



What is Russia's real homicide rate? Statistical reconstruction and the 'decivilizing process'

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Abstract

This article examines a paradox that relates to the issue of homicide in Russia. On the one hand, official police statistics demonstrate a rapid decline in the homicide rate in Russia in the 2000s, which is consistent with the stable economic growth (in particular after the financial crisis of 1998) and a stable political environment during the presidency of Vladimir Putin. On the other hand, other conditions and processes (e.g. rampant corruption, predatory policing, political repressions, state violence against businesses, rising xenophobia and apathy) point to what Norbert Elias terms a 'decivilizing process', which is expected to be associated with a less precipitous decline in homicide or stable homicide rate in this period. In fact, newly available homicide estimates suggest that the homicide rate was higher than and did not decline at a pace suggested by the official police and mortality sources in the 2000s. Hence, this article has two main objectives. First, it discusses issues around homicide statistics in Russia and argues that the newly available homicide estimates represent the more accurate statistics. Second, it explores decivilizing process theory as a potential framework for explaining a high and steady homicide rate in Russia in the 2000s.

Keywords

Corruption, decivilizing process, homicide, measuring homicide, Russia, violence

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Introduction

The Russian homicide rate is the highest in Europe and one of the highest in the world (UNODC, 2014). Moreover, it has been gradually increasing during the 20th century, arguably, due to the role of the Soviet state in exacerbating a cultural predisposition for violence and the survival of a 'binge' drinking pattern of alcohol consumption (Stickley and Mäkinen, 2005; Stickley and Pridemore, 2007). In 1994, the homicide rate in Russia peaked at over 47,000 homicide victims or about 33 per 100,000 persons (WHO, n.d.). Widespread and profound political, economic and social changes in the mid-1980s and the early 1990s appear to account for this dramatic increase in the homicide rate (Kim and Pridemore, 2005; Walberg et al., 1998). In the 2000s, however, the official homicide rate has demonstrated a dramatic decrease, with estimates ranging from 10 per 100,000 persons (police data) and 13 per 100,000 persons (mortality data) in 2010 (MVD, n.d.; Rosstat, n.d.).

The concept of a 'criminological transition' (Pridemore, 2007) suggests that some crucial changes in social structure, culture, technology and other aspects of society should be responsible for this remarkable decline in homicide in recent years. Indeed, the first decade of the 21st century, when Vladimir Putin came to power as President of Russia, is generally characterized by greater political and economic stability linked to high prices of oil relative to the 1990s. However, these improvements were accompanied by some negative trends. While some of these unfavorable processes seemed to be a continuation from the Soviet period (e.g. political repressions and corruption), some of them appeared to have emerged in the 2000s, such as xenophobia, racism, violence against non-Slavs, predatory policing of citizens, and state violence against businesses. Such patchy and inconsistent improvements in Russian society are unlikely to account for the considerable decrease in homicide rate in the 2000s.

An alternative explanation for the recent decrease in homicide in Russia can be linked to the ways in which homicide statistics are produced, especially given the Soviet Union's notorious legacy of falsification and concealment of data, including data on homicide (e.g. Tolts, 2012), that would put Russia in an unfavorable light. After a brief moment of greater availability of more reliable population data in the early 1990s, the quality of the Russian vital statistics data (Gavrilova et al., 2008; Pridemore, 2003) and police data (Inshakov, 2011) has deteriorated. More specifically, some researchers argue that the real homicide rate is much higher and is not declining at a pace suggested by the official sources (Andreev et al., n.d.; Inshakov, 2011).

This article examines the puzzle of rapidly declining homicide rates in Russia after 2000 (as demonstrated by official sources) under conditions that would suggest a very different trend. Given a history of widespread falsification of population data in the Soviet Union, we first examine the issue of post-Soviet homicide statistics and attempt to determine more accurate estimates of homicide rates in Russia in the 2000s. Although issues around measuring homicide in Russia and other countries are not new and have been recently summarized in the *Global Study on Homicide 2013* (UNODC, 2014), current literature seems to lack a consistent understanding of what the homicide rate in Russia is and how it has been changing in post-Soviet Russia. Our article addresses this gap in the literature because specious homicide data can have wide-ranging deleterious

implications for the justice system, policymakers, researchers and families. Based on evidence from our revised estimates that show basically a non-declining homicide rate in the 2000s, this article then explores whether a 'decivilizing process' (Elias, 1978) can serve as an explanatory framework for this trend in homicide in Russia, as suggested by Pinker (2011). Although a formal quantitative test of this theoretical framework cannot be accomplished within the scope of this article, we believe that illustrating theoretical arguments with empirical data can provide a starting point and help direct future inquiries.

Measuring the homicide rate

The legacy of the Soviet era when crime data were strictly controlled and often falsified when made public and the ongoing lack of clear and transparent homicide reporting systems in Russia raise serious concerns about the veracity of Russia's official homicide statistics today (Pridemore, 2003; Tolts, 2012). At the beginning of the 1930s, Soviet authorities decided to withhold all statistical information relating to crime and 'unacceptable' causes of death, including homicide, and hence patterns, trends and rates of homicide in Russia remained hidden for most of the 20th century. At the end of the 1980s, however, political changes resulted in the eventual release of criminal justice and vital statistics data on homicide. Today, information on homicide is available from two main official sources in Russia, that is, police crime data and vital statistics data, and also from research and a small number of surveys conducted, among others, by the Office of the Public Prosecutor (e.g. Inshakov, 2011), Ministry of Health and Federal State Statistics Service (e.g. Gavrilova et al., 2008; Ivanova et al., 2013). They are discussed below.

Official police data

There are two branches of executive power dealing with homicide in Russia: the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the office of the public prosecutor (Prokuratura in Russian). The Criminal Police Department of the MVD is in charge of registering and investigating homicides. In addition to supervising the execution of the law, the office of the public prosecutor also investigates homicide on its own. For the public, data about crime and homicide are available from the MVD through annual publications and online sources (www.mvd.ru).

There are several serious concerns about the police data that are likely to result in a large underrepresentation of the true homicide rate in Russia (Inshakov, 2011; Luneev, 2005; Pridemore, 2003). One indicator of underreporting is inconsistency in the official numbers of homicide provided by MVD. For example, a 2010 MVD crime report indicates there were 15,000 registered cases of completed and attempted homicides and almost 40,000 cases of 'intentional grievous body injury' (in some of these cases victims die) in 2010. However, in its summary section, the report states that 42,000 people died as the result of 'criminal assault' and 51,000 people received grievous body injuries in 2010 alone (MVD, n.d.).

Another indicator of the serious problems with police homicide data comes from the office of the public prosecutor. Specifically, in his interview with the *Rossiskaya Gazeta*

in 2010, the chair of Investigation Department (Sledstvenniy Komitet) at Prokuratura Alexander Bastrykin (2010) disclosed that the homicide rate in Russia in the recent years reached 70–80 per 100,000. In addition, in 2005, in his yearly speech to Russian prosecutors, General Prosecutor Vladimir Ustinov stated that only about 25 percent of all decedents received an autopsy, and often a forensic physician is not called to the scene of an apparent homicide (Ustinov, 2005). This points to the insufficient quality of the investigation of homicides and their possible underrepresentation in the official police statistics.

Furthermore, there are some grey areas in the production of police statistics of homicides, which allegedly open up the opportunity for manipulation. One of the most important is the definition of homicide in Article 105 of the Russian Criminal Code, which defines homicide as an intentional act to cause death of one (Part 1) or more people (Part 2), including attempted homicides. Without access to unpublished MVD data, there is no way to extract the number of attempts, though they appear to constitute between 5 and 10 percent of total homicides reported annually (Luneev, 2005). At any rate, it creates a certain degree of confusion in homicide statistics.

In addition, if the person died not during an attack but later (e.g. in three days, in hospital), the event would be registered as intentional grievous bodily harm leading to death (Part 4, Article 111 of the Criminal Code) and would not be included in the homicide category. This seems to differ from practices in other countries. For example, in the USA any death caused by the injuries at any time after the offense should be classified as murder.

Also, only cases with the intent to kill, not to inflict injuries which might still lead to death, would be counted as homicide according to the Criminal Code definition; all other cases would be coded as intentional grievous bodily harm leading to death. Luneev (2005: 409) argues that about one-third of the latter are cases of intentional homicide. In other countries, for example, in the United States, a criminal homicide is defined as ‘any death caused by injuries received in a fight, argument, quarrel, assault, or commission of a crime’ (US Department of Justice, 2004: 15). Because it is often problematic to differentiate in real life intent to kill and intent to severely injure another person (who died from this injury), this constitutes another gray area in the production of Russian homicide statistics in Russia.

Another aspect that should be kept in mind while interpreting police homicide data in Russia is that it is an event-based rather than victim-based reporting system. In other words, homicide of tens or hundreds of people resulting from a bomb explosion would be recoded as one crime, as defined in paragraphs ‘a’ and ‘e’ of Part 2 of Article 105 of the Criminal Code (Luneev, 2005: 409).

Vital statistics data

An alternative source of information on homicide is provided by vital statistics data, which is available at the Federal State Statistics Service website (Rosstat in Russian) (www.gks.ru). Russia classifies the causes of death according to WHO recommendations, and in 1999 it began using the WHO International Classification of Diseases (ICD) codes, 10th revision. In relation to homicides, vital statistics data supply information

on deaths as the result of interpersonal violence (ICD 10 codes X85–Y09, Y871), which excludes collective violence and legal interventions, self-harm and any unintentional injuries.

Although vital statistics data in Russia seem to be more trustworthy and reliable than police data (Pridemore, 2003), these also contain error. Mortality data as well as police data in Soviet Russia were subjected to manipulations. For example, deaths due to homicide (as well as deaths resulting from suicide, occupational injuries and various types of infectious diseases) were extracted from the original statistical tables and publicly reported in the category ‘Other and unknown causes’ (Andreev et al., 1995). Then, during the 1990s, there was a disproportionate increase in the number of violent deaths recorded as ‘unspecified’ (i.e. the accidental or purposeful nature of the injuries is supposedly unknown), many of which are thought to be homicides (Gavrilova et al., 2008; Ivanova et al., 2004; Pridemore, 2003). The increase in the number of deaths at unknown ages and from unspecified causes and in the number of violent deaths of undetermined intent continued through the 2000s (Andreev et al., 2008, n.d.; Semyonova and Antonova, 2007).

Because Russia uses the summarized list of causes of death, which means that the number of items used in the classification of cause of death is considerably smaller than in the ICD-10 system, WHO cannot estimate the overall quality of mortality data provided by Russia (i.e. the proportion of so-called ‘garbage codes’), but can detect the most obvious cases of miscoding. For example, HIV deaths recorded in the registration data were substantially miscoded to tuberculosis, lower respiratory infections and other diseases (WHO, 2014). This implies that similar pressure may be exerted over other ‘unsavory’ findings, such as homicide and suicide.

The aforementioned misclassification of violent deaths to some other categories may represent the difficulty of making complete and accurate decisions given heavy workloads and insufficient budgets of many medical examiners (Andreev et al., n.d.), the existing practice when ‘provisional’ death certificates often are not replaced by the final ones (Gavrilova et al., 2008), and an intention to conceal a murder (Ivanova et al., 2013; Pridemore, 2003; Vaysman et al., 2006). In the latter, the MVD officers can influence the cause of death determination made by medical officials in order to reduce the gap between the number of homicides reported by them and by the Ministry of Health. Such pressure may explain a decreasing gap between both reporting systems of homicide in the recent years (Figure 1).

Figure 1 provides data on police-recorded data and mortality data for homicide and injuries for the period 1980–2010. As we can see, the trends in both police-recorded homicide and vital statistics data seem to follow each other (a sharp increase from 1992 with its peak in 1994 and then a new rise after the economic crisis in 1998 with the peak in 2001–2002), though homicide estimates from the mortality data substantially exceed those from the crime data for the same years. During the 1990s, the vital statistics data reported an average of nearly 40 percent more homicides annually than the crime reporting system (Pridemore, 2003), a difference which is much greater than in many other countries. Figure 1, however, shows that the gap between the two datasets has decreased after 2005.

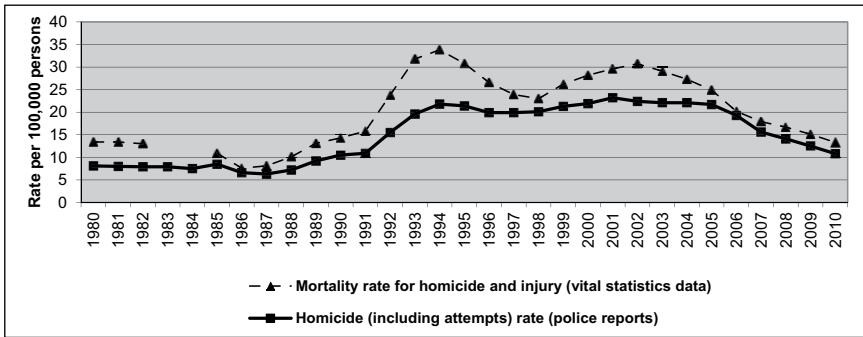


Figure 1. Police-recorded homicide rate (including attempts) per 100,000 residents (police reports) and mortality rate per 100,000 residents for homicide (vital statistics data) for 1980–2010.

Source: Police-recorded data are from Luneev (2005) for 1980–2002 and MVD (n.d.) for 2003–2010. Vital statistics data for 1980–1994 are from WHO (n.d.) and for 1995–2010 are from Rosstat (n.d.).

Computed estimates of homicide rate

Estimates based on the police homicide data. Some Russian criminologists have been skeptical about the remarkable decline in the police-recorded homicide rate in the 2000s and considered it to be an artificial tampering with the statistical data (Inshakov, 2011; Luneev, 2005). For example, professor and former colonel of militia Mikhail Babaev has openly stated that he does not believe any number published officially by the MVD, calling crime statistics in Russia ‘an unscrupulous lie’ (Babaev versus Veller, 2009). He argues that there is no possible realistic explanation for such an unprecedented decline in the homicide rate and a simultaneous increase in the number of unidentified bodies (Figure 2).

A group of scholars from the Research Institute of the Academy of General Prosecutor’s Office headed by Prof. Sergei Inshakov conducted a comprehensive study to calculate more accurate homicide estimates from 2001 to 2009, including the dark figure number of homicides left out of the official police data (Inshakov, 2011). Having direct access to the first-hand unmodified police statistics, Inshakov (2011) discovered that the total number of homicides reported to the police increasingly exceeded the number of homicides officially registered by police (Table 1). Specifically, the number of reports about homicide has tripled from about 14,000 to 45,000 whereas a recorded total homicide by the police almost halved from 34,000 to 18,000 between 2001 and 2009. As a result, in 2009 police registered 2.5 times fewer homicides than were reported to the police.

In addition, the number of unidentified dead bodies doubled from 37,000 in 2001 to almost 78,000 in 2009 (or a 109 percent increase between 2001 and 2009) (Inshakov, 2011); some of these people presumably were murdered (Andreev et al., 2008; Gavrilova et al., 2008). In addition, whereas the total number of missing persons appears to grow between 2001 and 2009 from about 110,000 to 120,000 (Inshakov, 2011; Zakatnova, 2007), the number of missing people who are officially declared for search by the police declines from 78,000 to 71,000 over the same period (Table 1). While many of these

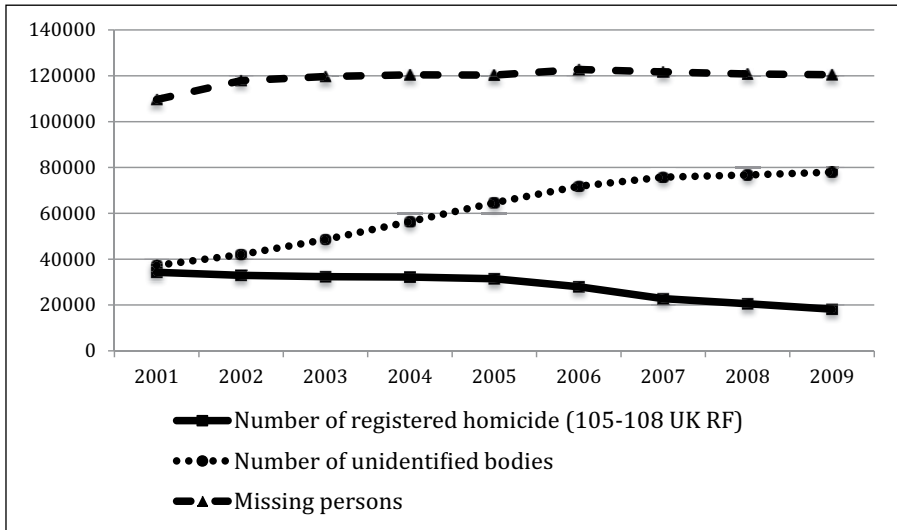


Figure 2. Dynamics of registered homicide in comparison with a number of unidentified dead bodies and missing persons in 2001–2009.

Source: Inshakov (2011).

Table 1. Summary of homicide-related statistical data in Russia, 2001–2009.

Source: Inshakov (2011).

Years	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total homicide (105–108 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation)									
Reported homicide	14,183	18,041	24,586	15,794	15,793	25,545	64,809	34,069	45,131
Registered homicide (official police data)	34,247	32,929	32,342	32,213	31,451	27,977	22,767	20,546	18,164
Computed estimated number of homicides (Inshakov, 2011)	34,247	35,667	37,167	38,667	40,167	41,667	43,200	44,600	46,200
Intentional and attempted homicide (105 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation)									
Registered homicide (official police data)	32,792	31,579	30,959	30,994	30,362	27,039	21,896	19,740	17,414
Computed estimated number of homicides (Inshakov, 2011)	32,792	39,979	39,859	39,794	39,662	39,739	39,595	39,440	39,214
Other homicide-related statistics									
Number of unidentified dead bodies	37,293	42,022	48,550	56,424	64,589	71,792	75,806	76,735	77,937
Total number of missing persons	109,617	117,904	119,700	120,446	120,298	122,735	121,718	120,784	120,455
Missing persons who were declared for search	78,524	82,790	80,288	77,680	74,943	72,358	71,037	71,380	71,433

Table 2. Intentional homicide (including attempts) rate per 100,000 persons: Official police data (MVD) and computed homicide rate by Inshakov (2011).

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Official homicide rate	22.4	22.1	22.1	21.7	19.3	15.6	14.1	12.5
Computed homicide rate (incl. dark number)	27.5	27.5	27.6	27.7	27.8	27.8	27.7	27.6

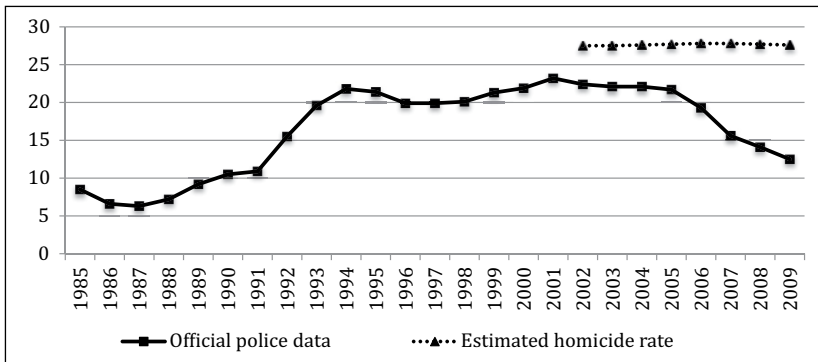


Figure 3. Official homicide (including attempts) rate (police reports) and estimated homicide rate per 100,000 persons.

Source: Inshakov (2011).

would have died from natural causes or simply started new lives, some of them met violent deaths and the official homicide rate clearly fails to convey the true scale of the problem.

To produce more accurate estimates of homicide rates in Russia in 2001–2009, Inshakov (2011) used a mathematical model of homicide-related risk factors, similar in its basic principles to the estimation models used by WHO (2014). Using multivariate regression analysis, Inshakov (2011) first identified the regression coefficients for each of the 16 risk factors in the model (e.g. poverty, income disparity, unemployment, ineffective functioning of institutions of social control), which predicted the registered homicide rate in 2001, and then included these regression coefficients and the means of the risk factors to estimate the number and the rate of homicide for each year until 2009 (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Computed estimates suggest that the average homicide rate per 100,000 persons in the period of 2002–2009 was about 27.7, whereas the official police data reported homicide rate of about 18.7 in the same period. Moreover, computed estimates also suggest that the number of homicides did not decline and appeared to hold stable across the 2000s. These estimates appear to be closer to the homicide estimates produced by WHO in 2002 and 2004 than those provided by the official police data. Namely, WHO estimated over 47,000 deaths due to homicide in 2002 (rate 32.9) and almost 43,000 deaths due to homicide in 2004 (rate 29.7) (WHO, Burden of Disease, 2014).

At the same time, it is important to mention potential limitations of the Inshakov estimation of homicide rates. First, Inshakov (2011) provides no detailed information on what the independent indicators were in this model and how exactly they were measured. Also, homicide rates tend to have nonlinear relationships with some of the independent variables in the model. For example, increases in poverty and unemployment, and the severe economic recession (resulting from the foreclosure crisis) in the USA during the 2000s appears to be associated with homicide rates that were lower than they had been in decades.¹

Homicide estimates based on the vital statistics data. Recently there have been attempts to more accurately estimate the number of deaths due to homicide in Russia based on official vital statistics data (e.g. Andreev et al., n.d.; Ivanova et al., 2013; Semyonova and Antonova, 2007). The major problems with the homicide vital statistics data tend to arise from misclassification of homicides as events of unidentified intent (EUIs). The rate of external causes of death due to EUIs is extremely high in Russia, about 28 per 100,000 residents between 2000 and 2011, and their proportion of all deaths from external causes accelerated in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Andreev et al., n.d.).

In a recent study, Andreev et al. (n.d.) modeled the relationships between the three causes of death (non-transport accident, suicide and homicide) and 10 independent variables, which allowed them to predict the cause of death for EUI cases. The model tended unambiguously to assign 33 percent of EUIs to homicide. Moreover, between 2000 and 2011, the proportion of homicides that were initially classified as EUIs increased from 28 percent to 44 percent, with the most dramatic increase occurring after 2006 (Andreev et al., n.d.). The redistribution of EUIs resulted in a substantial elevation of the official mortality figures for homicide in the 2000–2011 period. For example, based on Andreev et al.'s estimates, the Russian age standardized homicide rate for 2011 is 20.9 per 100,000, which is nearly double the officially recorded value of 11.5 per 100,000. Furthermore, the percent increase between Andreev et al.'s estimated and official rates of homicides grew substantially from 41 percent in 2000 to 82 percent in 2011 with the most rapid rise happening after 2005. This means that the level of homicide in 2000 would have been about 41 percent higher than that reported by official vital statistics data, whereas the 2011 level of homicide would have been about 82 percent higher than that reported by the official statistics. This supports the concerns of some scholars (Gavrilova et al., 2008; Pridemore, 2003) about the quality of the Russian homicide data and the validity of the officially registered reduction in homicide mortality in Russia. According to Andreev et al.'s (n.d.) reclassification of deaths categorized as EUIs, the homicide rate in Russia appears to be 1.5 times to twice as high as the official figure and to decrease from 2002 to 2011 but at a much slower pace than suggested by the official vital statistics data.

Estimates of homicides by other researchers appear to be consistent with these findings. For example, according to Antonova's (2007) estimates, the actual number of homicides at ages 20–39 years was about 1.5 times higher than that registered by official data, and at ages 40–59 the actual number of homicides was nearly twice as high as the official figure. Semyonova and Antonova (2007) examined suspiciously high rates of deaths

among working people in Moscow in 2003 due to EUIs, falls and other accidents. Detailed analysis of certificates of death and reclassification of these categories of cause of death increased the number of homicides and moved this cause of death from the fourth to the second position in the ranking of injury-related deaths.

Offering their version of EUI redistribution and focusing on the most frequent combination of the type of injury and cause, Ivanova et al. (2013) suggested that the 2010 level of homicides of men aged 20–59 would have been about 94 percent higher than reported by official vital statistics, that is, about 23,000 deaths rather than 12,000 deaths respectively. For women, the 2010 level of homicide would have been 66 percent higher than that given by official statistics.

In this section we examined the main sources of data about homicide in Russia, that is, official police data and vital statistics data, and pointed to a number of issues that cast doubt on the accuracy of official data, especially in the 2000s. The most pronounced problems in both sources relate to a disproportionate increase of the categories with unspecified causes of death and deaths of undetermined intent in vital statistics data and a category of intentional grievous bodily harm leading to death in the police data. Although vital statistics data have appeared to be more accurate in Russia, in fact, both reporting systems seem to provide questionable data on homicide.

Potential incentives for misrepresenting homicide statistics

Clearly, there are ways to misrepresent the homicide data in Russia if there is a will for that. First, measurement of changes in the amount of crime is politically important and crime statistics are widely used to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies of crime control. In other words, there are pressures to have the crime statistics show certain things. In Russia, it appears there is political pressure to show that crime is being reduced, which would fit with President Putin's proclaimed 'dictatorship of law' (Walker, 2007).

Distortions of population statistics regarding homicide, suicide, child mortality, migration, prison population, hidden settlements (secret towns to develop nuclear industry) and other unsavory phenomena were pervasive under the Soviet regime (Tolts, 2012). USSR authorities unabashedly used these statistics as a tool of political propaganda. Distortion of population statistics has been a complex multi-level process. After Soviet leaders publicly announced specific numbers or expectations about population trends, it was common for the Central Statistical Administration to bend to pressure and adjust its numbers (Tolts, 2012). In contrast, President Boris Yeltsin seemed not to have the resources and the political interest to encourage the manipulation of the population data. Moreover, the 1990s are often perceived as a brief period of a greater tolerance toward freedom in different segments of life, for example the media, politics and culture. However, under Putin's regime, there is evidence of a return to practices similar to those in Soviet Russia. Putin's messages about strengthening law and order in the 2000s may well have been perceived and interpreted by the officials in the police, hospitals and statistics departments as a direct call for action to reduce violent crime statistics.

A second potential incentive for manipulating crime statistics comes from a vested interest that police officers have in lowering homicide rates due to the so-called 'stick' ('palochnaya') system. According to this system, police officers strive to show positive

performance and are less concerned about an absolute level of criminal cases. Furthermore, police face penalties for unsolved criminal cases, so there is a tendency for the police to officially register cases which can be easily solved or cases already solved at the moment of investigation (for similar problems in relation to economic crimes in Russia, see Yakovlev et al., 2013).

There are other potential factors that can explain manipulations with homicide data in Russia, including a lack of manpower and resources to conduct the required thorough investigation of deaths (especially of unidentified bodies and missing people), reliance on established practices of registering causes of death that are associated with under-reporting of violent deaths (e.g. using provisional death certificates (Gavroliva et al., 2008)), and a shift in priorities among police officers toward earning money through their status and away from doing their job well (this will be discussed in the next section). All these reasons seem likely to create an atmosphere conducive to under-representation of homicides.

The trends described by the homicide estimates, which differ substantially from the official statistics of homicide, require explanation. Drawing on the concept of a 'criminological transition' (Pridemore, 2007), according to which a country's crime rate and crime characteristics may change (or hold stable) over time depending on the socio-economic changes in the society, the next section will discuss the broader conditions in the Russian society in the 2000s and how they changed or remained stable relative to the 1990s and Soviet times and what implications they may have for the homicide rate.

Decivilizing process and violence in Russia

A theoretical framework that would include and appropriately address most of the factors mentioned above can be derived from Norbert Elias' (1978) civilizing process framework. In the first half of the 20th century, Elias developed the seminal framework that described a pattern of changes in western sensibilities since the late medieval period and linked them with the broader changes in social organization and modes of interaction. It is a general theory of social organization and development that synthesizes many sociological arguments. Recently it has been successfully applied in explaining changes in homicide. Specifically, this framework suggests that there has been a century-long 'civilizing process' that resulted in a major reduction in homicide since the late Middle Ages (Eisner, 2001; Pinker, 2011).

Elias was convinced that the civilizing process might be reversed and this may happen very rapidly through an abrupt change in a society. This 'decivilizing process' returns a society to a state of insecurity and danger, which existed earlier. Elias (1996) stated that the Holocaust and the other atrocities of German Nazis were an example of a decivilizing process. Arguably, Russia has undergone a decivilizing process in the wake of the collapse of its former government twice in the 20th century, once after the October Revolution in 1917 and again after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The decivilizing process theory suggests that the homicide rate is not declining at a pace suggested by the official data, but also offers alternative explanations for Russia's high and non-declining homicide rate. Therefore, this section will mainly explore how this framework can be used in the case of Russia. Future research should undertake

empirical testing of a decivilizing process framework in relation to the homicide rate and the homicide trend in Russia. Below we consider three main components of a decivilizing process in Russia, that is, weak state, decreased sensibilities to others' suffering and a crisis of marketization. We also assess how these three components may have contributed to homicide rates in contemporary Russia.

Weak state

According to Elias, one of the key processes that explains the changes in sensibilities and people's behavior and the ensuing decrease in violent crime is the emergence of centralized states and the concomitant monopolization of the use of force or what we call here the rise of the state or 'Leviathan' (Hobbes, 2010; Pinker, 2011). Elias posited that early modern governments increasingly suppressed private violence long resorted to by semi-independent feudal elites, accumulating a monopoly of legitimized force in the political community. Western countries became states of complex functioning, which shaped the internalized self-restraint in its citizens.

The specific mechanisms through which violent crimes and homicides increase in relation to the erosion of the state or the state with the lack of political legitimacy are loss of trust in political and civil society, which is associated with loosened social bonds and controls within society; the exertion of 'private justice' or 'self-help', that is, when crime becomes the tool of social control in the situation of 'unavailability of law'; and finally, violent emotions, such as frustration and distrust as a result of an illegitimate state and unfair distribution of services to citizens.

There is no doubt that Russian society in the 2000s struggled with the repercussions of the deep social-political and economic crisis of the 1990s, including the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the economic crisis of 1998. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that, although fragile and oil-dependent, Russia's economy rapidly grew and the average living standards increased after 1999. Some argued that Russia has become a 'normal middle-income country' with the typical problems of a country in transition (Shleifer and Treisman, 2005). However, a 'weakness' of the state in a decivilizing process framework refers not as much to the economic performance as to the function of social institutions, such as, for example, law enforcement. In this regard, many have pointed to multiple unsavory and adverse aspects of the Russian politics and business in the 2000s, for example, rampant corruption, organized crime and an established political culture of violence, among others. In order to strengthen the state, President Putin put forth three focal goals in 2000, that is, to establish a 'dictatorship of law', to restore the 'verticality of power' (in order to control the local powers from Moscow) and to defend sovereign democracy. Arguably, his campaign on Russia's sovereignty (not democracy) as a 'liberal empire' has had considerable success and increased nationalism. However, his other two objectives, 'verticality of power' and 'dictatorship of law', apparently failed, with implications for the crime situation in Russia.

Russian political scientist, sociologist and publicist Stanislav Belkovsky (2013) argues that Putin was unable to build a 'verticality of power'; rather, a 'horizontality of power' emerged, consisting of innumerable centers of power, in which big money merged with bureaucratic resources. For example, criminal collaboration of the local law enforcement

agencies with the local politicians and businesses kept hidden and unpunished systematic tortures and killings of the citizens in Kushchevka village for years. Other notorious examples of a failure to control corruption of local powers are the summit project at Vladivostok and the winter Olympic Games 2014 (Aron, 2014).

Promised by Putin and his administration, 'rule of law' has not been established in the 2000s in Russia. Instead of becoming a foundation of the state applicable to everybody, law was mainly used to constrain ordinary citizens and selective businessmen with their businesses. Putin further undermined the rule of law and fostered political arbitrariness by tolerating the 'political culture of violence' associated with notorious political killings (Walker, 2007). The police, as one of the central institutions intended to ensure the rule of law, turned its powers and resources to advance their own material interests, rather than to fight crime; this policing in Russia can best be described as 'predatory policing' (Gerber and Mendelson, 2008). Police misconduct, including police violence and police corruption, undermines a rule of law and democracy in Russia.

It is not surprising that in these circumstances many Russians hold negative perceptions of and have no trust in the police and other 'power institutions' (Semukhina and Reynolds, 2014; Zernova, 2012). This is important for our discussion of homicide, because the civilizing process theory in particular stresses the role of the state in decreasing violence not so much through the use of brute coercive power but through generating trust and internalized self-restraint in people. As Pinker (2011: 96) put it, '[a] Leviathan can civilize a society only when the citizens feel that its laws, law enforcement, and other social arrangements are legitimate, so that they don't fall back on their worst impulses as soon as Leviathan's back is turned'. And indeed, Russia's political legitimacy index—which has been associated with homicide rates (Nivette and Eisner, 2013)—is one of the lowest among other countries. Some of the mechanisms that can explain the association between low legitimacy and high homicide rates are low self-control and use of violence as self-help.

Above we have discussed some of the issues of the Russian state in the 2000s, which characterize it as rather a weak state. Although mainly inherited from the 1990s, some of these decivilizing processes seem to flourish under Putin's rule, for example, distrust of the police and the courts, and widespread corruption. In addition, the repressive power of the state toward political and economic opponents appears to have strengthened after 2000 relative to the 1990s. All these processes seem unlikely to be associated with a rapid decline in homicide in the 2000s, as suggested by the official data, and are rather expected to lead to the increase in the homicide rates.

Decreased sensibilities to others' suffering

The second process in Elias' theory, which is highly interrelated with the previous one, is the increasing social drive toward self-constraint, which, in turn, led to the cultivation of a deeply ingrained self-control that has burdened many impulsive behaviors, including violence, with feelings of shame and embarrassment. During this change, people became more sensitive toward others' suffering and more repulsed by others' expression of raw emotions and behaviors, such as anger, rage and open violence. This combination of changes is termed 'sensibilities' in Elias' framework.

Historically, from the court, new standards of self-control in social interaction then radiated outward to other parts of the society. At the same time, changes at the social level transformed into changes in individuals' behavior, including increasingly refined table manners, greater control and increasing privatization of reproductive life and bodily functions and greater restraint in the use of force. In other words, large-scale changes in social control as a result of the civilizing process are thus also accompanied by changes in 'habitus'. As a result of habitual self-restraint, reflexive understanding of an individual's own actions, those of others, their interrelationships and their consequences emerged. All this contributed to a decline in different kinds of interpersonal violence, including homicide (for a review, see Pinker, 2011).

People in Russia have experienced substantial shifts in expressing their true feelings and behaviors. In the Soviet time, people kept their true thoughts and spontaneous emotions suppressed and hidden out of fear of being discovered by the secret police and prosecuted by the KGB. After the fall of the Soviet Union, people seemed to start to express themselves more openly. Although largely spontaneous in nature, some of these emerging attitudes, particularly those related to hatred of others and closely linked to anger, are said to have been cultivated under the influence of coordinated propaganda efforts; this kind of propaganda appears to have been a tool to unify Russian society and to further its domestic and foreign policies (Shlapentokh, 2007). One of the most pervasive forms of mass consciousness in the 2000s has become xenophobia and nationalism (Pain, 2007; Sevortian, 2009; Verkhovsky, 2007). The percent of Russians openly expressing xenophobia increased from 20 percent in 1989 to nearly 60 percent in 2005 (Shlapentokh, 2007). Hatred of Chechens, Ukrainians, Georgians and 'real foreigners', especially Americans, exacerbated after 2000 (e.g. Petersson and Persson, 2011). Putin has contributed to these trends by resuscitating an 'all against us' attitude that included encouraging anti-American sentiments, manufacturing the enemies in and outside of Russia (Mendelson and Gerber, 2008) and generating nostalgic feelings about the great Soviet past, including the Second World War victory (Hutchings and Rulyova, 2009). In addition to xenophobia and nationalism, other forms of hatred and intolerance appear to have grown intensely after 2000. The most notorious of these are homophobia, as evidenced by the 2013 law banning the promotion of homosexuality, and intolerance/hatred of 'blasphemy' epitomized in the criminal case against 'Pussy riot'.

These perceptions have been confirmed in a recent study of the psychological well-being of Russian society (Urievich and Urievich, 2013). Conducted by the Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences and based on the evaluations given by 124 experienced psychologists from different regions of Russia, this study measured the presence of 35 positive and 35 negative characteristics of society in relation to three different periods, that is, 1981–1991 (before the collapse of the Soviet Union), 1992–2001 and 2002–2011. Quite unexpectedly for the authors of this psychological study, the period 1981–1991 appeared to have been perceived as the most positive in terms of psychological well-being, and the recent period 2001–2011 as the worst (all negative indicators increased, while positive indicators decreased); the period in the middle has been seen as a transition 'from good to evil'. In this study, many indicators, which point to the decivilizing process in Russia, have notably increased after 2001, that is, aggressiveness, hostility, brutality, malice, rudeness, xenophobia, violence, hatred, anxiety,

egoism, apathy and so on. At the same time, such positive characteristics as kindness, empathy, compassion, fairness, calmness, honesty and humanity decreased. Authors of the study conclude that positive economic changes (which are often seen as a most important characteristic of the 2000s) are not necessarily associated with improvements of the psychological characteristics of society. In fact, heightened economic stability rather uncovers deep psychological issues of contemporary Russian society.

Discussion of violence in Russia can hardly avoid mentioning a role of alcohol (Pridemore, 2002). However, alcohol-related harm in Russia is not due solely to the amount that Russians drink, but also to what and how they drink. Binge drinking, preference of distilled spirits (mainly vodka) to wine and beer, drinking home-made samogon, surrogates and non-beverage substances, drinking mainly in home kitchens and not bars and restaurants (for a review, see Lysova and Pridemore, 2010) can be seen as decivilizing aspects of the 'Russian drinking culture' (Stickley and Mäkinen, 2005). Together with prevailing emotions of anger, hostility and a lack of sympathy, Russian patterns of alcohol drinking appear to contribute to perpetration of violence and homicide.

Based on a decivilizing process argument, increased hostility and anger, xenophobia and homophobia, apathy and a lack of compassion in the 2000s are not likely to be associated with rapidly declining rates of crime and homicide, but rather with the opposite.

Crisis of marketization and criminalization of business

The third aspect of Elias' civilizing process, one that has unsurprisingly received far less attention from scholars, concerns the rise of 'commercial society' and what Clark (2012) terms 'market society'. The basic reasoning here is that growing market economy fosters interdependence because successful business requires good relationships with suppliers, agents, customers, creditors or debtors, among others. Therefore, businesses thrive on faith and credit, and eventually on understanding others' desires in the form of consumer preferences. The more people are involved in these extended networks, the higher the incentive to accept the constraints of such interdependence, and the lower the incidence of daily violence is likely to be. Clark (2012) elaborates this general argument and suggests three more specific channels through which new market norms might have been conveyed and contributed to declining violence rates in early modern Europe, that is, the urban, based on monetization criminal justice system, the merchant court system and the pro-mercantile rhetoric emanating from contemporary new media. First, monetization of the criminal justice system, that is, paying fines to the victims and their families, even for violent offenses, instead of using corporal and capital punishment (which preempted the problem of reintegration of offenders back into the community), replaced the law of vengeance by the law of personal interest. This crucial change arguably led to the formation of habitual prudent thinking, greater civic cohesion and respect for a broad rule-of-law culture rather than the crime-and-punishment system itself, and thus was likely to lead to a decline in personal violence. This point echoes one of Elias' focal arguments about the effect of social apparatus on self-constraints, which with time becomes an automatic habit.

Second, the merchant court system, including intense interaction between merchants and merchant judges, further solidified an interest-based rather than vengeance-based

model of human reciprocity (Clark, 2012). Finally, market–society norms shifted to encompass the ideas of individual liberty and mercantile dignity. Taken together, these processes were (and, arguably, still are) likely to lead to a growing depersonalization of human relationships, which in turn appears to be one of the causal mechanisms by which market relations may have lowered the level of violence in early modern Europe and continues to do so. In other words, ‘the state becomes an agent of pacification by providing a neutral third-party to the two parties locked in an honor-sensitive dispute’ (Clark, 2012: 127) and thereby mitigates the destructive ‘law of vengeance’. Indeed, recent studies provide evidence for the link between a rise of the ‘commercial state’ and a decrease in interpersonal violence in many countries (Mares, 2009; Pinker, 2011).

Russia’s marketization has been a turbulent process. The Russian market economy first got a chance to develop after the Soviet planned economy crashed in 1991. However, very quickly it became clear that weak government with the absence of an effective law enforcement system contributed to an outburst of criminal activity, including violent pressure on emerging private business in the 1990s. Moreover, in order to defend their property and resolve conflicts with their business partners, entrepreneurs had no choice but to rely on criminal groups (criminal ‘roofs’ or ‘krysha’) (Volkov, 2002), which resulted in the rapid growth of organized crime. However, in 2000 after Vladimir Putin came to power and economic growth in Russia took a new start, law enforcement officials at different agencies (Ministry of Interior Affairs, Federal Security Service, Federal Service of Tax Police, etc.) received their share in the provision of illegal protection to businesses (Gans-Morse, 2012). A new wave of violent pressure on business at all levels of authorities was launched in 2003, and by 2008 the role of gangsters was fully taken by policemen, investigators and prosecutors. This growing ‘state violence’ against business resulted in the rapid outflow of capital in 2008–2009 (Yakovlev et al., 2013).

As shown above, violence has been an important factor of economic development in Russia, and what is more important in terms of the decivilizing process framework is that a culprit was the state. In accordance with an argument that links strong market economy with a civilizing process resulting in a decline in violent crime, a rapid decrease in homicide in the 2000s is least expected in these circumstances in Russia. Violence-based interactions at the state level, predatory state policing and prosecution of businesses, increasing people’s distrust in courts and the police are most likely to support the ‘law of vengeance’, which along with the disrupted civic cohesion and dysfunctional rule-of-law culture would encourage the use of violence in disputes between individuals and groups in Russia.

Conclusion

This article explored the factors behind the precipitously declining homicide rates as demonstrated by the official data in Russia in the 2000s. First we examined and summarized the issues around homicide statistics in Russia, because there is a history of falsification and concealment of population data in the Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Recent studies, which employed sophisticated mathematical models to estimate more accurate rates of homicide, suggest that the homicide rate in the 2000s was much higher

than that reported by official crime and mortality data. While the official sources indicate that in 2002–2009 the homicide rate per 100,000 persons ranged between 19 (official police data) and 23 (official vital statistics data), the computed estimated rates ranged between 28 and 34 respectively. Moreover, while statistics from official sources demonstrate a rapid decline in homicide in the 2000s, the computed estimates suggest that the homicide rate held relatively steady (based on crime data) or declined at a much slower pace (based on mortality data) than reported by the official data. One of the contributions of this study is that it emphasizes the serious limitations of official homicide statistics in Russia, which is broadly used by both scholars and practitioners. These specious homicide data threaten the validity of the studies and the effectiveness of the policies that draw on these questionable homicide data. Future studies should continue to examine the validity of official homicide data and the concrete mechanisms of their falsification in order to improve the quality of homicide data.

At the same time, it should be noted that Russia is not the only country to experience issues with the official homicide statistics. UNODC's recent *Global Study on Homicide 2013* (UNODC, 2014) outlined the data availability and data quality issues in many other countries in the world, especially in Africa and Oceania. Also, official mortality data suffer from limitations in classification of external causes of death in some developed western countries, such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Denmark and the Czech Republic (Andreev et al., n.d.).

The computed estimates of the Russian homicide rate and the homicide trend in the 2000s required some explanation. We explored the potential of Norbert Elias' decivilizing process framework and its application to Russia and potentially elsewhere, but the format of this article did not allow us to empirically test this theory. Although increasingly used in the last two decades, this framework seems best to apply to long-term historical processes. At the same time, there have been attempts to explain more recent changes in crime and homicide rates, for example, in the second half of the 20th century (e.g. LaFree and Tseloni, 2006; Pinker, 2011). Moreover, this article employed what Elias referred to as a 'decivilizing process', which can happen rapidly in a relatively short period of time. Specifically, we focused on the three main components of the decivilizing process, which we argue originated in the Soviet time, worsened in the 1990s and then again in the 2000s, that is, weak state, decreased sensibilities about others' suffering and a crisis of marketization. Each of these decivilizing processes is unlikely to be associated with the rapid decrease in homicide in the 2000s. We argue that the concept of the decivilizing process sheds light on some nontrivial factors for homicide in addition to the traditional ones, such as inequality, alcoholism and unemployment. Moreover, theorizing in this article is not limited only to Russia and may be applicable to other countries that go through serious socio-economic and political changes. What the decivilizing process theory stresses is that economic hardships alone are not enough to explain changes in homicide rates and that other factors, which comprise the decivilizing process framework, also should be considered. It should be emphasized that our examination of the factors that deem to be causally relevant to explaining recent changes in homicide rates are not exhaustive and can leave out some other relevant factors that require further research.

Notes

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1. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this observation.

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