Marieke Liem (Leiden University)

KEY FINDINGS

- In 1985, Goldstein presented his framework on the relationships between drugs and violence in the United States, laying a foundation for future research on drug-related violence. Since then, the rise of synthetic drugs, including in Europe, and the introduction of online drug transactions have drastically changed illicit drug markets and associated violence contexts.
- The innovation and diversification of the drug market calls for an expansion of Goldstein's framework, given the increasingly complex accompanying violence. A framework specifying the level at which violence takes place allows for a better understanding of drug-related violence, as well as the degree and type of firearms involved at each level. The proposed refinements relate to violence occurring at different stages of the drug route, and access- and consumption-related violence at the individual level.
- This fine-grained framework captures the characteristics of drug-related violence in the European Union (EU). As its heterogeneity implies a diverse research and policy agenda, this framework provides policy approaches to tackle each level where drug-related violence manifests itself, offering intervention entry points at the international, national, local, and individual levels.

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Abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
EMCDDA	European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction
EU	European Union

Introduction

There is a vast heterogeneity when it comes to the links between drugs, firearms, and violence. This paper focuses on the nexus between drug-related violence and firearms in Europe. This is particularly important given that much of the firearm violence research to date focuses heavily on the US context, where firearm homicide rates far exceed the European average.¹ Differences in mortality, as well as considerable variations in gun cultures and firearm legislation between EU countries, highlight the importance of studying gun violence in a European setting. Although there has been a spike in research interest and policy attention in this area since the early 2000s,² our conceptualization of drug-related violence is still largely built on US data. This paper questions whether the various manifestations of drug-related firearm violence in Europe can be captured well enough by existing US frameworks. It concludes that a more fine-grained classification of drug-related gun violence is needed.

The first section highlights the established links between drugs and violence, paying attention to Goldstein's (1985) framework of drug-related violence.³ It then zooms in on the links between drug-related violence and firearms, and identifies various ways in which prior empirical studies have connected drug-related violence to firearms. The second section presents challenges to the applicability of Goldstein's (1985) model, based on the nature of the drug-related violence nexus in the current European context. It goes on to consider an expanded, fine-grained framework, with Goldstein's (1985) model as a basis. The section also presents the framework and case studies for each of the sub-categories. The final section of the paper discusses implications for research and policy.

Established links

Links between drugs and violence⁴

The actual nexus between drugs and violence is more complex and nuanced than is generally assumed, as the strength of the relationship between the two varies across time and space and depends on various factors, including the specific socio-cultural context and the type of drug involved.

Most work on the drugs–violence nexus initially focused on individual-level perspectives and examined the physiological effects of drugs on committing violent acts.⁵ It was not until the mid-1980s, with the onset of the crack cocaine epidemic in the United States, that scholars started considering the effects of illegal drug markets on violence, largely as a result of Goldstein’s (1985) work. Goldstein suggested three mechanisms to explain how drugs can be responsible for the generation of violence: psychopharmacological, economic-compulsive, and systemic.

The psychopharmacological model points to the direct effects of drugs as a cause of violence. In some individuals, and in certain circumstances, an altered perception of reality and excitement, irritability, and irrationality can result in violent behaviour.⁶ Prior research assessing the pharmacological pathway between drug use and violence is mixed. While some studies found the likelihood of violent victimization and offending to be much higher,⁷ others found no association between individual drug use and firearm homicide.⁸ The lack of clear empirical support for either hypothesis may be due to shifts in drug use. Cannabis and opioids constitute two of the

most frequently used recreational drugs in the United States. These drugs tend to inhibit violent behaviour, although opiate withdrawal can increase the likelihood of violence.⁹ Studies specifically assessing the relationship between cocaine, methamphetamine, and violence are faced with small sample sizes.¹⁰

The economic-compulsive model comprises those acts of violence committed with the purpose of obtaining money to buy drugs, including robberies and stealing. Drug users may engage in property crime to finance their addiction, although its overall impact on levels of violence is not clear.¹¹

Systemic drug-related violence refers to violence resulting from the production, distribution, and consumption of drugs. This includes territory disputes between dealers, gang turf wars, robberies of drug dealers and subsequent violent reprisals, punishment for selling poor-quality drugs, punishment of informants, and cancellation of debt by punishment.¹² This model accounts for a substantial proportion of drug-related violence, which is reflected in the wealth of studies covering this issue. Literature examining the effects of drug markets, especially cocaine, on violence levels has also flourished, particularly in Latin America.¹³

Links between drug-related violence and firearms

Violent markets

Drug markets are arguably the most violent sector of the illegal economy,¹⁴ although it should be noted that violence is by no means a common feature of illegal markets.¹⁵

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Blumstein was one of the first to make explicit the conceptual and empirical connection between drug-related violence and firearms. He argued that as drugs are illegal, drug markets are too, and that drug market actors must therefore arm themselves for self-protection. The resulting “arms race” among young people active in these markets leads to more frequent gun use, ultimately contributing to an escalation of violence. Blumstein (1995) acknowledged the usefulness of Goldstein’s (1985) tripartite framework and added a fourth, broader connection between drugs and violence, which included the use of guns. Referred to as the “community disorganization effect of the drug industry,”¹⁶ this category indicates that “[...] the influence of the widespread prevalence of guns among drug sellers may stimulate others in the community to similarly arm themselves for self-defence, or to settle their own disputes that have nothing to do with drugs, or to gain respect”.¹⁷ Blumstein (1995) drew attention to illegal markets of crack cocaine. Compared to powdered cocaine, crack cocaine is sold at a much lower price; this drew in many low-income people who could only afford to buy one dose at a time, thereby increasing the number of transactions. With increased demand came the need for new sellers—mostly urban young men who were more likely to carry guns for self-protection. Violent conflicts between groups of young men could take the shape of a reciprocal process, which Papachristos termed the “norm of reciprocity”.¹⁸ This dynamic results in an increase in retaliations for prior violence. More recent empirical studies also back up this analysis, finding that the density of narcotics sales in a certain area is significantly associated with firearm homicides.¹⁹

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The European situation

Empirical links between drugs and violence

Recent years have seen a growing interest in research on drug-related violence in Europe, which is in part due to the active role of researchers from the European Homicide Monitor group, as well as the prioritization of this phenomenon by the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). In a pilot study examining the nature and scope of drug-related homicide in Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden, Schönberger et al. found

that about half of all homicides in these countries were drug related.²⁰ Making use of Goldstein’s (1985) framework, the international group of researchers found psychopharmacological homicides to be most prevalent in Finland and Sweden, whereas systemic drug-related homicides were most common in the Netherlands. For all countries, economic-compulsive drug-related homicides constituted a fraction of the total. Drug-related homicides involved firearms twice as often as those that were not drug related.²¹ These studies, unlike those undertaken in the United States, typically were not able to analyse the influence of co-occurring alcohol use. Higher levels of violence are found to be associated with a combination of alcohol consumption and drugs, rather than drug consumption alone.²² Furthermore, the relationship does not appear to be limited to alcohol and illegal drugs, but also extends to alcohol and prescription drugs.²³ In addition, recent European academic and policy-oriented work has focused on violence linked to cannabis,²⁴ as the

cannabis market generates high profits, and criminal networks involved in dealing cannabis tend to be larger than groups involved in dealing other types of drugs.²⁵

Another body of recent European work has focused on overlaps between drug and firearm supply. Recent years have seen an increased demand for firearms among international drug traffickers, as well as youth gangs involved in street drug dealing. Since it is difficult to acquire a firearm legally in the majority of EU member states, most firearms used in this context have been stolen from legal gun owners or state stockpiles.²⁶ As dealing in firearms is not deemed particularly lucrative, only small numbers of guns are usually trafficked at a time, alongside other illegal goods, including drugs. Drugs are the most commonly seized commodity alongside firearm-related items (such as ammunition, explosives, and components), clearly linking illegal drug trafficking to firearms trafficking.²⁷ A recent UN Office on Drugs and Crime report on the European situation revealed that firearm seizures occur in relation to drug trafficking in about 28 per cent of cases, but can occur in as much as 44 per cent of all cases in some European countries.²⁸

Empirical links between drug-related violence and firearms

When examining the specific link between drug-related violence and firearms in Europe, previously reported US findings²⁹ do not seem to be limited to the United States alone: recent work in Sweden, for example, has shown that open drug markets and vulnerable neighbourhoods are associated with gun violence.³⁰ Criminals

usually use firearms to threaten or shoot others to facilitate drug trafficking; however, as firearms are mainly acquired for intimidation, most

criminal gun violence in this context is non-lethal.³¹ Gerell et al. found both a spatial and a temporal dependency between drugs and violent crime in Sweden—that is, gun violence tended to be spatio-temporally linked

to disadvantaged areas with drug activity. Gun violence is mainly temporally concentrated and exhibits “near-repeat patterns that appear to be strongest within one or two weeks”.³² These patterns could indicate that the level of gun violence and near-repeat patterning is not only driven by its relationship with open drugs markets, but also affected by other underlying mechanisms. Building on the work of Gerell et al., Magnusson’s recent analysis of gun violence in Stockholm showed specific overlaps between gun violence and drug markets in areas that share harsh socio-demographic conditions.³³

In the Netherlands, Rabolini, Krüsselmann, and Liem found that drug-related homicides were mostly perpetrated by firearms, and clustered together with non-lethal shootings and hand grenades.³⁴ The authors reported drug-related homicides around large urban centres, particularly Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and southern provinces of the country. Systemic drug-related homicides were the most pronounced and provided the strongest link with the other two phenomena (shootings and grenades).³⁵

Other European studies have looked at the relationship between drug prohibition, the disruption of drug markets, and drug-related violence. A recent study on the cannabis market in Copenhagen found that arresting established sellers, and a stricter enforcement of drug laws, resulted in higher levels of (gun) violence.³⁶ Disrupting the monopolistic structure of the cannabis

Drugs are the most commonly seized commodity alongside firearm-related items, clearly linking illegal drug trafficking to firearms trafficking.

market, along with its spatial equilibrium and previously established hierarchy, increased competition for access to turf and customers, and led to more violence.

The need for an expanded framework

Goldstein's classification has been widely used in criminological studies globally³⁷ and in recent European work.³⁸ This classification system has become a sort of "standard-bearer" when analysing the nexus between drugs and violence.³⁹ Several problems emerge, however, when trying to understand these manifestations through Goldstein's original framework.

Times are changing

Since the 1980s, there have been vast shifts in types of drug use; while the 1990s saw changes in heroin, cocaine, and crack cocaine use, recent years have been characterized by upticks in methamphetamine and synthetic opioid use. Several macro-processes are at work that supersede changing patterns in drug use, drug trafficking, and drug production. The EMCDDA identifies macro-processes such as globalization that drive innovation in drug trafficking and production.⁴⁰ Their report points to a trend towards the drug market becoming increasingly digital, as social media applications and encrypted services appear to be more commonly used for drug purchases. Furthermore, Europe's cannabis policy environment is becoming increasingly complex due to its decriminalization in some countries. This, in turn, affects the relationship between cannabis markets and violence. In addi-

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tion, cocaine trafficking in maritime shipments from Latin America (mainly Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador) has shifted from southern and eastern European entry points to northern European (such as Antwerp, Belgium, and Rotterdam, the Netherlands)⁴¹ entry points.⁴² The detection of secondary cocaine processing laboratories in Europe has increased, indicating that trafficking groups are employing more innovative methods for supplying the European market. These processes impact the drug market in profound ways, which in turn may affect the relationship between drugs and violence, and thereby suggest the need to reassess the applicability of Goldstein's 1985 framework on today's relationships between drugs and violence.

Systemic violence as catch-all category

Goldstein already acknowledged the wide range of violent acts that fall into the category of "systemic violence", such as fights between dealers, turf wars, robberies, and punishment of informants.⁴³ Ever since Goldstein proposed this category, its heterogeneity has only expanded.

Production processes vary enormously according to the type of drug; cannabis production, for example, has changed radically in scope, size, and location.⁴⁴ The same holds true for drug trafficking, with emerging new global markets and changing

trafficking methods. Markets now include not only physical markets but also virtual markets. Violence associated with each of these markets also changes. In Goldstein's original model, a dispute involving a local dealer and consumer over selling poor-quality drugs would be put into the same category as a homicide resulting from a large-scale transnational conflict over

the seizure of tons of cocaine. Lumping these acts together increases the risk of generating a catch-all category of sorts. As systemic drug-related violence accounts for a significant proportion of all drug-related violence, this category in particular may require a more fine-grained classification.

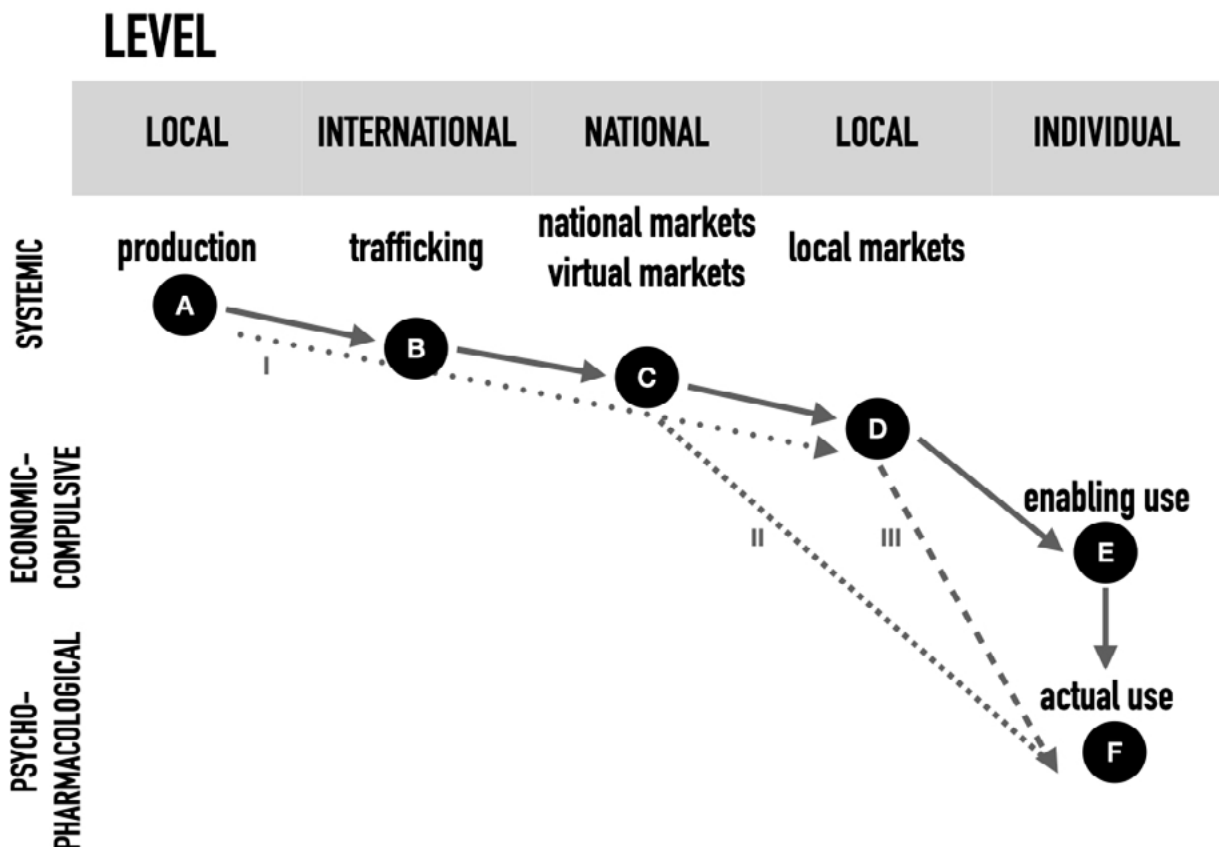
A changing, more heterogeneous, and increasingly complex landscape of drug-related violence leads us to question whether Goldstein's original US-based framework is fully sufficient to capture contemporary patterns in drug-related violence in Europe, and, specifically, its relationship with firearms. This paper seeks to expand Goldstein's framework by using a more fine-grained classification of drug-related violence in order to better understand the link with firearms, and in particular to conceptualize the link between drugs and firearm violence.

The expanded framework

Explaining the expanded framework

Figure 1 represents an expanded framework through which the relationship between drugs and violence—and consequently the way in which firearms are connected to drug-related violence—can be better understood. Goldstein's original three elements (psychopharmacological, economic-compulsive, and systemic) are still represented in the left column. The new framework focuses, however, on the drug routes—from production to consumption. The arrows illustrate the distribution route and identify

Figure 1 The relationship between drugs and violence: An expanded framework



several levels on which drug-related violence can take place. This is a conceptual model and does not require the presence of firearms. Since the focus of this paper is to delve into the relationship between drug-related violence and firearms, however, violence perpetrated with firearms is highlighted when explaining the model and providing examples.

In the expanded framework, the drug-violence nexus starts at the local level, where drug-related violence may take place to safeguard the production of drugs (A). Here, firearms may be used to protect drug labs from raids by competitors or authorities. Once produced, drugs are either directly trafficked to local markets (ecstasy produced in the Netherlands, for example, is distributed nationally—see dotted line “I”), but more commonly they are trafficked internationally (B). Violence involving firearms may be used to ensure that the drugs reach their international destination point. Conflicts over international shipments and international payments, for example, may arise and involve the use of firearms. It has also been suggested that organized crime groups may not be competing directly for territories, to enable their trade through shipments, but rather for access to specific international transport hubs.⁴⁵ Once the destination country is reached (C), drug-related violence can take place in the context of securing control over national markets, as well as perhaps virtual markets. From national markets, drugs then find their way to local markets (D), or are directly sent to individual users (see dotted line “II”). If drugs first enter local markets, drug-related violence may occur in the context of establishing control over local territory. In the next step, drugs are sold directly to the individual user (see dotted line “III”). In the context of financial hardship associated with drug use, users may resort to economic-compulsive violence to

enable drug use (E). Finally, the actual consumption of a drug may contribute to violent behaviour categorized as psychopharmacological drug-related violence (F).

This newly presented framework differs from Goldstein’s initial tripartite framework in that it allows for a conceptualization of systemic violence, and recognizes that this type of violence can take place at the local, national, and international level. It is even possible to argue that some conflicts play out at a supranational level—such as conflicts over large quantities of drugs being exchanged for other drugs, money, real estate, art, or cryptocurrency between parties that do not necessarily involve individuals or groups tied to one particular country or global region.

Furthermore, the expanded model recognizes that violence associated with the distribution of drugs accounts for a significant proportion of all drug-related violence by identifying distribution routes and acknowledging that violence can take place in each of these routes.

Illustrating the expanded framework

Case studies are presented here as examples, making use of the Gunviolence.eu – Incident Monitor (hereafter referred to as the “Incident Monitor”).^a The Incident Monitor builds on artificial intelligence (AI) technology to scrape news reports in 27 European countries, allowing for the identification of firearm-related cases. At the time of writing (April – May 2023), the AI technology for the Incident Monitor was not yet able to provide a complete picture for all 27 countries, making it difficult to clearly establish

a The Incident Monitor (www.gunviolence.eu/incident-monitor) aims to collect media articles on firearm-related violence in all EU member states. It processes data in real time through an automated system that uses artificial intelligence. For more detailed information on the development and functioning of the Monitor, consult the methodological report: Cops, D., De Schutter, A. & De Smedt, T. (2023), *Gunviolence.eu – Incident Monitor: Methodological report*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, <https://vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/en/project-insight/#methodologicalreport>.

the scope of the relationship between firearm violence and drugs in Europe. Nevertheless, the Incident Monitor made it possible to manually search for examples related to firearms and drugs. The paper presents individual cases, retrieved manually, that were reported in at least one of the 27 EU member states between 2019 and 2022, and that involved drug-related violence, or the potential for drug-related violence, using firearms. Each step of the newly constructed framework is illustrated—from drug production (A) to individual drug use (F).

A. Systemic violence: Production

According to the EMCDDA, Europe faces an “overall high availability of an increasing number of different substances, often of high potency and/or purity”.⁴⁶ In addition to the import of large shipments of drugs, “the European Union has also become a significant producer of some drugs, both for domestic consumption and for the global market, [...] indicated by the dismantling of over 350 drug production facilities in the EU in 2020” alone.⁴⁷ A worrying example of this is the observation that Mexican crime groups have started to become involved with synthetic drug production within the EU.⁴⁸ After cocaine, amphetamine is the second most popular illicit drug on the European market and, since its production occurs closer to the consumer, it is intertwined with local distribution networks. Nonetheless, gun violence is generally less visible in the EU at the production level of the drugs market, since drug-related gun violence is most visible at the consumer market level.⁴⁹ At the production level, drug-related violence may take place to protect production facilities from raids or from being discovered, as Case 1 illustrates.⁵⁰

Case 1: Deadly shooting associated with crystal meth production

A 41-year-old man was shot and killed in a village close to Rotterdam in November 2022. The victim had been released from custody a month earlier, as he was suspected of being involved in the production of crystal meth. The judicial hearing was originally planned to take place a few days after the homicide. Directly after the shooting, witnesses saw a grey car leave the scene at high speed. The driver ignored a stop sign, after which the police chased the car, equipped with false licence plates, which resulted in a crash shortly afterwards. Police arrested a 45-year-old local man and a 35-year-old man from the south of the country in connection with the case and secured a firearm from the crashed car. Years earlier, the victim had been known for his involvement in the EPO trade—a forbidden substance since 1991.

Consumer-ready drugs may be produced not only from scratch, but also with the use of precursors. Case 2 illustrates that the boundaries between drug production and drug trafficking may not always be clear-cut.⁵¹ Although this example does not involve a violent act, it highlights how gun-related violence can occur in drug production and drug processing facilities.

Case 2: One of the most active drug gangs in Gran Canaria Falls

In January 2022 during an operation called Jezebel–Doolittle, police and the Guardia Civil arrested eight people and seized 17 kilograms of cocaine, one million euros, firearms, and documents related to money laundering. In addition, police seized 13 litres of procaine, an anaesthetic drug frequently used as a precursor for the adulteration of narcotic drugs. According to investigators, this group owned several vehicles prepared with “caves”—spaces created inside vehicles to hide drugs and money, and buildings to store the narcotic substance before its distribution.

This case also demonstrates that, at the wholesale level, most of the drug-related gun violence in Europe is associated with the cocaine market. Due to the market’s high profitability, it becomes less monopolized as more actors participate in the drug’s production and trafficking, thus increasing the likelihood of competition and violence.⁵²

B. Systemic violence: Trafficking

At the international level, drug-related violence may take place in the context of conflicts over seized drugs, loss of investment, or main drug trafficking routes. The international nature of drug trafficking is reflected in the international nature of the parties involved. Traffickers in Europe are often members of poly-criminal groups involved in various criminal activities, and make use of the same networks and routes to smuggle illegal commodities, such as drugs and firearms.⁵³ Anecdotal accounts suggest that threats or acts of violence may be carried out by individuals hired specifically for this purpose, as Case 3 illustrates.⁵⁴

Case 3: Murder-for-hire in the Western Balkans

In January 2019, the Serbian police issued an international arrest warrant for a 39-year-old man suspected of killing his 37-year-old brother-in-law—a well-known drug smuggler, who was likely targeted because the assassin’s clients wanted to send a message to him. Serbian police also believe that the suspect can be linked to several, as yet unsolved, homicides, including that of a 57-year-old lawyer. The suspect was known to have connections to the Albanian drug mafia active in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, as well as in Kosovo.^a

In Spain, there has been an uptake in gun violence related to the drug-trafficking milieu. This has been attributed to loopholes concerning deactivated firearms and Flobert-calibre firearms, which are not considered as “firearms” in some member states, and can easily be converted into higher-calibre firearms. They quickly gained popularity and have been trafficked into various EU countries, including Spain, for reactivation.⁵⁵

Other notable examples that have their origin in the international drug market include the homicide of Dutch journalist Peter R. de Vries in Amsterdam in July 2021.⁵⁶ Apart from being a crime journalist, he acted as a confidant of a crown witness in the so-called “Marengo” trial of leading members of the Dutch–Moroccan Moco Mafia.⁵⁷ This homicide is ascribed to Ridouan Taghi, who is currently standing trial for ordering numerous homicides in the organized crime drug market.

a The designation of Kosovo is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

C. Systemic violence: National and virtual markets

In the category of systemic violence in the context of national markets and virtual markets, violence may occur to secure control over these markets. Here, violence may take place in the same city or town where the conflict originated.

Accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, recent years have seen an expansion of online drug channels and drug delivery service models.⁵⁸ There are reports that an increasing number of consumers may have turned to online methods to source drugs rather than buying from street dealers.⁵⁹ It is possible to argue that the shift to virtual markets brings about a drop in the risk of violent conflict in national markets, including gun-related violence; however, the shift to online markets may instead constitute a displacement of such violence. Cases 4⁶⁰ and 5⁶¹ illustrate the potential for violence in trying to safeguard online distribution.

D. Systemic violence: Local markets

One of the final steps in the drug distribution chain involves the transfer of drugs from national markets to local markets. Here, drug-related violence may take place in the context of establishing control over local territory. Local markets may be especially significant in relation to firearms, as local consumer markets account for the most visible drug-related gun violence when examining wholesale drug distribution chains.⁶² Several cases were retrieved that revealed the potential for gun-related violence, such as in Cases 6,⁶³ 7,⁶⁴ and 8.⁶⁵

Case 4: EncroChat reveals Germans dealing in drugs and in possession of a firearm

Spanish police arrested a 25-year-old and a 26-year-old from Hamburg in January 2022. The two men were arrested in a Barcelona restaurant, carrying EUR 3,600 in cash and several mobile phones. They were suspected of drug trafficking following the infiltration of French officials in the EncroChat server rooms. The men are said to have had around 160 kilograms of cannabis and half a kilo of cocaine. The 25-year-old was reportedly in possession of a live pistol with 100 rounds of ammunition.

Case 5: Sweden's deadly gang conflict

The death of a 13-year-old boy in September 2023 is said to be linked to Sweden's ongoing gang conflict, which has exploded in scope as gang members and their families are now being targeted for assassination. Throughout 2023, the "Kurdish Fox" and his network Foxtrot in Stockholm have been at war with the Dala network, led by a man known as "The Greek", leading to shootings, killings, and bombings across parts of the Stockholm region. Both networks are known for being involved in the nationwide drugs trade.

Case 6: The violent death of a Dublin "cardboard gangster"

In January 2019, a fatal shooting in Dublin resulted in the death of a 23-year-old man. Together with a friend, he had left a local gym and got into a BMW jeep at around 18:30. When they exited the car park, a lone gunman on foot approached the vehicle and fired at least five shots. The victim was well-known to the police, who labeled the shooting as "a local drugs issue". The 23-year-old was described as a cocaine dealer with a related conviction. According to the police, he was considered a relatively low-level drug dealer.

Case 7: Two men attack mother of a local gang leader

In Belgium, two suspects tried to attack the mother of a local criminal gang leader in December 2022. He was involved in the large-scale import of cocaine and linked by police to various attacks in the Antwerp drug environment. The criminal court sentenced a 21-year-old Dutch man to 37 months in prison for being involved in this failed attack. The man's under-aged companion tried to shoot from inside the house, but the gun jammed and they fled. After a police chase, their car was stopped and they were arrested.

Case 8: A couple supplies drugs for the entire region

In Czechia, a couple suspected of supplying drugs for the whole Jindrichohradecko region was arrested in mid-August 2022. Law enforcement arrested the man directly at his workplace, where he was also temporarily living. At his workplace, and subsequently in his garage and personal vehicle, a police search found over ten kilograms of cannabis, a gas pistol, and tens of thousands of Czech crowns from criminal activities. His partner was arrested later that day.

E. Economic-compulsive violence

Economic-compulsive drug-related violence—that is, violent, financially motivated acts aiming to obtain money or drugs to sustain a drug habit—is one step further down the drug route. Recent European data⁶⁶ suggests that this type of violence has become rare, possibly rows from criminal activities due to the decline of heroin markets.⁶⁷ The Incident Monitor revealed Case 9.⁶⁸

This case also illustrates how the increased availability of firearms in European illicit markets makes these weapons more available for low-level, and even very young, criminals.⁶⁹

Case 9: Robbery of scout camp in Belgium

In July 2021, two young men, aged 19 and 20, raided a scout camp in Belgium in the early hours of the morning. The two men, dressed in black with hoods covering their faces, stormed onto the domain and forced their way into the room where the management team was meeting at that time. Waving a gun and knife, they required the management team to hand over their wallets, cell phones, and other valuables and fled. A day later, both were arrested. The men confessed, with the older one adding that “everything happened under the influence of cocaine. [...] I needed money to pay for my addiction. I now feel a lot of shame and anger because of what I did.” Both men were sentenced to prison and to mandatory treatment for alcohol and drug addiction.

Case 10: Irish deer hunter high on cocaine shot at police

In February 2020, a 24-year-old man was on a hunting trip with his uncle and cousin. After hunting deer during the day, the man drank pints and shots and took half a gram of cocaine. He became very intoxicated, agitated, and aggressive, and was—according to newspaper reports—“making a nuisance of himself”. The three men returned to the bed and breakfast they were staying in, but, just after midnight, the suspect left the house again, having changed into his hunting clothes, and started walking up the main street, carrying his rifle. Over a period of an hour, he went around the streets and fired shots towards civilians, the police, and property. He was arrested by the police before anyone got hurt.

F. Psychopharmacological violence

Among the Incident Monitor cases of psychopharmacological violence involving the use of a firearm, the co-use of alcohol was pronounced. This is in line with observations in large-scale studies, which find that violence tends to be associated with a combination of alcohol and drug consumption.⁷⁰ Case 10 illustrates this dynamic.⁷¹

Implications

This paper has questioned whether the various manifestations of drug-related firearm violence in Europe can be captured by existing US frameworks, namely Goldstein's seminal 1985 tripartite model of gun-related violence. It concludes that a more fine-grained classification of drug-related violence is needed in order to better understand the link with firearms. This expanded framework, capturing the diversity of drug-related violence in Europe, demonstrates that a diversified approach is needed to tackle the various manifestations of drug-related violence, including drug-related violence perpetrated by firearms. In short, acknowledging the heterogenous nature of the phenomenon itself implies heterogeneity in research and policy.

Unlike in the United States, Europe does not have a long-standing tradition of studying violent crime. Although there has been a spike in research interest and policy attention in this area, the depth of knowledge when it comes to firearm and drug-related violence may vary (or be lacking) across different European countries. Significant gaps exist in terms of quantifying the links of the suggested framework to better establish the types of drugs markets, as well as the types of drug production and consumption, associated with the highest levels of violence. Important gaps also remain in both qualifying and quantifying the link between firearm and drug-

related violence. As the case studies retrieved from the Incident Monitor reveal, the media typically do not report on the type of firearms confiscated or encountered, let alone reveal any information on the origins of firearms used in specific types of violence. This underscores the impression that firearms are typically regarded as an "add-on" in the media and law enforcement reporting about violent crimes, rather than a priority area that warrants attention. Making drug-related violence and its association with firearms trafficking and use a key priority at the EU level may help data collection efforts to better inform the policies necessary for tackling this pressing issue.

Firstly, two pathways can be distinguished for tackling violence associated with drug production: one from the non-EU country of origin (for cocaine and heroin, for example) and the other, more recent pathway, from within the EU (for synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances, for example). Focusing on the latter, reports highlight how the production of synthetic drugs within Europe is on the rise.⁷² This increase may pose a threat to Europe's internal security. In terms of policy implications, a better understanding is needed of the drivers of synthetic drug production and their impact, including the role of precursors and source chemicals—and how control over these substances affects (the potential for) violence. To improve the measurement of the nature and scope of synthetic drug production enterprises, studies have pointed to the potential of researching environmental factors such as precursors present in soil, sewage, or air.⁷³

Acknowledging the heterogenous nature of the phenomenon itself implies heterogeneity in research and policy.

Secondly, in terms of the implications of curbing violence related to international drug trafficking, policy areas include identifying and targeting criminal networks involved in international drug trafficking. At the European level, priority should be given to seeking to disrupt high-risk criminal networks, particularly those with access to fire-

arms. Recent US studies highlight the potential impact of precision policing, in which law enforcement focuses on a small number of individuals who are thought to be the main drivers, rather than mass enforcement measures.⁷⁴ Recent European work corroborates this observation, finding that removing key players in groups engaged in criminal activity may increase crime reduction rates.⁷⁵ Specifically targeted disruption interventions can take many different forms, from undertaking activities to make subjects related to organized criminal groups aware they are being targeted, to using search warrants. Other methods include prosecuting suspects involved in such groups for a wide range of low-level tangential offences, such as traffic offences. Yet another method relates to the use of civil powers, or the criminal justice system, to control assets, for example through the repossession of businesses or residential property. When opting for specific types of disruption, it is firstly important to know what type of disruption works, in what context, and against what level of organized crime.⁷⁶ It should be noted that, in some instances, disruption practices may even result in criminal networks becoming “stronger” after targeted attacks, as the disruption may lead them to become more resilient—that is, to develop the capacity to absorb and withstand disruption and to adapt to change when necessary. In addition, when law enforcement destabilizes a drug market by targeting specific drug-trafficking routes, it may inadvertently cause a spillover effect to other locations, increasing the likelihood of local competition, and thus the potential for violence.⁷⁷ Prior research has emphasized the importance of conducting criminal network interventions at an early stage, before the network is able to achieve maximum resilience.⁷⁸

Thirdly, vast changes can be expected in shifts from local markets to online drug markets—

hence, patterns of drug-related violence are also likely to change. Innovations in recent years include less reliance on face-to-face dealing and more individual online drug transactions. This implies that closer monitoring of online drug markets, social media, encrypted communication apps, and Darknet drug sales is warranted, with particular emphasis on overlaps in the supply of both drugs and firearms. Law enforcement efforts should be geared towards the physical component of shipping such products. Although marketing and sales of drugs and firearms take place online, these products are ultimately shipped using (inter) national postal systems; while these are seen as

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major bottlenecks from the seller and buyer’s perspective, they could also be opportune places to intervene. Previous observations highlight the growth of stealth packaging in this context,⁷⁹ which in turn suggests that both postal

systems, border patrol, and (inter)national law enforcement should combine forces to curb this development.

Fourthly, both recent literature and a snapshot of the European situation illustrate that economic-compulsive drug-related violence represents a fraction of all drug-related violence. This can partially be explained by shifts in Europe’s drug market from the 1990s until now, moving away from heroin—a drug strongly associated with economic-compulsive violence. This does not imply, however, that the problem is completely removed from the European landscape. The impact of (recent) economic recessions on people who use drugs may be profound, and increase the likelihood of future economic-compulsive violence. To curb this threat, a proactive stance from social and healthcare services—focused on supporting individuals to overcome addiction—is key.

This push for a more rehabilitative approach may be especially important in the context of European

countries with harsher (criminal) punishments for drug-related offences. When it comes to individuals involved in drug use and/or lower-ranking drug trafficking charges within criminal organizations (such as street-level peddling), a public health-based approach to this type of violence may be more effective among some at-risk populations.⁸⁰ This may be achieved, for example, by handling minor drug-related criminal offences (including economic-compulsive violence) through restorative justice mediation, instead of more traditional penalization methods through national criminal justice systems. Finally, drug-related violence can be further reduced by tackling substance abuse at the individual level—for example by offering interventions aimed at reducing drug use through treatment, support, and harm reduction services. As prior studies indicate, particular attention to the co-use of alcohol is warranted.

Taken together, using a more fine-grained, multi-level approach may provide the basis for prioritizing future interventions to reduce the burden of drug-related violence in Europe.

Conclusion

This paper has described how the drug world is continuously changing, as are its manifestations of violence. To keep up with these changes, original frameworks through which drug-related violence is studied need to adapt accordingly. An extended and more fine-grained version of Goldstein's almost forty-year-old model is proposed, allowing researchers to analyse drug-related violence in greater detail—namely by specifying the level where drug-related violence manifests itself. This extended framework captures the heterogeneity of drug-related violence, thereby allowing for a diversified approach to both research and policy in this area.

Using a more fine-grained, multi-level approach may provide the basis for prioritizing future interventions to reduce the burden of drug-related violence in Europe.

Endnotes

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Authors

Marieke Liem

Marieke Liem is professor of violence and interventions at Leiden University, where she and her team conduct research on interpersonal violence. She received her MPhil degree from Cambridge University and her PhD from Utrecht University, and has been a Marie Curie Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School. She was one of the founders of the European Homicide Monitor, and continues to work on this project. Her research interests focus on violence. She has been a principal investigator on numerous research projects on domestic homicide, homicide by the mentally ill, homicide followed by suicide, firearm violence, drug-related violence, homicide in overseas areas, the effects of confinement on violent offenders, and international comparative research on violence. Current research projects centre on the relationship between drugs, violence, and organized crime. She is a member of the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) Scientific Committee.

Project INSIGHT

Project INSIGHT is an initiative that aims to prevent violence by enhancing the visibility of firearm violence in the European Union. With an online knowledge platform (www.gunviolence.eu) as its primary tool, the project also entails the creation of eight research reports on various themes of firearms violence. Project INSIGHT is funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund - Police.

Project INSIGHT is coordinated by the Flemish Peace Institute. The Flemish Peace Institute was established in 2004 as a para-parliamentary institution within the Flemish Parliament. It provides thorough analyses, informs and organizes the debate and promotes peace and the prevention of violence. In the past the institute has coordinated other EU-funded projects on firearms such as SAFTE, DIVERT and TARGET.

The publication process of the Project INSIGHT research reports was supervised by the Small Arms Survey. The Small Arms Survey strengthens the capacity of governments and practitioners to reduce illicit arms flows and armed violence through three mutually reinforcing activities: the generation of policy relevant knowledge, the development of authoritative resources and tools, and the provision of training and other services.

Other partners in the Project INSIGHT-network include Textgain, SIPRI, and the Institute of Security and Global Affairs at Leiden University. The project also receives support from the Belgian Federal Police, Europol, European Firearms Experts, Dutch National Police and SEESAC.

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