

Note on Data and Methodology

The Human Security Report Project's (HSRP) publications fill an important knowledge gap for policy communities addressing the challenges posed by political violence around the world.

Few governments collect, and even fewer release, data on political violence and human rights abuses around the world and such information is too politically sensitive for international agencies to collect, collate and publish. Scholarly research publications, on the other hand, especially those that focus on quantitative research, are often inaccessible to non-specialists. The HSRP 'translates' such technical material where necessary to ensure that it is accessible.

The HSRP's research team tracks political violence around the world in much the same way as the monitoring process of the Millennium Development Goals' tracks health, education and other development trends.

The Project draws on the best available data in preparing its publications. But all experts working in this field recognize that the best is often not very good. Where reliable statistics are most needed—for the very poor countries that are most afflicted by political violence, for example—they tend to be least available.

The HSRP is nevertheless confident that the major *trends* in political violence that are recorded in its publications are correct. All the major datasets show the same broad downward trend in political violence since the Cold War ended, despite the fact that quite different measuring methodologies are used.

Trend data are important because they help governments and international agencies determine whether things are getting better or worse—and whether or not their policies are having an impact. But absolute numbers—particularly of war deaths—are inherently problematic.

The HSRP's publications contain detailed discussions of data reliability issues and contending approaches to measurement. Concepts are carefully defined, and alternative explanations for the trend data are canvassed. There is for, an example, a discussion of some of the problems of measuring terrorism on p.12 and 13 in the Terrorism chapter of the *Brief*.

Pointing to current and past trends does not of course assume that the decline in political violence the world has witnessed over the past fifteen years will necessarily continue.

All data sources are referenced in the main body of the text. The data section on our website contains additional information on data sources—with links to data providers. See: www.hsrgroup.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=71&Itemid=62

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