



Murder cases in the Republic of Kosovo (2020-2024): Classifications, trends and legal framework

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Abstract: Murder serves as a critical indicator of social dysfunction, where crime often replaces lawful conflict resolution. This study examines murder cases in the Republic of Kosovo from 2020 to 2024, analysing the patterns that lead to these murders over time. The research further evaluates the system of murder cases while comparing them to the current legal framework. The approach in this research uses a mixed-method approach, which includes interviews with the national police, media reports, police records, a legal framework, and analysis of psychological tendencies followed by offenders or potential offenders. The objective of the research is to understand murder as a pattern of violence and further distinguish between the different types of murders. The findings indicate a decline in completed murders, implying a shift in attempted murder, indicating that the attempted murders are not premeditated but occur impulsively, often in the heat of the moment, during interpersonal conflicts rather than organised planning or criminal enterprise. The study builds on criminological theories of violent crime and legal studies on murder cases in Kosovo, offering a perspective on murders. This study aims to contribute to criminological research and provide policy recommendations in legal and law enforcement responses to such crimes.

Keywords: murder; legal framework; psychological tendencies; offenders; Kosovo

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1. Introduction

Murder is one of the most severe forms of violence committed against the life of another human being. In post-war countries such as Kosovo, where the socio-economic situation and the transitional challenges exist, the limited law enforcement capacity creates the opportunity for criminals to use it to their advantage by operating with illicit activities. Such vulnerabilities create social instabilities. Criminological research has emphasized the importance of intent, premeditation, and planning in differentiating murder from other patterns of homicide. Smit, de Jong, and Bijleveld (2012) note that in some jurisdictions, murder is distinguished from the broader category of ‘homicide’ and refers specifically to the premeditated killing of another human being. Here, premeditation is used to describe planning the act of killing.

The connection between crime and justice has always played a coherent role in shaping society. More broadly, Garland (2014) argues that patterns of murder and punishment are connected to social order. Multiple international studies support the view that murder rarely occurs spontaneously; somewhat, personal, situational, and environmental factors align to create an opportunity for lethal violence. Globally, crime statistics further demonstrate that a country’s murder rate often correlates with its level of development, forming a vicious cycle in which underdevelopment elevates murder rates, which in turn impedes social and economic progress. However, high murder rates in some regions cannot be explained by development alone, highlighting the influence of additional social, cultural, and political factors (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019).

Although previous researchers have examined violent crimes in Kosovo, there remains a notable gap covering the period of 2020–2024, a period marked by changing policing strategies and differentiating crime patterns.

As a post-war society, Kosovo exemplifies dynamics through which socio-economic and legal factors contribute to criminal behavior. The city of Peja is very significant due to its connection to the Montenegro border, a known route for illicit activity.

The research focuses on explaining the gap by providing a data-driven perspective on murder patterns in Kosovo from 2020 to 2024 while integrating criminological theory with legal analysis and focusing on the patterns of premeditated murder and impulsive murder, identifying contextual factors that contribute to lethal violence, while taking into consideration how legal institutions provide mechanisms of defense. The findings aim to provide further support for law enforcement

practitioners and support future researchers in enhancing responsive policies against lethal crime.

2. Methods

The study consisted of qualitative and quantitative analyses.

The quantitative analysis consists of the examination of official statistical data provided by the Kosovo police, covering murder cases from the period of 2020–2024. These data were defined by categorisation by legal offence type, making it possible to compare across the years and to identify observable trends.

Meanwhile, the qualitative component consisted of structured interviews with five police officers from the Serious Crime and Investigation unit in the city of Peja. The interviews described insights into situational patterns, offender characteristics, and challenges that are faced by police officers while investigating murder related offences. The professionals were selected based on their professional experience and expertise from the serious crime unit.

The second stage involved the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts to identify psychological, social, and situational factors that align with the patterns of these kinds of crimes. With the interpretation of the findings, it was possible to provide a richer interpretation of these kinds of murder patterns.

In addition to the interviews, supplementary information was provided through personal communication. These communications offered clarification of investigative procedures and additional details the support the interpretation of interview data.

There were ethical considerations maintained throughout the study, whereas no personal data was disclosed, and the use of the data provided by the police of Kosovo was authorized for academic research purposes.

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. Stage one included descriptive statistical methods, which were applied to identify the changes in the frequency and classification of different types of murder over the five-year period.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Legal Definitions of Homicide – Murder

Crime in general has been a significant threat to society. The crime that is considered one of the most hideous crimes includes taking the life of another human being. One very important factor is also intent, which in the offender is typically a condition for homicide. The intention of the offender should be aimed at the consequence of his act, in this case, the death of the victim (Smit, de Jong, & Bijleveld, 2012, p. 9). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023) report, nearly 40 per cent of global homicides are connected to crime, mainly organized crime and gang-related violence.

According to the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS, 2015), intentional homicide is defined as ‘unlawful death inflicted upon a person with the intent to cause death or serious injury’. This definition contains three elements characterizing the killing of a person as intentional homicide:

- 1. Objective element:** The killing of a person by another person.
- 2. Subjective element:** The intent of the perpetrator to kill or seriously injure the victim.
- 3. Legal element:** The unlawfulness of the killing means that the law considers the perpetrator liable for the unlawful death (legal element). This includes homicide, honour killing, serious assault leading to death, death because of terrorist activities, femicide, infanticide, extrajudicial killings, and more.

3.2. International Classification of Murder

In conflict situations, it is often difficult to disentangle lethal violence that is part of a conflict (including deaths from war operations), or of a lower-intensity continuation of conflict, from homicidal violence (both by combatants and non-combatants). Similarly, it is sometimes challenging to separate typical combatant groups from organised crime groups and terrorist organisations, and, by extension, the deaths associated with their violent actions. Therefore, the international classification of crimes for statistical purposes, the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (2023), provides a typology for disaggregation according to the ‘situational context’ of murders. This typology is reflected in the way the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime collects data from member states

through the United Nations Survey on crime trends and the operation of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS), which divides murder into three broad categories: Murder related to criminal activities, Interpersonal murder, and Sociopolitical murder. Whereas the divided groups of murderers are divided on:

a. murder related to criminal activities is divided into murder related to organised criminal groups and gangs, on the one hand, and murder related to other criminal activities (for example, robbery), on the other.

b. Interpersonal murder is divided into murders perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members and other interpersonal murders perpetrated outside the family context (for example, killings perpetrated by acquaintances or neighbors).

c. Sociopolitical murder is divided into murder related to social prejudice, political aims, civil unrest, and other sociopolitical agendas (for example, vigilante killings, unlawful killings by the police, or killings resulting from communalism, casteism, and class conflict).

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019), globally, homicide accounts for many more deaths than conflict-related killings and terrorist killings combined. Since there is a difference between conflict-related deaths and intentional homicide, **the intent** determines whether the count is homicide or not. Meanwhile, according to the studies, the evaluation has both subjective and a legal element. When concentration is on homicide, there is also a trajectory that pushes through to act, concluding with violence, which in the end can be lethal. Murder is not limited to people living on the margins of society; instead, it can affect all people, irrespective of their age, sex, ethnicity and socio-economic background (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019).

3.3. Psychological Perspectives on Homicide–Murder

Understanding the characteristics of offenders requires a psychological perspective.

The Big Five Model of Personality suggested that five domains largely account for individual differences in personality including extraversion; openness; neuroticism; agreeableness; and conscientiousness (Brown, 2016).

Furthermore, a meta-analysis on personality and antisocial behavior has concluded that individuals who commit crime tend to be self-centered, hostile, adhere to

unconventional values, beliefs, and have difficulty controlling their impulses (Traynham, Kelley, Long & Britt, 2019).

As Kocsis & Palermo (2016) contend, among the many variables assessed in psychological testing are the person's emotional stability, sociability, values, consistency, reliability, sexual identity, anger, hostility, impulsiveness, compulsiveness, and the presence or absence of mental disorders. Therefore, criminal conduct is recognized as a violation of the norms of conduct.

Meanwhile, Collins (2009) argues that there are many forms of violence, and simple theories will not be able to explain them all. He further disclosed that domestic abuse does not have exact causes, taking as examples dueling, player violence in sports, war, armed robbery, or ethnic massacre. There is no theory of individual motives for violence that can be able to explain why these violent actions happen. He further argues that these kinds of motivations are diverse and further explains that most violent actors are incompetent to complete their actions, ending mostly in attempts and abortive missions.

Cooney (2009) argues that one should not look at what people say or think, but at what they do, adopt a sociological rather than a philosophical perspective, and the most striking feature of human killing is the sheer variability it evokes.

Individuals with psychopathic personality traits have lower levels of self-regulation, are manipulative, impulsive, and unable to feel remorse or guilt (Boccio & Beaver, 2016).

Therefore, to determine whether conflict-related deaths should be counted as intentional homicide or not, the intent of the perpetrator and the legality of the killing need to be determined; in other words, the evaluation has both a subjective and legal element.

3.4. Regional and Socio-Legal Context

According to Kalac (2021), the current legal transposition of the European Union's *acquis communautaire* throughout Southeastern Europe in many ways resembles the legal "Europeanization" and unification process that took off back in the nineteenth century. The region's patronage legacy and culture of working around the official system, rather than through it, even though they damage the rule of law and fuel corruption, should not be seen entirely in a negative light.

Further, Kalac (2020) argues that there is no doubt that, in terms of criminal policy, we have been living in an era of pre-crime for quite some time now. Whether we like it or not, times have changed and so has the general position on concepts of (criminal) guilt, dangerousness, and liability.

Moreover, by understanding the broad types of homicide, there is the ultimate question of the characteristics of these kinds of crimes. Another very important perspective is also the connection to the psychological patterns.

4. Results

4.1. National Trends in Murder (2020–2024)

The analysis of murder cases in Kosovo from 2020 to 2024 reveals both national trends and city-specific patterns. The quantitative data obtained from the Kosovo Police provided insight into the frequency, classification, and trends of murder cases across the country. At the same time, qualitative interviews with police officers in Peja offered a deeper understanding of situational factors and challenges in addressing these offences.

Table 1 provides an overview of criminal offences associated with the annual distribution of murder from 2020 to 2024. The data includes the different types of homicide—murder according to the Criminal Code No. 06/ L-074, ranging from intentional to negligent. Over the period of five years, the number of murder cases decreased from 14 in 2020 to only 2 in 2024.

Table 1. Criminal Offences of Murder in the Republic of Kosovo (2020–2024)

Criminal Offences	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Murder	14	10	5	10	2
Attempted Murder	97	96	88	118	112
Aggravated Murder	15	18	14	14	14
Attempted Aggravated Murder	16	17	9	19	17
Murder by negligence	1	1	2	2	0
Infanticide (Murder of an infant during childbirth)	0	0	0	0	1

Source: Data adapted from Confirmation of personal data and criminal record status [Unpublished document], by Kosovo Police, 2025

As shown in Table 1, attempted murder cases remained consistently high over the years and showed a higher number in 2023, with 118 cases, and in 2024, with 112 cases. Relating closely to the topology of the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (2015) and relating to the attempt on interpersonal murder, which as mentioned above, is divided into murders perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members and other interpersonal murders perpetrated outside the family context (for example, killings perpetrated by acquaintances or neighbors).

Further, meeting the characteristics of intentional murder, and particularly the intent of the perpetrator to kill or seriously injure the victim (subjective element), since the attempt fails to be executed. Further suggesting that no theory of individual motives for violence will explain much of what happens, not only because motivations for violence are diverse, but rather because most attempts at violence are abortive and most violent actors are incompetent to execute what they have initiated.

Meanwhile, aggravated murder remained stable with 14 cases in the last three years. As for attempted aggravated murder, there was a change showing a decrease in the number of cases from 2023 to 2024. In 2023, there were 19 cases, and in 2024, there were 17 cases, resulting in a decrease of 2 cases.

Murder by negligence, which includes the cause of death through carelessness without intent, in 2020–2021, there was only one case per year. As for 2022–2023,

there were only two cases per year, while in 2024, there were no cases reported. Notably, infanticide is defined as the killing of a newborn during childbirth or shortly after childbirth.

In the first four years, there were no cases. Even though it is a rare offence and is legally distinguished from the other types of murder due to psychological and social circumstances, in 2024, there was only one case of infanticide.

The interesting part is that at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, the world faced a rapidly spreading virus, named SARS-CoV-2. The virus spread promptly, and the treatment was unknown. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 to be a global pandemic. The first case of COVID-19 in Kosovo was registered later than in other regional countries (Krasniqi, 2020). Despite movement restrictions, the number of attempted murder cases remained high.

Supporting Hashani's (2021) observation that, at the national level, there was a decrease in property crimes during the pandemic. Further, even theft offences, aggravated theft, and the criminal offence of robbery, compared to the previous years, were fewer cases reported to the Kosovo Police during the pandemic. Suggesting that even with all the movement restrictions by the Kosovo police due to the pandemic, there were 97 attempted murder cases, showing that the interest in intent to cause fatal harm persisted, and followed with 96 cases of attempted murder in 2021.

This supports the observation that while general crime declined due to movement restrictions, cases of attempted murder persisted, indicating the shift toward more violent crimes with the intent to cause lethal harm.

4.2. City-level Analysis: Peja

In Table 2, the analysis shifts to the city of Peja, providing an overview of criminal offences of murder in a border-area municipality. The study narrows to the city level in order to better understand local crime patterns. Peja, which is a transit route toward Montenegro, is of particular interest, as its proximity to the border may offer offenders involved in illicit crimes easier opportunities to flee law enforcement authorities.

Table 2. Criminal Offences of Murder in the city of Peja- Republic of Kosovo (2020–2024)

Criminal Offences	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Murder	2	1	2	0	0
Attempted Murder	13	15	5	12	14
Aggravated Murder	0	3	2	2	4
Murder by negligence	1	0	0	0	0
Infanticide (Murder of an infant during childbirth)	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Data adapted from Confirmation of personal data and criminal record status [Unpublished document], by Kosovo Police, 2025

Table 2 provides an overview of criminal offences in the city of Peja. Starting with murder cases, in the years 2023 and 2024, there were no cases reported. As a specific municipality, it shows that the focus was on attempted murder, with the highest number of cases. Aggravated murder shows a slight increase from two cases to four cases in 2024, following a murder by negligence, which shows only one case in 2020.

Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the highest numbers in attempted murders. The data indicate that there were no cases of murder, while there were 4 cases of aggravated murder, which include killings that meet one or more of the following criteria: the victim is a child, a pregnant woman, or a family member, the act is committed in cruel, deceitful or premeditated manner, it is motivated by material gain, revenge, or the intent to commit or conceal another crime and other aggravating circumstances specified by the criminal code of Kosovo (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2019). The results of the city of Peja also meet the criteria of the topology under group b, which presents the traits of interpersonal murder criteria.

4.3. Qualitative Insights from Peja

Furthermore, during the interviews with the police officers of the city of Peja, there were traits of offenders mentioned that meet the criteria of Kocsis & Palermo (2016), which suggests that among many variables assessed in psychological testing are the person's:

- Emotional instability, impulsiveness, and hostility.

- Obsessive-compulsive traits.
- Difficulty in providing adequate support for domestic violence victims.

The interviews also revealed systemic challenges: institutional failures to provide protection for vulnerable women, as evidenced by Amnesty International's (2023) report on Domestic violence in Kosovo. It is reported that most cases of domestic violence are reported by women and girls. Nevertheless, there is no sufficient support for vulnerable categories. It should be noted that these data represent only reported cases, excluding unreported incidents, cases disclosed informally to the police, or cases that did not proceed with a formal police investigation.

4.4. Legal Framework

From a legal perspective, the analysis follows the categories of murder offences defined in the Criminal Code No. 06/L-074. Therefore, to understand the Republic of Kosovo's legal framework, particularly the Criminal Code, it is essential to contextualize and correlate with the statistical findings. In Kosovo's Criminal Code, the term murder (*vrasja*) is the formal term, and the code does not use a separate term like "homicide", which is used in common-law systems. The criminal code No. 06/L-074 of the Republic of Kosovo, in chapter XVI in criminal offences against life and body, defines the different types of 'murder' as follows,

Article 172

Murder

Whoever deprives another person of life shall be punished by imprisonment of no less than five (5) years.

Article 173

Aggravated Murder

1. Shall be punished by imprisonment of no less than ten (10) years or by life imprisonment. The person who:

- 1.1. Deprives a child of life;
- 1.2. Deprives a pregnant woman of life;
- 1.3. Deprives a family member of life;
- 1.4. Deprives another person of life in a cruel or deceitful manner;

- 1.5. Deprives another person of life and, at the same time, intentionally endangers the lives of one or more other persons;
- 1.6. Deprives another person of life with the intention of gaining material benefits;
- 1.7. Deprives another person of life with the intention of committing or concealing another criminal offence, or to prevent the person from giving testimony or providing information to the police or during criminal proceedings;
- 1.8. Deprives another person of life out of ruthless revenge or other low motives, including revenge for giving testimony or providing information to the police or during criminal proceedings;
- 1.9. Deprives an official person of life during the exercise of official duties or in connection with official duties;
- 1.10. Deprives another person of life motivated by nationality, language, religion or lack of religion, skin color, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or because of their connection to persons with any of these protected characteristics;
- 1.11. Intentionally commits two or more murders, except for acts covered under articles 174 and 176 of this Code;
- 1.12. Deprives another person of life and has previously been convicted of murder, except for acts covered under articles 174 and 176 of this Code; or
- 1.13. Preparatory acts for any of the subparagraphs of paragraph 1 of this article shall be punishable.

Article 174

Murder committed in a state of severe mental distress.

Whoever deprives another person of life in a state of severe mental distress, caused without their fault by an attack, mistreatment, or grave insult by the deceased person, shall be punished by imprisonment from one (1) to ten (10) years.

Article 175

Murder by Negligence

Whoever unintentionally deprives another person of life through negligence shall be punished by imprisonment from six (6) months to five (5) years.

Article 176

Murder of an infant during childbirth

A mother who deprives her own infant of life during childbirth or immediately after birth, while still under the disturbance caused by childbirth, shall be punished by imprisonment from three (3) months to three (3) years.

According to the articles of the criminal code in Kosovo, sentencing is determined.

5. Discussion

The analysis of murder cases in Kosovo from 2020 to 2024 provides insights into trends, offender characteristics, and the effectiveness of the current legal framework. The pattern of data shows a notable decline in completed murders, while attempted murders remained consistently high. This pattern shows that while lethal outcomes have decreased, the intent to commit lethal acts persisted. These findings align with criminological theories describing the role of intent and premeditation in completed murders from attempted murders (Smit, de Jong & Bijleveld, 2012).

The dominance of attempted murders, particularly taking into consideration the interpersonal nature, indicates that many violent acts occur impulsively during conflicts rather than through organized planning. This observation aligns with Collins (2009), who argues about human violence and how it often results in abortive attempts. Interviews with police officers of the city of Peja further highlight that offenders show such traits as emotional instability, impulsiveness, and obsessive-compulsive tendencies (Kocsis & Palermo, 2016).

From the city-level analysis, particularly from the city of Peja, it reveals that border municipalities may face different challenges due to the proximity to border routes. While completed murders were low, attempted murders remained high, and aggravated murders remained notable, indicating situational opportunity meeting systemic limitations of the law enforcement, and concluding on illicit activities that need early prevention. As institutional shortcomings, including limited protection for domestic violence victims, further noted by the report of (Amnesty International, 2023), contribute to persistent violence.

From a legal perspective, the Criminal Code No. 06/ L -074 provides a clear legal framework, differentiating the different types of murder. However, the high prevalence of attempted murder highlights the need for targeted preventive measures and more enhanced enforcement strategies, particularly in high-risk areas, indicating also cities near cross-border areas. The data suggests that there is a need for early-stage conflict resolution, domestic violence prevention, offender rehabilitation in

early stages, which can enhance the chances of reducing attempted murder and complete murder. Supporting also OSCE Mission in Kosovo (2024) report on the adjudication of domestic violence cases in Kosovo, where it was stated that courts failed to assess basic aggravating circumstances properly, such as whether the convicted person had committed repeated offences against the same victim (s), the age of the victim (s), relevant prior criminal convictions of the convicted person, and whether any abuse of trust occurred. The practices depart from the framework provided by the Supreme Court's Sentencing Guidelines and it is mentioned that they likely go against international standards.

6. Conclusion

The study of murder-related offences in Kosovo for the period of 2020-2024 reveals a notable decline in completed murders, while attempted murders remained consistently high. This suggests that, although lethal outcomes decreased, the intent to commit fatal harm persisted, reflecting criminological theories emphasizing premeditation and offender's intent (Smit, de Jong, & Bijleveld, 2012) Furthermore, theoretical perspectives and particularly those of Collins and Conney, provide a useful interpretation on why violent encounters frequently result in unsuccessful attempts despite clear intentions to commit lethal violence. Considering also the data from the city of Peja, which also showed a useful lens on offenders engaging in lethal violence, which also ended in higher numbers of attempted murder cases, illustrating how interpersonal conflict, offender impulsivity can influence violent crime patterns.

These findings have direct implications for Kosovo's criminal justice system. They highlight the need to reassess the legal framework, procedural safeguards, and sentencing in proportion with the Criminal Code. As for high-risk municipalities such as the city of Peja, there is a need for targeted legislative and policy interventions that should concentrate on preventing mechanisms before violent confrontations escalate. Although the numbers are not very high, the upward trend could signal a shift in crime severity. Moreover, the data point toward the need for targeted legislative offences, particularly concerning high-risk violent offences, to enhance both legal certainty and preventive effectiveness. Targeted legal and policy interventions, particularly those aimed at early stages, enhanced domestic-violence protection, and improved investigative capacity, are essential to confront violence before escalation.

The observations that were made should not only be of relevance to provisions of the Criminal Code but also to future legislative initiatives and policy planning in the field of serious violent crime. From a criminological and doctrinal standpoint, there is an inquiry into the adequacy of current statutory definitions, sentencing practices, and the principle of proportionality under Kosovo's criminal code. Ultimately, the study provides empirical evidence that can be of relevance to future legal reforms and criminological research.

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