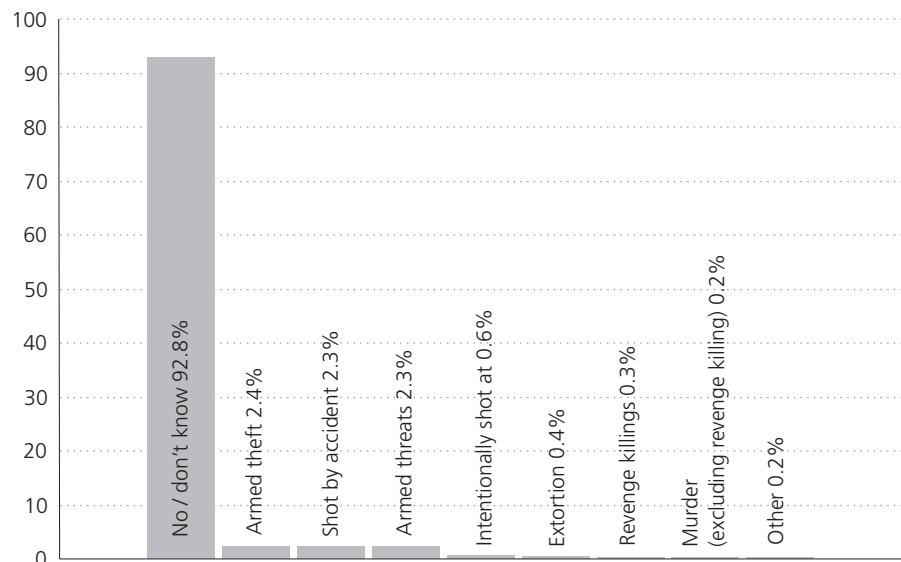


Impacts of SALW

ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS of this report, and one which gives a useful overview of a range of firearm-related impacts on Albanian society, was that 7.2 percent of respondents to the ISO 2005 Survey stated that they or a member of their family had been a victim of a crime in the previous twelve months, with almost all of these (at least 84.7 percent, not including murder, extortion and 'other' crimes) involving a firearm. As the chart below shows, armed theft, being shot at by accident and armed threats together represented the most commonly suffered misuses of firearms, while 0.6 percent of respondents reported that a member of their family had been intentionally shot at, and 0.5 percent could report a revenge killing or other kind of murder amongst their family members (the vast majority of which are likely to have been committed with a firearm).¹¹⁶

Were you or a member of your family a victim of any of the following types of crimes in the last twelve months?



These findings can be compared with those of a 2004 report entitled *Human Security in Albania*, in which it was reported that 2.4 percent of respondents had been involved in a firearms incident, while 34 percent of respondents stated that they thought that an accidental or intentional shooting was a high and likely security risk in Albania.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Reportedly, in 1998 87.6 percent of intentional injuries causing death in Albania were inflicted with a firearms. Krug E G et al, World Report on Violence and Health, (World Health Organisation, 2002).

¹¹⁷ Institute for Contemporary Studies and Center for Rural Studies, Human Security in Albania, (Prepared for the United Nations Development Programme, November 2003), p 42.

Despite the limited amount and reliability of data available on the mental and physical impacts of guns in Albania, the most recent data available suggests that crime in Albania is higher than the average for East-Central Europe. Armed robbery and banditry, which was common after the turbulence of 1997, is a diminishing but serious threat, and while it is hard to assess the implications of the figures, reported crime is also steadily rising. Likewise, the proportion of suicides committed with firearms in Albania was significantly higher than global averages when last measured in 1998. This suggests (but does not prove) the negative impact of the accessibility of guns, particularly where property disputes, jealousy, alcoholism and depression generate a risk of violence or suicide. Such an impact is also suggested by the analysis of qualitative information in Albanian media reports on firearms incidents from 2002–2005. There is little reliable monitoring of domestic violence, but the information available suggests that such violence may be alarmingly widespread, and involve the use of SALW on a regular basis. Better information gathering on these issues would help to clarify the most effective course of action in these areas.

Also significant is the clear indication from information supplied by two hospitals that admissions related to firearms are steadily decreasing, which may reflect the success of the weapons collections since 1997 in decreasing the accessibility of weapons. Likewise, the MOI figures for reported murders and blood feud killings indicate a similar steady decline. Furthermore, the focus groups conducted for this report revealed a sense that ‘good citizens’ are, by and large, fairly safe from violent crime. It appears, then, that the level of violent crime is decreasing in Albania, and is not a daily disturbance to the average Albanian household. One view of the significance and impact of weapons possession in contemporary Albania was offered by a MFA interviewee, who noted that if one ranks human security threats in Albania, weapons come out below all the others – like pollution, it could be categorised as a constant but low-intensity threat.¹¹⁸ However, with at least 6.1 percent of families stating in the household survey that they had experienced a firearms-related crime in the past twelve months, it remains clear that further progress in reducing the accessibility, visibility and misuse of weapons is necessary, in tandem with other measures to increase public safety and confidence, and continues to have the potential to enhance the downward trend in violent crime.

2.1 Firearms fatalities

Unfortunately, as there is no system for recording and monitoring what proportion of overall murders is committed with firearms, the most detailed recent national statistics for firearms fatalities that the research team was able to obtain were those for 1998 which were used in the World Health Organisation’s *World Report on Violence and Health* (2002).¹¹⁹ According to these figures, 741 of these 846 intentional injuries that led to death, homicides, and suicides involved a firearm.¹²⁰ In other words, 87.6 percent of manslaughter, murder and suicide cases involved a firearm. Put another way, there were 22.1 firearm fatalities per 100,000 people. Of these 741 cases, 591 were reported as homicides, 98 as suicides, 50 as unintentional and 2 undetermined.

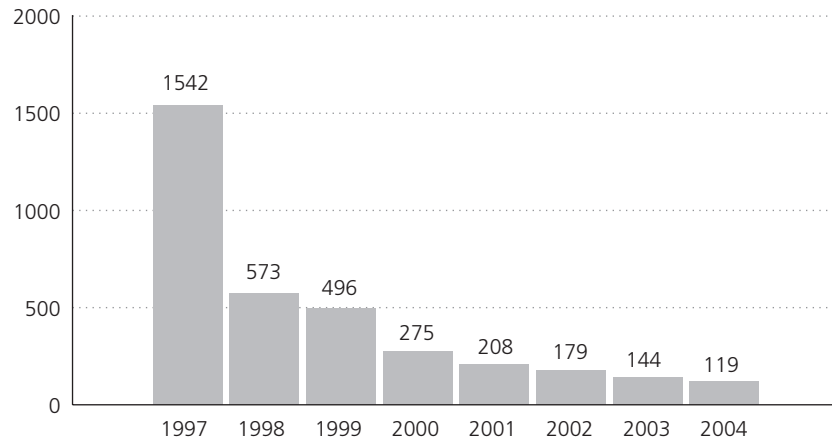
2.1.1 Firearm-related homicides

Of the 660 murders reported in the WHO report, 89.5 percent were committed with a firearm. However, possibly because of problems with reporting mechanisms, the WHO reports 87 more murders than the then MOPO in 1998 (as shown in the chart opposite).

¹¹⁸ Interview, MFA official, 24 April 2005.

¹¹⁹ Krug E G et al, *World Report on Violence and Health*, (World Health Organisation, 2002).

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p 322.

Reported murders since 1997 (Source: MOPO, op cit, pp.73–74)

Although there has been a continual decrease in murders since 1997, in the absence of indicative statistics the research team are unable to report on whether the percentage of homicides committed with a firearm has increased or decreased from the 1998 level of 89.5 percent. However, according to a Tirana police report, in 2004 twenty murders were committed in the city using firearms, as well as one armed robbery which resulted in a fatality.¹²¹ In addition, there were a further 93 reported attempted murders, 22 injuries and 399 other crimes against the individual in which firearms were involved. The report also noted an increase in robberies and suicides using swords, knives and ‘cold steel’.

The mayor of Fier, Baftjar Zeqo, informed the research team that the majority of murders in Fier were carried out with firearms.¹²² He believed that these murders were revenge killings carried out by members of organised crime groups. According to Robert Metaj, the head surgeon at Fier hospital, the number of firearms-related admissions increases during the summer, a period that he states is also known for the return of Albanian émigrés to Fier.¹²³ In his opinion, the increase is the result of vendetta or ‘criminal business’ murders. He also stated that the number of females killed by firearms, and those reported to him as suicides, has been rising in recent years. At the same time, the number of injuries incurred through celebratory fire at weddings and other family festivities appears to be falling. In general, however, firearms fatalities are the second most common type of injury or casualty after traffic fatalities in Fier. In Berat, we were informed that of the three murders committed in the first six months of 2005, one had been committed with a firearm, in line with recent trends for murders in the region around Berat in which a third have been committed by firearms.¹²⁴ However, in Gjirokaster, unregistered firearms were thought to have been used in only around ten percent of recent accidental and intentional injuries and fatalities.¹²⁵

2.1.2 Firearm-related suicides

According to the WHO’s *World Report on Violence and Health* (2002), at 2.9 per 100,000, the rate for suicides committed with a firearm in Albania was lower than levels in North America, but higher than other areas of the world according to data for the period 1997–1999, as the following chart demonstrates.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Source: ‘Survey on the collection and surrendering of weapons, ammunitions and other military materials during the 1997–2004 period’, Police Directorate of Tirana, 2 March 2005.

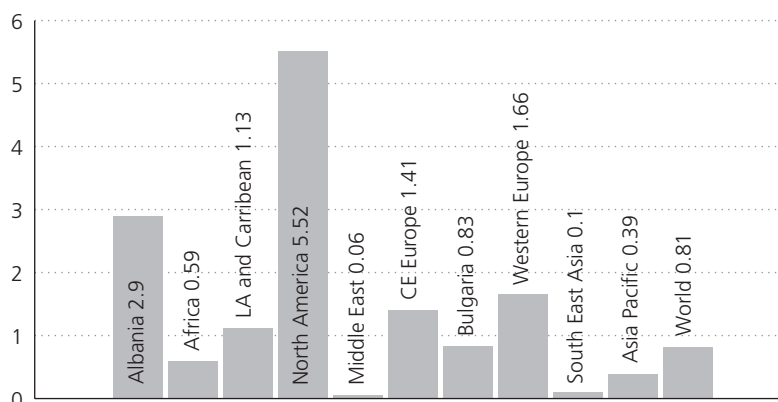
¹²² Interview, local government official, 12 May 2005.

¹²³ Interview, Metaj, 15 May 2005.

¹²⁴ Interview, hospital official, 29 July 2005.

¹²⁵ Interview, hospital official, 6 August 2005.

¹²⁶ Op cit Krug et al. p 322.

Firearm suicide rates per 100,000 population (Source: WHO, 2002)

According to the WHO report, in 1998 just under twenty percent of intentional killings were suicides, while around thirteen percent of all firearms fatalities were suicide cases. Overall, Albania's suicide rate of 6.5 per 100,000 in 1998¹²⁷ was below the European average (13.6 for males and 4.3 for females 1999–2001).¹²⁸ The table below gives the WHO figures for overall numbers of suicides in 1998 by gender and age group, and indicates that 98 of a total of 165 suicides were committed with firearms.

Table 1: Suicides committed in Albania in 1998¹²⁹

	Female	Male	Total
Suicides	61	104	165
Suicides aged 5–14	1	2	3
Suicides aged 15–29	42	46	88
Suicides aged 30–44	9	28	37
Suicides aged 45–59	4	18	22
Suicides aged 60+	4	10	14
Suicides per 100,000 population	3.6	7.1	6.5
Suicides committed with a firearm	–	–	98

With improved epidemiological surveillance, more accurate data gathered over several years would enable more confident analysis of overall trends. In the absence of such surveillance, the research team were unable to generate an estimate of suicides committed in Albania using firearms since 1998. However, the WHO figures for 1998, which show that over 59 percent of suicides in Albania were committed with a firearm in that year. This is well above the worldwide average of 19.5 percent for countries where data was available for the 2002 WHO report,¹³⁰ and suggests the hypothesis that access to firearms was too easy for those at risk of suicide at this time. This is known to have been the case, as the figures refer to the year after the looting of over half a million SALW. The effect of subsequent collections on the firearm suicide rate, cannot be examined without more routine information gathering and reporting mechanisms being in place among healthcare providers.

The figures from the media content analysis undertaken for this Survey, (included below in section 2.5), indicate that on average 20.2 reports of firearm related suicides appeared in the newspaper *Shekulli* per year in the period 2002–15 May 2005.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Op cit Taylor, Phillips and Bogozavljevic, p 30.

¹²⁹ Op cit Krug et al, pp 314 and 315.

¹³⁰ This is the percentage of the aggregated total of all suicides which were committed with firearms in countries where firearm-related suicides were recorded, rather than a mean of the rates in countries listed, calculated from data in op cit Krug et al, pp 314–323.

¹³¹ The average takes into account the monthly rate in the first 4.5 months of 2005.

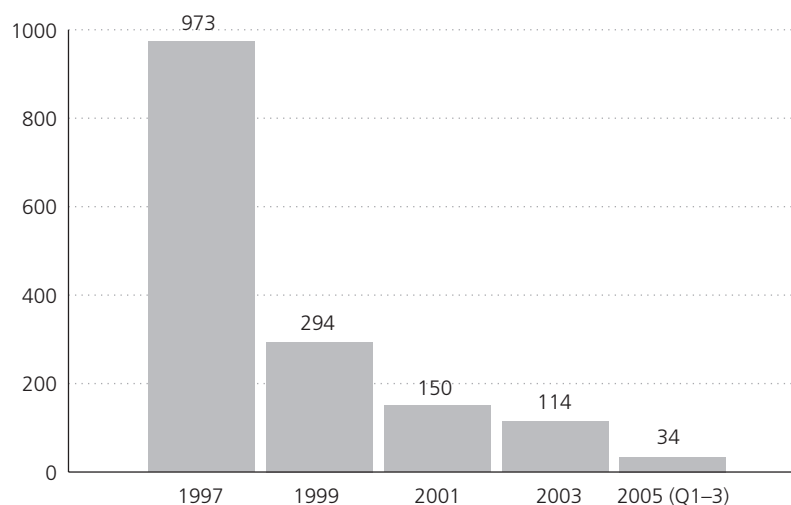
2.1.3 Firearm-related accidental deaths

As stated above, 2.3 percent of Survey respondents reported that they or a member of their family had been shot at by accident in the previous twelve months, while the WHO reported in 2002 that in Albania in 1998 there were 50 unintentional deaths caused by firearms (a rate of 1.5 per 100,000 population). The figures for accidental shootings from Fier hospital which are shown in section 2.2 suggest a slight decline in numbers for the period 2000–2004, but the accuracy of the classification as ‘accidental’ is correctly applied to the numbers of cases shown. The absence of stories about firearms-related accidents from the media survey findings suggests that the danger of accidental shooting presented by firearms is under-reported – especially if the rate of 50 deaths per year from this cause has been maintained since data was last collected on the topic in 1998.

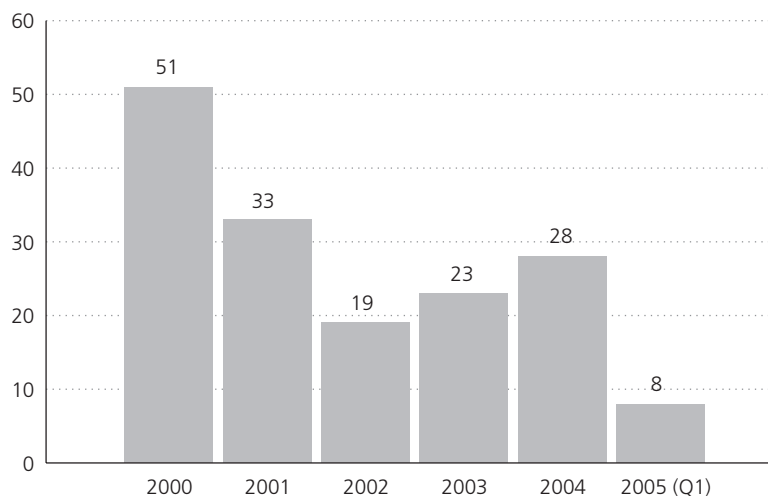
2.2 Firearms injuries

Although it was not possible to obtain authoritative national statistics on firearms injuries and fatalities, two individual hospitals, the Military Hospital in Tirana and Fier Hospital, did provide statistics which provide a reliable impression of the overall rate of injury. The pattern of total injuries recorded by the two hospitals in recent years (in the case of the Military Hospital for 1997–September 2005, and in the case of Fier Hospital for 2000–March 2005) is shown in the charts below as one of gradual decline.

Firearms injuries recorded at the Military Hospital 1997–September 2005



Firearms injuries recorded at the Fier Hospital 2000–September 2005



The statistics for the Military Hospital in Tirana include most cases of firearms injury from Central Albania, but only severe firearms injuries from the North and the South

of Albania, therefore the breakdown by region should not be taken as indicative of the actual geographical distribution of such cases.

Table 2: Firearms injuries recorded at the Military Hospital 1997–September 2005¹³²

Month	Southern Albania		Central Albania		Northern Albania	
	Non-fatal injuries	Fatal injuries	Non-fatal injuries	Fatal injuries	Non-fatal injuries	Fatal injuries
1997						
January			4		1	
February			9		2	
March	14		110		23	1
April	32	2	64	6	38	2
May	28	2	59	8	24	1
June	27	1	61	5	27	7
July	40		58	1	29	3
August	21	2	37	1	25	1
September	13	3	30	4	28	2
October	1	1	31	2	21	
November	3	2	30	3	5	1
December	2	2	7		6	
Total	973					
1999						
January	8		19		9	
February	6		16		8	
March	6		10		9	1
April	7		17	3	14	
May	1		11		4	
June	4		13	1	9	1
July	6		10	1	8	
August	2		18		6	
September	5	1	10		5	2
October	2		9	5	4	
November	1		11	1	5	
December			3	1	1	1
Total	295					
2001						
January	5		7	2	8	
February	4		5		5	
March			3	1	6	
April	2		5		4	
May			5		3	
June	1		3		6	
July	2		3		6	
August	2		5	1	6	
September	3		10		2	
October	3		5	1	5	2
November	2		3	1	3	1
December	1	1	5	1		1
Total	150					

¹³² Admissions to the Military Hospital are classified into five categories: trauma, orthopaedics, radiology, internal diseases and infective diseases. The admissions register assigns each admission a number which indicates the treatment category, and records the following information: the patient's name and address; the category of the admission and a complete diagnosis; the date of the patient's admission and discharge. Most firearms injuries were classified as trauma, or occasionally also as orthopaedic cases because they involved fractures. As the numbers for classifying injuries indicate only whether the injury was a trauma or an orthopaedic fracture, the only way to compile data specifically on firearms injuries is to retrieve information covering the diagnosis of the disease from individual records.

2003

January	1	4	1	5
February		3		3
March	2	6		4
April	3	5		1
May	1	2		3
June	1	8	1	4
July	1	7		7
August	2	6	2	3
September	2	3		5
October	1	4		2
November	1	4		2
December	2	2		
Total	114			

2005

January		2		1
February		3		1
March		1	1	
April				1
May	1	3	1	1
June	1	3		2
July				4
August	1	1		2
September		3		
Total	34			

Total (all years)	274	18	776	55	415	29
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1567

The statistics for Fier Hospital record not only the total number of recorded firearms 'incidents' admitted to Fier Hospital for the period 2000–March 2005, but also reflect the gender, urban/rural status and age of the injured parties.¹³³

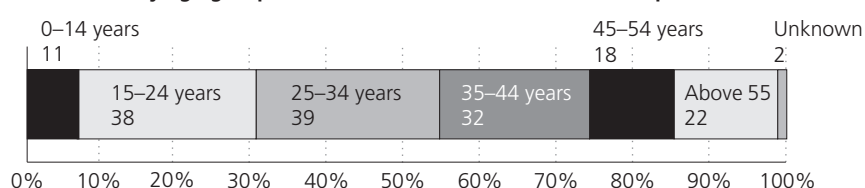
Table 3: Firearms cases admitted to Fier Hospital 2000–March 2005

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005 (Q1)
Male	43	29	13	17	23	8
Female	8	4	6	6	5	0
Urban	20	10	7	5	11	3
Rural	31	23	12	18	17	5
0–14 years old	1	2	2	1	4	1
15–24 years old	6	8	8	12	4	0
25–34 years old	14	7	2	6	5	5
35–44 years old	11	12	3	3	2	1
45–54 years old	11	4	1	0	2	0
Above 55	7	0	3	1	10	1
Age unknown	1	0	0	0	1	0
'Accidental shootings'	39	25	19	21	24	6
'Accidental shootings' by males	34	21	13	15	20	6
Intentional shootings	12	8	0	2	4	2
Intentional shootings by males	9	8	0	0	3	2
Total firearms incidents	51	33	19	23	28	8

133 Source: hospital official, 15 May 2005.

Although it cannot be argued that this table can be used as an accurate representation for firearms injuries and fatalities in Albania, it offers clues as to the situation in Albania as a whole. Thus, notwithstanding concerns over the use of weapons in domestic violence outlined below in section 2.3 (cases which may never reach hospital), these figures would suggest that more males than females are injured by firearms in Albania, just as the household survey findings indicated that more males than females own guns in Albania. Also notable here is the fact that more firearms incidents occurred in rural than in urban settings. This tallies well with the strong perception that firearms are primarily held in rural rather than urban areas (reported in section 3.5.4, 'Perceptions of civilian SALW possession'), and perhaps undermines the impression that the use of firearms in rural areas is predominantly for legitimate, practical rather than criminal use. The distribution of admissions by age group for the five years and three months covered is shown in the chart below, which shows that, as is commonly seen, the victims of armed violence in this dataset fall predominantly in the age range 15–34 years, which accounted for 47.5 percent of the cases.

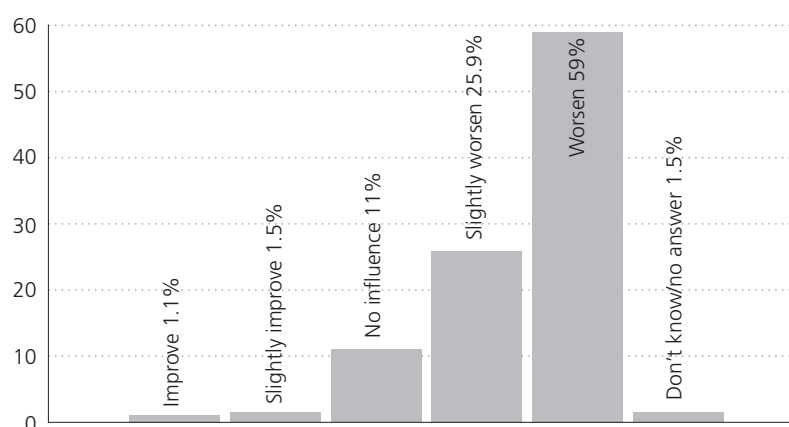
Distribution by age group of firearms cases admitted to Fier Hospital 2000–March 2005



2.3 Domestic violence

When asked whether firearms improve or worsen relations within the family, 84.9 percent of respondents to the household survey conducted for this report replied that they slightly worsen (25.9 percent) or worsen (59.0 percent) them. More women (62 percent) than men held the latter view.

Do you think firearms improve or worsen relations inside the family?



The only known attempt to estimate the prevalence of domestic violence quantitatively in Albania is the figure from a 1996 study of violence against women which reported that almost 40% of respondents suffered physical violence regularly.¹³⁴ According to a report by Eglatina Gjermeni and Majlinda Bregu of the Gender Alliance for Development Centre, official statistics on domestic violence are very unreliable and do not give a true picture of the scale of the problem.¹³⁵ The report thus examines the phenomenon by exploring the coverage of domestic violence in the Albanian media,

¹³⁴ Albanian Women's Association, *Violence Against Women*, (Refleksione Report, 1996), cited in Baban A, *Domestic Violence Against Women in Albania*, (UNICEF, 2003), p 15.

¹³⁵ NGO representative E and Bregu M, *Monitoring Media on Domestic Violence 2001 & 2002*, (Women's Center, 2003).

and concludes that family crimes have been increasing in recent years. It also states that media attention tends to be focused upon more sensational aspects of domestic violence, and that typically reports are inaccurate, lack analytical quality and evade questions of social responsibility. A sample of the headlines for domestic violence fatalities in 2001 are given below:

'Crime in the family: Brother kills sister', (Shekulli, 27 March 2001)

'Son attacks parents with a hand grenade – mother dies', (Shekulli, 11 January 2001)

'Father shoots his only daughter', (Shekulli, 10 March 2001)

'Executes wife and mother-in-law, then kills himself with the last bullet left', (Republika, 17 February 2001).

'Love dies: Jealous man kills girlfriend before turning to himself', (Republika, 22 June 2001)

'Terror, massacre: Man kills wife and son with an automatic gun' (Republika, 7 October 2001)

In the Women's Centre's media report for 2001, the six main newspapers surveyed contained 207 articles on domestic violence, of which 48 reported on domestic murders, five on attempted murders and three on suicides.¹³⁶ Of the instruments used in the domestic abuse crimes, 62 percent of cases involved SALW (36 percent automatic guns, 13 percent handguns and a further 13 percent bombs and grenades). This compares to just thirteen percent of cases involving knives.¹³⁷ Again, the sensationalism of the media means that the findings of such studies cannot be taken as representative of the overall situation in the general population. However, given the greater mortality associated with firearms injuries as compared to injuries inflicted with other kinds of implement, the accessibility of firearms could be aggravating the risk of serious harm to women whatever the actual prevalence of domestic violence in Albanian society overall. The majority of physical abuse cases covered had jealousy as their stated cause (27 percent), with arguments (24 percent), alcohol (10 percent) and mental health problems (10 percent) also cited.¹³⁸

The analysis of the Women's Centre and Gender Alliance for Development Centre also suggests that neither law enforcement and justice bodies, nor the media, take domestic violence seriously. It is generally seen as something that is 'private', between a man and his wife (i.e. the wife is regarded as the 'property' of the husband), with media interest heightened by the gruesome details of the crime.

According to the NGO Stop Violence Against Women, although Article 18 of the Albanian Constitution guarantees equality before the law, there is no specific legislation on domestic violence.¹³⁹ Such violence can be prosecuted as assault under the Code of Criminal Procedure, which prescribes a range of fines and custodial sentences depending on the severity of the offence.¹⁴⁰ Non-serious intentional injury, rape and sexual harassment can be prosecuted only when the victim files a complaint.¹⁴¹

2.4 Reported crime and victimisation rates

According to the key findings of the 2000 International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS), Tirana is above average for the capital cities of East-Central Europe in terms of both the number of crimes per 100 inhabitants (incidence) and in terms of the percentage of respondents who were victims of crime (prevalence) in the year preceding

¹³⁶ Ibid, p 19.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p 22.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p 23.

¹³⁹ Stop Violence Against Women, 'Albania', <http://www.stopvaw.org/Albania.html>, accessed 09 November 2005.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

the survey.¹⁴² The average incidence and prevalence rates for capital cities in East-Central Europe was 51 and 27 percent respectively, for Tirana it was 56 and 32 percent. Interestingly, 44 percent of the Tirana-based respondents viewed the performance of the police positively in 2000, while 48 percent of respondents viewed their performance negatively. Although this was very close to the averages for East Central European capitals (47 percent negative and 44 percent positive), the percentage point difference between those who assessed the police positively and those who assessed the police negatively was the smallest of all European capitals surveyed. The survey also recorded that 60 percent of Tirana's respondents felt safe when 'walking alone in their area after dark', compared to 40 percent who did not feel safe, meaning that Tirana was rated as safer than the average East-Central European capital.¹⁴³

Focus group interviewees from Tirana also gave generally positive views about their perceived levels of personal security – although some interviewees were still a little worried about venturing out after dark. According to the focus group and other interviewees, Tirana is regarded to be one of the safest places to live in Albania. For example, one focus group interviewee from Shkodër rated public safety in the capital as better than that in Shkodër when he stated that:

There is a difference between Tirana and Shkodër though. There are people that feel more secure in Tirana. I have known some businessmen who were scared to run their businesses in Shkodër, so they have gone to Tirana.

Focus Group, Shkodër, Male, August 2005.

Other signs of fear in Albania's cities were reported in relation to the times that people would go out at night. For example, a representative of Berat's chamber of commerce stated that one does not see people in restaurants in Berat after nine o'clock in the evening,¹⁴⁴ with a similar view also reported in Shkodër:

I have noticed that people [seem to] have the idea that no real state exists. Maybe you were never raped or robbed in the middle of the street, but you fear that, because you think that the state has no authority over people. Usually, in Shkodër, especially from October till February, I mean during winter, it is very rare for the people to go out at night and have fun, or just simply take a walk after eight o'clock in the afternoon. Two years ago people wouldn't go out after seven o'clock, now it's eight o'clock. And it is very special case to see people out at nine. Why? Because they still have the fear, that it is dark outside, so we have to be home. I mean that even when there is no concrete fear, it is just the overall feeling, that the state cannot protect you, so it is dangerous to go out in the dark.

Focus Group, Shkodër, Male, August 2005.

According to the 2005 ISO poll, 19.9 percent of respondents feared that they or a member of their family might become a victim of crime in the future. According to the Centre for Rural Studies and Sustainable Development report of 2004, only nine percent of respondents thought that their area had a bad or very bad level of security.¹⁴⁵ Most of their interviewees explained that security levels were improving because of: a decrease in crime, and gun crime in particular; less blood feuds; better economic prospects; and the fact that they thought that most of the 'bad' criminals had left Albania. Although the 2004 report concluded that the public perceived crime levels to be lower than they were in 2002, they stated that there was still a belief that crime levels were higher in urban areas compared to rural areas.¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, while the public believe that the crime situation in Albania is improving, the number of reported crimes is rising.

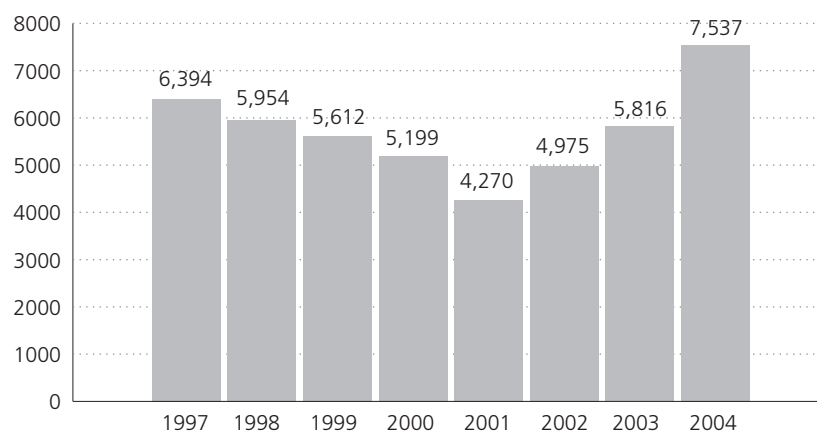
¹⁴² The types of crime covered in the ICVS are: theft of car, theft from car, car vandalism, theft of motorcycle, theft of bicycle, burglary, attempted burglary, robbery, theft of personal property, sexual offences (women only), assault and threat of assault. Source: Alvazzi del Frate A, Van Kesteren, J N, Criminal Victimization in Urban Europe. Key findings of the 2000 International Crime Victims Survey (UNICRI, 2004), <http://www.unicri.it/wwd/analysis/icvs/pdf_files/CriminalVictimizationUrbanEurope.pdf>

¹⁴³ The average responses for ECE capitals were 51 percent of respondents stressing that they were unsafe and 49 percent stating that they were safe. Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Interview, Berat Chamber of Commerce, 30 July 2005.

¹⁴⁵ Op cit Centre for Rural Studies and Sustainable Development, p 23.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p 27.

Registered crimes in Albania 1997–2004 (Source: op cit MOPO, p.61)

According to these official crime statistics, the percentage of total registered crimes that are committed against the person is returning to levels comparable to the pre-1997 period.

Table 4: Crimes against the person by year (1992–2004).

Year	Crimes against the person	Total registered crimes	% of total crimes against the person
1992	1,874	11,241	16.6%
1993	2,090	9,412	22.2%
1994	2,007	7,423	27%
1995	1,664	6,370	26.1%
1996	1,486	5,221	28.4%
1997	3,141	6,394	49.1%
1998	1,877	5,954	31.5%
1999	1,909	5,612	34%
2000	1,858	5,199	35.7%
2001	1,631	3,728	38.2%
2002	1,586	4,975	31.9%
2003	1,726	5,816	29.7%
2004	2,019	7,896	25.5%

MOI and international observers agree that the increase in the number of reported crimes and crimes against the person is probably due to an improvement in the recording of reported crimes, rather than an absolute increase in criminal activities.¹⁴⁷ Of course, the poor record-keeping for criminal activities in previous years makes it harder to conclude whether the increase is simply due to improved procedures for registering crimes or increased criminal activities. Increases in the number of reported crimes could also be due to increased public confidence in reporting crimes to the police. Also, as is to varying degrees true in all countries, many crime victims do not report crimes to the police. However, the levels of reporting – or non-reporting – of crimes to the police are apparently comparable with the norms of other European and North American countries.¹⁴⁸ Despite this, according to Dennis J Kenney’s analysis, Albanians still remain more susceptible to violent crimes against the person than people in other western countries.¹⁴⁹

Although most focus group respondents did state that public safety and security levels were far higher than in 1997, concerns were still voiced regarding the possibility of

¹⁴⁷ Interview, international official, 27 April 2005; op cit MOPO, p 61.

¹⁴⁸ According to Kenney, while homicide (100 percent), business burglaries (91 percent) and robbery (81 percent) have reportedly high rates for public reporting, thefts (41 percent), sexual assaults (56 percent) and threats of assault (63 percent) are not so frequently reported to the police. Kenney D J, *Public Perceptions of the Police in Albania: Nationwide Surveys of Residents and Police* (City University of New York and UNDP SSSR, 2004), p 11.

¹⁴⁹ Op cit, Kenney, pp 10–11.

being shot and possibly killed by a firearm. One focus group participant linked this to the strategy for collecting weapons, demanding a shift to seizure rather than voluntary collection in the belief that this would reduce insecurity by making ordinary citizens less casual about owning illicit firearms:

It is very obvious that there is lack of security here. No parent is calm about their children going to school, coming back, bringing their children to take part in different activities. There is a lack of security. Why? Because everyone possesses a gun – without permission in most cases. We can see these people possessing guns in everyday life, we hear it in the news – this person was killed, this other killed himself. So all of this information creates an overall sense of the lack of security in the family, society and everywhere else. I think that the Government should do something. It should make inspections time after time, not by revealing secrets, not by telling people that at this time, on this day, a guns inspection will take place. I know that it is difficult to keep this kind of secret, people talk to each other, and then everyone who possesses guns will learn this, and will hide their gun someplace. So, we will always live with a lack of security and will feel insecure – until the day that the authorities take this issue seriously.

Focus Group, Shkodër, Female, August 2005.

These fears are no doubt fuelled by the regularity with which one can still hear of a firearms incident in the region. In the focus groups conducted in Fier and Shkodër, at least one respondent was able to recall a recent firearms incident in the region.

Can you think of any accident that happened recently with a gun?

– In a village last week a man killed his mother-in-law and his wife.

FG, Fier, Female

– Yesterday, there was an accident in a family, there was shooting, but luckily no one got killed.

FG, Fier, Male

– Yesterday, a merchant was killed at the market, he was selling there as usual, and he was killed with a gun.

FG, Shkodër, Female

2.4.1 Armed robbery and intimidation

One of the most common forms of firearms usage in the immediate post-1997 period was reportedly 'banditry' and armed robbery.¹⁵⁰ Although this had been thought to be on the decline, in 2004 there were 134 registered cases of violent robbery and 93 involving firearms. In the beginning of 2005, it was reported that a masked and armed gang that had been preying on cars and vans travelling on rural roads in the Mat district had been apprehended by police, thanks to an anonymous tip-off.¹⁵¹ Fifty police officers surrounded the gang of five young men from the Diber district of Albania, who were suspected of stealing weapons from the cars and vans that they stopped. In the home of one of the arrested individuals, police found eight automatic weapons, 4,000 rounds of ammunition, and explosive materials. One report from 2005 also stated that a Shkodër policeman was suspected of armed street robberies, after stolen items and weapons were found in his car and home in February 2005.¹⁵²

There were also a number of reports from late 2004 and early 2005 in which fifteen and sixteen year old youths had brandished weapons and threatened night club owners in Shkodër and Tirana.¹⁵³ In these cases, the youths were found to be in possession of unregistered pistols. In early 2005 an individual from Berat was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for walking into Berat police headquarters on 20th December 2004

¹⁵⁰ Op cit Lawson and Saltmarsh; op cit Saltmarsh.

¹⁵¹ 'Masked, armed robbers steal guns from cars on rural roads in Mat', Albania Crime and Corruption Issues, 8–14 January 2005. Source: Shekulli, 12 January 2005.

¹⁵² 'Shkodër policeman suspected in street robberies', Albania Crime and Corruption Issues, 12–18 February 2005. Source: Shekulli, 17 February 2005.

¹⁵³ 'Armed adolescent threatens to kill nightclub owner', Albania Crime and Corruption Issues, 29 January–4 February 2005. Source: Shekulli, 4 February 2005; 'Four youths from Puke district arrested for attempted murder of Tirana bar owners' Albania Crime and Corruption Issues, 8–14 January 2005. Source: Shekulli, 14 January 2005.

with a Kalashnikov rifle and threatening to kill the chief of police.¹⁵⁴ In another episode, an off-duty police officer has also been accused of using his firearm to threaten a fellow villager, reportedly firing at the individual, according a report published in January 2005.¹⁵⁵ These cases would appear to support the thoughts of Ali Hajdani, Chief Inspector of the Fier Police Directorate, who argued that the very fact that weapons are easily available means that they are easily resorted to for threatening purposes.¹⁵⁶

2.4.2 SALW in blood feuds, vendettas and their broader impacts

The blood feud is a vendetta regulated by Albanian customary law (the *Kanun*).¹⁵⁷ When a member of one family has been dishonoured or killed by a member of another, the former are entitled to claim 'compensation' from the latter in accordance with the Commission of Blood or Council of Elders' interpretation of the *Kanun*. The wronged family may seek compensation with blood (by the killing of a male member of the other family) or may, after mediation, grant a magnanimous pardon (receiving payment in the form of money or property).¹⁵⁸ While the number of recorded blood feud murders fell as low as 10 in 2004, they have certainly increased as a percentage of all reported murders in Albania since 1991, and continue to be regarded as a cause for concern throughout Albania.¹⁵⁹ The significance of the phenomenon for this report is that the *Kanun* specifically refers to firearms as the implement for committing and avenging murder.¹⁶⁰ Although it cannot be argued that blood feuds are conducted in strict adherence to the letter of *Kanun* law, it is clear that the level of blood feud killings has implications for the level of firearm violence in Albanian society.

In the twentieth century Ahmet Zog and Enver Hoxha sought to end adherence to the *Kanun* as they attempted to construct a modern Albanian state.¹⁶¹ In general, Hoxha's efforts have been regarded as relatively (in some cases, spectacularly) successful in containing the resort to blood feuds:¹⁶² one account states that only one blood feud killing was recorded during Hoxha's 40 year reign.¹⁶³ There is no means of verifying the exact numbers, but it is apparent that the harsh penalties for the perpetrators of blood feuds and the tough reputation of Hoxha's regime for law enforcement may have made the resort to extra-legal revenge much less common.

A number of researchers have stated that with the end of communist rule, the Albanian state became less able to control private and public security. Corrupt practices in the law enforcement and judicial systems increasingly led Albanians to take the law into their own hands, deriving customary legitimacy from the *Kanun*,¹⁶⁴ such that between 1992 and 1994 the number of murders connected with blood feuds reportedly quadrupled.¹⁶⁵

154 'Two-year prison sentence for gunman threatening police', Albania Crime and Corruption Issues, 5–11 March 2005. Source: Shekulli (Internet Version), 5 March 2005.

155 'Policeman arrested by colleagues for firing service weapon', Albania Crime and Corruption Issues, 8–14 January 2005. Source: Shekulli (Internet Version), 12 January 2005.

156 Interview, Hajdani, 14 May 2005.

157 The *Kanun* has governed a wide variety of economic and social relations, in particular gender and property relations, throughout Albania since the fifteenth century. The blood feud has come to be regarded as a central element of the *Kanun*, the most well-known version of which has been attributed to Lekë Dukagjini (1410–1481). For example, see: Çobani T, 'Lekë Dukagjini and his code (Kanun)', website of the Committee for Nationwide Reconciliation, <<http://www.pajtimi.com/faqebrenda.php?newsID=30&lang=eng>>, 17 May 2005.

158 Op cit Lawson and Saltmarshe, pp 136–9; op cit Saltmarshe, pp 190–3. For a portrayal of a fictional blood feud in Northern Albania cf. Kadare I, *Broken April*, (Vintage, 2003).

159 According to the Committee of National Reconciliation (CNR), blood feuds continue to pose problems for families living in Berat, Burrel, Elbasan, Fier, Kruja, Shkodër, Tropoja and Vlora. Source: Website of the Committee for Nationwide Reconciliation, <www.pajtimi.com>, 17 May 2005.

160 Cf Khakee A, Florquin, N, 'Kosovo and the Gun: A Baseline Assessment of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Kosovo', (Geneva, Small Arms Survey/UNDP, June 2003), p 31.

161 Op cit Biberaj; op cit Blumi; op cit Doll; op cit Lawson and Saltmarshe; op cit Saltmarshe.

162 Ibid.

163 Arie S, 'Blood feuds trap Albania in the past: Thousands forced to take refuge as medieval code targets fathers and sons', *The Observer*, 21 September 2003, <<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,1046385,00.html>>, 17 May 2005.

164 Op cit Biberaj, pp 16 and 201; op cit Lawson and Saltmarshe, pp 136–9; op cit Saltmarshe, pp 190–3.

165 Op cit Biberaj, p 202.

Table 5: Number of recorded murders and blood feud killings in Albania 1997–2004¹⁶⁶

Year	Total murders recorded	Murders attributed to blood feud	Murders attributed to blood feud (%)
1998	573	45	7.8
1999	496	41	8.2
2000	275	18	6.5
2001	208	32	15.4
2002	179	13	7.2
2003	144	12	8.3
2004	119	10	11.9

The above table shows a roughly consistent decline in both overall recorded murders and blood feud murders between 1998 and 2004. Meanwhile, the table below reveals that, with the exception of 2004, the percentage of recorded murders attributed to blood feud since 1998 in Shkodër is well above the Albanian national average. Although numbers already appeared to have been declining, a special unit was established within the Shkodër Police Directorate to combat blood feud killings in the region at the beginning of 2005.

Table 6: Number of recorded murders and blood feud killings in Shkodër 1998–2004¹⁶⁷

Year	Total murders recorded	Murders attributed to blood feud	Murders attributed to blood feud (%)	% of Albanian blood feud murders committed in Shkodër ¹⁶⁸
1998 ¹⁶⁹	76	32	42.1	71
1999	82	42	51.2	102 ¹⁷⁰
2000	53	20	37.7	111
2001	45	13	28.8	40.6
2002	28	9	32.1	69.2
2003	22	8	36.4	66.7
2004	17	1	5.8	10

The blood feud permits the killing of any adult male member of a suspected wrongdoer's extended family, who become legitimate targets for 'compensation' purposes. This has reportedly led to 1,270 men fleeing Albania for fear of being killed under blood feud conditions, with an estimated 2,500 families thought to have been involved in blood feuds since the early 1990s.¹⁷¹ According to Committee of National Reconciliation figures, in 2001 there were 1,376 families living under the fear of a blood feud in 746 villages and 17 cities in Albania.

¹⁶⁶ Op cit MOPO, pp 73 and 74.

¹⁶⁷ Interview, MOPO official, 15 May 2005.

¹⁶⁸ The discrepancy between the figures for Shkodër and the figures for Albania nationally that has led to more than 100 percent of blood feud murders in Albania being committed in Shkodër in 1999 and 2000 once more highlights the problems of the accuracy of crime figures in Albania.

¹⁶⁹ The data for this year is reportedly not very accurate and probably under reported because many of the files for this year were burnt or disappeared during the 1998 disturbances.

¹⁷⁰ The fact that the table shows that 102 percent of blood feuds were recorded in Shkodër in 1999 and 111 percent in 2000 is due to the fact that the reported number of blood feud murders in Shkodër in 1999 was one more than the national total in 1999 and two more in 2000. It is assumed that this is the result of reporting deficiencies within Albania between the regions and the centre.

¹⁷¹ Op cit Arie; Source: Website of the Committee for Nationwide Reconciliation, <www.pajtimi.com>, 17 May 2005.

Table 7: Distribution of families under blood feud (2001)¹⁷²

Area	Families under blood feud	Children (1–18 yrs) affected	Children (1–10 yrs) affected	Children (11–18 yrs) affected
Berat	62	26	11	15
Bulqiza	17	17	6	11
Burrel	48	47	15	32
Durrës	98	56	26	30
Elbasan	29	27	12	15
Fier	49	21	8	13
Gjirokastër	9	7	1	6
Has	28	44	18	26
Korçe	15	9	6	3
Kruja	11	13	3	10
Kukës	49	44	17	26
Kurbin	12	10	4	6
Lezha	18	11	2	9
Librazh	4	6	3	3
Lushnje	33	34	10	24
M.madhe	67	53	24	29
Pogradec	6	4	0	4
Puka	13	0	0	0
Shkodër	460	108	51	57
Tepelene	16	20	10	10
Tirana	144	68	22	46
Tropoje	81	46	15	31
Vlorë	111	40	18	22
Total	1,376	711	282	429

A number of NGOs¹⁷³ have reportedly been working as mediators to decrease the number of families living under the threat of a killing through a blood feud. With their assistance, the number of families living under blood feud reduced to 724 in 2003, with only 160 children unable to attend school because of feuding.¹⁷⁴ Specifically in Shkodër, as shown in the table below, the police have identified 320 families that are currently locked up in their homes due to blood feuds:

Table 8: Families involved in blood feuds in Shkodër as of June 2005¹⁷⁵

Area	Families in blood feud	Families 'locked up'	People 'locked up'	Children 'locked up'
Shkodër	215	83	178	–
Puka	55	3	8	–
Malesi e madhe	50	23	62	–
Total	320	109	248	34

Some of the NGOs involved in mediating blood feuds have been criticised for asking the parties involved in the blood feud for money in order to carry out the mediation.¹⁷⁶ In other cases, peace has been mediated, but the police have then arrested a suspect involved in the blood feud. In these cases, it has been reported that the NGO mediators have tried to explain that the arrest is not necessary because the victim has already agreed to 'forgive the blood', and thus in court the victims have not even cooperated

¹⁷² Source: Website of the Committee for Nationwide Reconciliation, <www.pajtimi.com>, 17 May 2005.

¹⁷³ The list includes: Association of Mothers with Orphans (Puka); Association of Peace Missionaries (Shkodër); BESA Association (Puka); Foundation League of Peace Missionaries (Shkodër); Foundation Peace and Justice (Catholic church in Shkodër); Foundation for Resolving the Conflicts (Tirana); Mission of Nationwide Reconciliation (Shkodër) and Reconciliation Mission Mother Teresa (Shkodër).

¹⁷⁴ Op cit Arie; op cit Lawson and Saltmarshe; op cit Saltmarshe.

¹⁷⁵ Source: Ministry of Public Order.

¹⁷⁶ Interview, MOPO official, 15 May 2005.

with the prosecution. Therefore, one could argue that parallel 'law' structures are functioning which hamper the state's efforts when it does try to seek justice for the injured party.

In 2001, there were a number of amendments to the Criminal Code that explicitly referred to blood feuds:

- Article 78/2 states that blood feud killers should receive a minimum of 20 years imprisonment up to the maximum of life;
- Article 83/a states that those who threaten people and insist that they lock themselves in their homes or face being shot due to blood feud can be imprisoned for up to 3 years.

According to the head of Shkodër's crime department, there have recently been a few cases in which elderly interlocutors, who are sent by the family of the blood feud victim to inform the family of the perpetrator that they should lock themselves up, have been arrested by the police.¹⁷⁷ They have also investigated a number of suspected cases of blood feuds in Shkodër in 2005, although the same source suggested that the courts remained too lenient in such cases. While the state justice system continues to dispense justice inefficiently, blood feud killings are unlikely to disappear.

2.4.3 Perceptions of corruption and organised crime

Transparency International has included Albania in its Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) since 2002. Since this date, Albania has consistently scored a CPI rating of 2.5.¹⁷⁸ However, as more countries have been added to the CPI, Albania has fallen in the rankings. Thus, in 2002 it was in joint 81st place, but by 2004 it was in joint 108th place. This could be compared with Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, which were in joint 106th place in 2003 when Albania was in joint 92nd place. In 2004, Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro were in joint 97th place with scores of 2.7 up from 2.3. It would seem that perceptions of corruption remain stable in Albania, while they are falling in neighbouring states.

In opinion polls carried out on the eve of the 2005 parliamentary election, corruption was the second most acute concern of the electorate, and organised crime the sixth.¹⁷⁹ The poll also revealed that the top three most trusted institutions in Albania were the international organisations the EU, NATO and the OSCE.¹⁸⁰ The media took fourth place, with municipal government coming in fifth place with 47.2 percent of respondents expressing a degree of trust in this institution, followed by the President on 46.2 percent and parliament on 46.1 percent. National government was trusted by a third of respondents with the prosecutors' office (29 percent) and courts (25.7 percent) coming in last in the poll.

Many Albanian and international commentators think that combating organised crime should be one of the Government's main concerns, due to its negative impacts upon the rule of law and the justice system. However, focus group respondents did not make the same direct connection. They complained that they did not perceive justice to be served because criminals are not caught or they are set free by the courts. There is a sense that corruption further limits the capacity of the state to carry out its law enforcement and justice activities. Yet, when asked if organised crime affected them, interviewees replied:

– *Organised crime doesn't affect me, no.*

¹⁷⁷ Interview, MOJ official, 15 May 2005.

¹⁷⁸ Transparency International Website for Corruption Perception Index <<http://www.transparency.org>>, 6 June 2005. The Albanian CPI is based upon assessments from: Business Environment Enterprise Performance Survey, Freedom House, a multinational development bank, World Business Environment Survey of the World Bank, World Markets Research Centre.

¹⁷⁹ Elections 2005 Public Opinion Polls: Overview of Key Findings (Mjaft and Gallup International, Tirana, 1 June 2005), p 7. The main concern of the opinion poll respondents was unemployment.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p 21.

– *It won't affect me as long as I mind my own business, if I disturb someone else, then yeah... I fear more the stupid little crimes, like a teenager steals my car, I catch him, I probably beat him, his family kills me and everything. But the crime I fear the most is the political one. They killed someone the day of the elections just because of political ideas. That is what I fear. I don't fear the ones that sell drugs. Because I don't do drugs.*

Focus Group, Tirana, Male, August 2005.

2.4.4 Perceptions of the Police

A potentially positive finding of the poll on the eve of the 2005 parliamentary election cited above was that 43 percent of respondents expressed trust in the police, a figure that surprised the poll's organisers.¹⁸¹ This rising level of trust could have been due to the fact that in 2004 the head of the police force, Bajram Ibraj, was seen to have taken a tough response to police corruption by dismissing 304 officers, and arresting 52 of them, on corruption charges.¹⁸² Nevertheless, regular allegations of continued corruption within the police academy, police, border and customs forces, suggest that a lot more work remains to be done before corruption is no longer regarded as a serious problem for effective law enforcement. For example, in a nationwide survey on police performance carried out in 2004 by the Centre for Rural Studies (Tirana) for the UNDP's Support to Security Sector Reform, only 35 percent of respondents viewed the police with great respect.¹⁸³ Twenty-two percent stated that they had little respect for the police, while 42 percent of respondents stated that their respect varied. However, the report suggests that while gender, age and education do not impact upon rating police services, with 39 percent giving a good or very good rating and 45 percent stating that it is at least acceptable, significant regional variations were noted when asked if they believed that they would receive a 'fair outcome' from the police if their services were called upon.¹⁸⁴ In our own interviews and survey, the research team also found that Albanian citizens were still not entirely satisfied with the protection for people and property provided by state law enforcement agencies, as one focus group interviewee stated:

[Unfortunately] no one thinks well of the police here. For instance, when I see a policeman, I don't feel respect or I don't see him as someone that is protecting me. I don't see the policeman as a person that is just, that tries to make justice by respecting the law. So, if I want to commit a crime or break a rule, I don't feel scared of him. This figure in Albania does not exist. There may be just policemen, but most of them are corrupted, they only think about the money, in everything they try to earn something. So I don't see the policeman as a person that respects the law. I just see him as someone who has a job.

Focus Group, Shkodër, Female, August 2005.

Similar responses in other all-female focus groups conducted in 2005 chime with the findings of the survey *Public Perceptions of the Police in Albania*, which suggested that a higher percentage of women fear the police than men, while a lower percentage of women have an improved or great deal of respect for or confidence in the police.¹⁸⁵ As 34.4 percent of respondents think that it is acceptable to have a firearm 'when the law is not being enforced', the lack of confidence in policing is clearly an obstacle to greater control of illicit weapons. Proven incidents of corruption and malpractice (including in relation to SALW trafficking), as well as more persistent rumours, also damage the image of the authorities.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Interview, NGO representative, 21 July, 2005; Elections 2005 Public Opinion Polls: Overview of Key Findings (Mjaft and Gallup International, Tirana, 1 June 2005).

¹⁸² 'Some 304 policemen removed from force in 2004', Albania Crime and Corruption Issues, 8–14 January 2005. Source: Zeri i Popullit, 12 January 2005.

¹⁸³ Kenney D J, *Public Perceptions of the Police in Albania: Nationwide Surveys of Residents and Police* (City University of New York and UNDP SSSR, 2004), p 18.

¹⁸⁴ According to Kenney's survey, Berat (73 percent), Fier (75 percent) and Tirana (62 percent) respondents were among the regions with the most confidence in police fairness, while Diber (27 percent), Durrës (28 percent) and Kukës (34 percent) respondents had the least confidence. Source: *Ibid*, p 14–15.

¹⁸⁵ *Op cit*, Kenney, p 19.

¹⁸⁶ According to a key MOPO informant, in the past there were cases of police officers being found to have trafficked weapons. Interview, MOPO official, 26 April 2005.

2.5 SALW incidents in media reports

The research team carried out a content analysis for the frequency with which firearms incidents appeared in the Albanian daily national newspaper *Shekulli* during the years 2002, 2003, 2004 and the first five months of 2005. The results of this review can be found in the following tables:

Table 9: Frequency of firearms incidents reported in Shekulli newspaper 2002–2004.

2002	Murders	Murders Attempted	Injuries	Suicide	Armed Threat	Hostage Taking	Robbery	Illegal Weapon Possession	Armed Assault
Jan	2	2	–	1	–	–	–	1	1
Feb	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
Mar	10	1	–	2	–	–	–	–	1
Apr	11	–	–	–	–	1	–	1	–
May	7	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Jun	1	–	1	1	–	–	–	1	–
Jul	2	3	–	1	–	–	1	–	–
Aug	8	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Sep	2	1	3	3	5	–	2	2	1
Oct	5	1	–	1	–	1	–	2	2
Nov	7	1	7	2	2	–	1	4	2
Dec	6	–	1	2	4	1	–	–	1
Total	64	11	12	13	11	3	4	11	9
	138								
2003	Murders	Murders Attempted	Injuries	Suicide	Armed Threat	Hostage Taking	Robbery	Illegal Weapon Possession	Armed Assault
Jan	11	–	7	3	1	–	1	2	3
Feb	3	2	–	4	–	–	–	1	–
Mar	4	–	–	3	–	–	–	–	–
Apr	4	3	–	1	–	1	–	2	1
May	5	1	1	2	–	–	1	–	1
Jun	7	2	1	1	–	–	–	2	–
Jul	6	4	2	3	1	–	2	2	2
Aug	16	2	6	–	1	2	2	1	4
Sep	2	4	2	–	–	–	–	1	2
Oct	9	–	2	3	1	–	–	–	–
Nov	7	3	1	2	3	–	–	3	–
Dec	5	–	1	–	–	–	1	–	–
Total	79	23	23	22	7	3	7	14	13
	191								
2004	Murders	Murders Attempted	Injuries	Suicide	Armed Threat	Hostage Taking	Robbery	Illegal Weapon Possession	Armed Assault
Jan	5	3	–	2	1	–	–	1	–
Feb	6	2	4	1	–	–	–	–	–
Mar	9	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–
Apr	7	4	1	1	2	–	–	1	–
May	4	2	–	4	2	–	–	–	–
Jun	11	2	–	3	1	–	–	1	–
Jul	1	5	1	3	–	1	–	1	–
Aug	11	4	1	1	–	–	–	–	–
Sep	5	2	–	3	–	–	–	1	–
Oct	6	–	–	2	–	–	–	–	–
Nov	4	1	–	2	–	–	–	1	–
Dec	–	3	–	–	4	–	–	–	–
Total	69	28	7	22	11	1	–	4	–
	138								

2005*	Murders	Murders Attempted	Injuries	Suicide	Armed Threat	Hostage Taking	Robbery	Illegal Weapon Possession
Jan	3	2	–	1	1	–	–	
Feb	2	5	–	3	1	1	3	
Mar	2	2	–	3	–	–	–	
Apr	3	–	1	4	–	–	–	2
May	2	1	–	1	–	–	–	
Total	12	10	1	12	2	1	3	
	41							

*to 15 May

From these tables it would appear that the majority of firearms-related articles in *Shekulli* focussed on murder and attempted murder. It is likely that this reflects the public's interest in such sensational incidents rather than their greater frequency *per se*. The number of articles concerned with injuries varied, while the number of articles referencing suicide almost doubled from 2002 to 2003. While August saw the most stories about murder in 2003 and 2004, April and May had the most features on murder in 2002. There is no sign of a discernible seasonal pattern for attempted murders, injuries or suicide coverage in *Shekulli* from this sample of years.

TT pistols, Kalashnikov automatic rifles and hunting rifles are the main firearms that are featured in these articles, although many articles do not explicitly mention the type of firearm used. It is normally stated that the weapon used is unregistered, and it is generally assumed to have been looted in 1997. However, a number of high-profile killings in 2003 introduced more sophisticated weaponry. For example, a remote control mobile phone-operated bomb was used in the assassination of a Tirana-based businessman in 2003. Explosives are not a very common weapon for murder, although they tend to feature frequently in accounts of accidents, often involving children.

Most reported firearms incidents take place in rural areas or the outer districts of cities. The majority of the murders reported in *Shekulli* were committed against members of the same family. Property disputes, jealousy, alcohol and depression were most commonly cited as the reasons behind the resort to firearms. In almost all of these cases, the firearm – usually a pistol – was close at hand. Property disputes are also cited as the main cause of murders and injuries between people who are not members of the same family, although organised crime vendettas and blood feud cases also appear in the press.

One of the most striking changes is that armed robberies no longer dominate the front page headlines, with more column inches being taken up by suicides. The fact that 22 suicide articles were reported in 2003 and 2004 is thought to be a sign of more media interest in this phenomenon, with 12 articles on the topic already published in the first five months of 2005. The most recent high profile suicide cases have featured young children aged between ten and fourteen years old.

Stories on trafficking in firearms have decreased in quantity since 2002, but the items being trafficked have apparently increased in quality. Thus, interceptions of trafficked weapons that are now reported upon relate to missiles and mobile phone detonated bombs rather than AK-47s and bolt-action rifles. However, these articles tend to portray trafficking as a series of isolated one-off events, and not as part of a larger scale, co-ordinated and regular activity.