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Radical decrease in the number of homicides in Hungary

Abstract

In Hungary, the number of crimes recorded by crime statistics is surprisingly decreasing. Since its peak in 1998, the overall crime rate has fallen to less than a third. Within this, the decline in the number of homicides, which fell to one-fifth, is even more pronounced. Many people critically look at statistical indicators, and the authority's accounting methods know the superior numbers. In my research, I examined this.

Keywords: criminology, crime statistics, number of homicides, police credibility

Introduction

I intend to bring my publication up for discussion. On the one hand, I want to continue the research and publication on the topic in the future, and on the other hand, I welcome well-founded comments and criticisms.

The evolution of the number of homicides in many cases provokes noisy professional debate. Hungary has experienced a radical decline in this respect since 1994, which embarrasses professionals, too. Even in the best-intentioned man, logical doubt arises, seeing the extent of the decline in an incredibly short time in historical terms.

In 2016-17, it emerged that the Hungarian homicide data published by Eurostat¹ are not the same as the Hungarian statistical data, they do not show such favorable numbers as the latter one. The difference was that the Hungarian data included only intentional and completed homicides, and the European statistics also included data on homicides committed at the experimental or preparatory stage or through negligence.

1 European Statistic Office.



Opinion leaders, critical of increasingly favorable domestic homicide data in professional forums have also suggested that unsolved homicides are more likely to be described by the authorities as a fatal bodily injury or a negligent threat of death in the occupation, in order to improve homicide statistics.

These opinions are also widespread in law enforcement and practical police circles.

Research methodology

In the course of my research, I obtained the available statistics on the homicide data of Hungary from the Criminal Statistics of the Unified Investigation Authority (ENYÜBS), the Criminal Statistics System (BSR), the Central Statistical Office, and the National Statistical Data Collection Program (OSAP).

I sent data requests to the Ministry of Interior, the Criminal Analysis and Evaluation Division of the National Police Headquarters (ORFK), the International Criminal Cooperation Center (NEBEK), and the Central Statistical Office (KSH).

Perhaps the most important thing is to distinguish between ENYÜBS and BSR data. The former is an output statistic, i.e., it is compiled at the end of the investigation phase of criminal proceedings. Thus, it does not show how many crimes occurred during the period under review but how many were closed. The duration of the procedures varies, so this bias should be included in analyzing the system data. BSR data contains data on currently ongoing investigations, making them more up-to-date. The ORFK does not provide official information on the latest data. The main reason for this is that drawing far-reaching conclusions from data of ongoing proceedings can be misleading. In the meantime, it may turn out that the pending case has been reclassified by the authorities, terminated, or suspended in the absence of a crime or perpetrator.

Global decline in violence

‘In addition to quantitative indicators, qualitative changes are equally important in the study of homicide trends, so the incidence rate of qualified homicides is also a significant consideration in the analyzes. International comparisons of the number of individual crimes can be difficult due to differences in criminal law. However, the definition of a basic case of homicide is uniform because it is essentially an act committed with intentional causing of another person’s death, which is a criminal offense everywhere and differs mainly in qualifying

circumstances. By virtually the same definition of intentional homicide, it is possible to compare it internationally.’ (Bolyky, 2018).

In my research, I intend to examine the doubts that have arisen and analyze the trend in an international comparison.

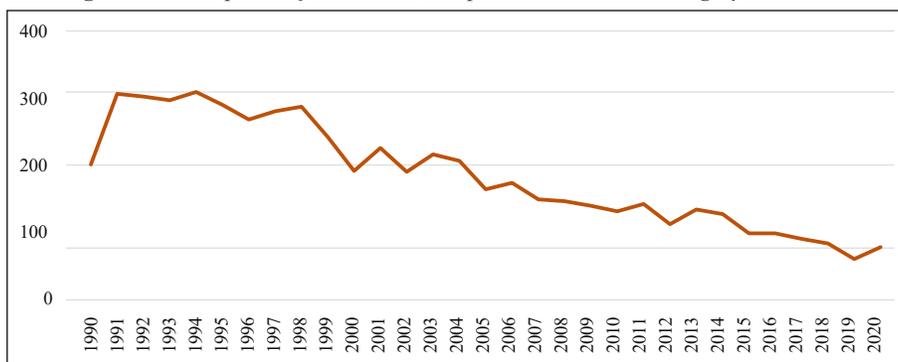
‘There is a withdrawal of violence in all areas of life. Everyday life is quite different if we are constantly afraid of being kidnapped, raped, or murdered, and it is difficult to achieve advanced art, learning, or trade if the institutions that support them are looted or set on fire at the moment they are built. The historical trajectory of violence affects how we live our lives and how we interpret them. What could be more important to our perception of the meaning and purpose of life than deciding whether we have gotten better or worse over time due to humanity’s efforts. And above all, how do we interpret modernity — how the forces of individualism, cosmopolitanism, logic, and science have undermined the family, tribe, tradition, and religion. Much depends on how we view the legacy of this change: seeing the world as a nightmare of sin, terrorism, genocide, and war, or valuing it as a period that, measured on the scale of history, has never been seen as a peaceful, blessed time ‘ (Pinker, 2018).

Pinker describes in his book five psychological systems, or, as he calls them, a demon; in this sense, we either resort to violence as a means, or we want to express our dominance with it, but sometimes we want revenge for some perceived or actual harm, or we think in the name of some ideology that the end sanctifies the means. There is another demon to reckon with: of course, it is also conceivable that we are sadists.

We are not only endowed with demons, but angels - the original title of the work (*The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*) also refers to the traits that tell most of us not to be at each other’s throats, no matter how much fun it may seem at first. Empathy can play a significant role in this - we have to think that while it would be a pleasure to punch somebody in the nose, well, if we were in the person’s place, we probably would not be too happy. Angels also include restraint, moral sense, and finally, common sense: it allows us to see the great connections and think about what can make our lives easier and safer ([URL 1](#)).

In the United States, there were 750 violent crimes per 100,000 residents in the early 1990s. The indicator fell by more than 50% by 2013, and there were only 368 violent crimes per 100,000 inhabitants. Between 1980 and 2014, the rate of violent crime fell by 39%, and between 1993 and 2016, the incidence of victimization also fell by 20%, a remarkable 40% drop between 1995 and 2010 ([Tcherni-Buzzeo, 2018](#)).

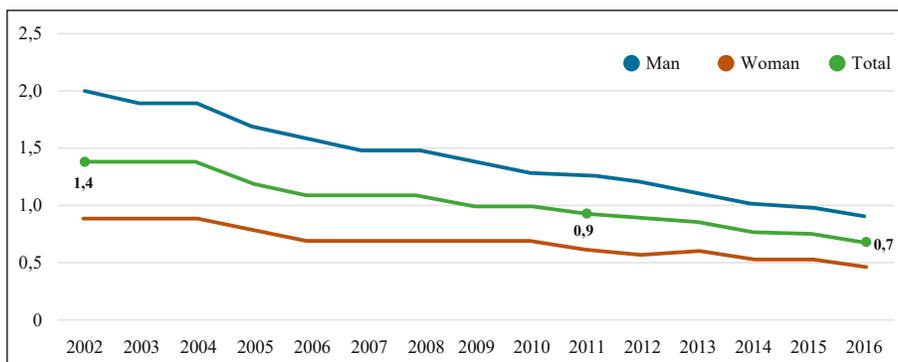
Figure 1: Development of intentional, completed homicides in Hungary 1990-2020.



Source: ORFK Criminal Analysis and Evaluation Department.

In the meantime, we can see that there is a significant decline in homicides in the European Union as well. The most striking is the decrease in the number of homicides committed against men during the period under review. The number per 100,000 inhabitants decreased from 1.9 cases to 0.9 cases between 2002-2016. The comparability of international data naturally raises many questions, as Szabolcs Mátyás has already written (Mátyás, 2020).

Figure 2: The homicide rate 100,000 per capita by sex in the European Union 2002-2016.



Source: Eurostat.

Disappearances in Hungary

Based on the data of the Hermon Circulation Registry System, the number of released missing person bulletins due to disappearance between 2014-2020 (broken down by year) was as follows:

Figure 3: *Number of released missing person bulletins due to disappearances based on data from the Hermon Circulation Registry System*

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Till 2021. 05.24.
Child /0 - 14 year/	3864	2911	2731	3117	2900	3123	2762	1151
Juvenile /14 - 18 year/	13021	16368	15968	15907	15499	15472	15482	6289
Minor total	16885	19279	18699	19024	18399	18595	18244	7440
Adult	3190	3543	3584	3193	3084	2955	2468	826
Total	20075	22822	22283	22217	21483	21550	20712	8266

Source: NEBEK.

Based on the statistical data collected from the Hermon Circulation Registry System, the number of released missing person bulletins has not changed significantly in recent years, it is almost stagnating.

It is important to note that the number of recorded missing person bulletins is not the same as the number of disappearances. In the case of minors, the high number of releasements is typically the number of children who have left the place of care without a permit or who do not return there at the prescribed time, placed with temporary effect. In these cases, we cannot speak of disappearance in the traditional sense of the word, because in most cases, the place of residence of the minor (for example, the area of care of the child who has escaped) is generally known. It happens that a minor leaves the designated place of care without permission several times a year. By implication, as many times as one escapes, this generates the initiation of as many rounds of procedures in the detection of the statistical system.

The disappearance of minors may also be due to conflict situation between the parents or between a parent and the child, the dispute over the child's placement, or possibly the prevention of a child protection authority measure. Minors placed in orphanages, residential homes, and foster care typically escape to their parents, relatives, or friends during their unauthorized departure. Reappearance of a missing person depends on several factors. It is influenced by the circumstances, cause, and location of the disappearance. About 30% of missing minors appear within one day of reporting, another 30% within a week of reporting, and 35% within one month.

The remaining 5% include minors whose whereabouts are presumed by the competent authority in the light of the information gathered during the data collection but are difficult to trace for other reasons (they are abroad, hidden by their family or friends).

Within the special management activities of the Circulation Registry and Management Department of NEBEK, special attention is paid to the handling of disappearance cases of adults. For these cases, a comprehensive, efficiency-enhancing system was developed, the implementation began between 2017-2018, in the first phase by mapping out more than 800 existing cases at national level. During the examination of the cases, it can be stated that the following types of cases occur in the circling system due to their nature:

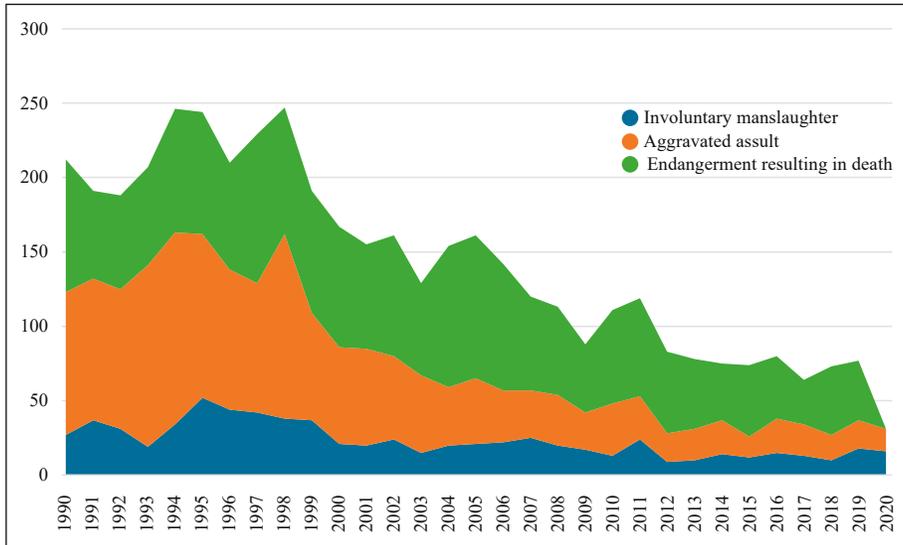
- disappearances of a child or juvenile that last only a short time (that are usually affecting the same persons, unauthorized departures become permanent, and then the persons are appeared);
- departures, usually due to dementia, which is common for the elderly, sometimes maybe fatal, but a corpse is not always found;
- those leaving the hospital due to mental or other problems;
- those who leave intending to commit suicide, some of whose bodies are not found;
- disappearance resulting from the lifestyle of the missing person (especially death resulting from a decline due to alcoholism, drug addiction), during which the body of the wanted person does not appear;
- a smaller number of voluntary departures (escape due to family, kinship, or couple relationships).

The current Tracing Act, which entered into force on 1st January 2014, defines the data processing time in 90 years, which was 20 years before that, so this generates a continuous increase in the number of cases compared to the previous ones.

Based on the analysis of the latest statistical data, it can be stated that the number of missing adults, sought for more than 90 days, does not change significantly, it is between 800-825 cases. Old and newly reported cases are constantly monitored, and the necessary analysts and data collection activities are performed/directed by the department. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the development of the number of disappearances does not give a reason to assume that there would be a large number of missing homicide victims among the missing persons.

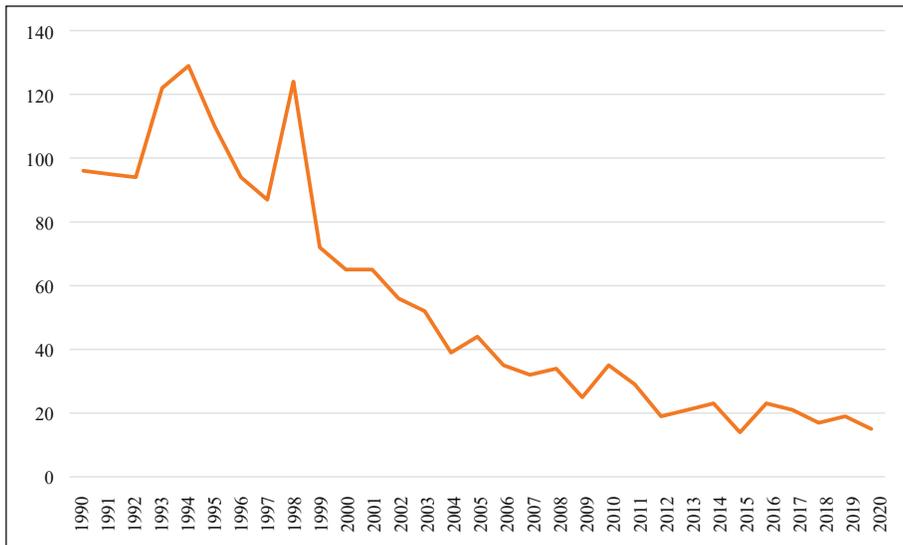
Development of crimes related to homicide in Hungary

Figure 4: *Tendencies of homicide-related crimes in Hungary between 1990-2020.*



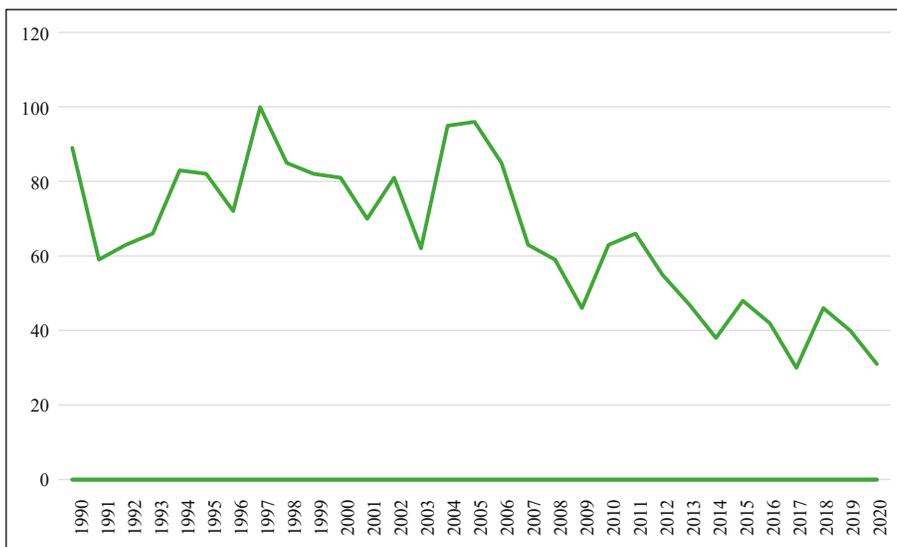
Source: ORFK Criminal Analysis and Evaluation Department.

Figure 5: *Aggravated assault crime in Hungary 1990-2020.*



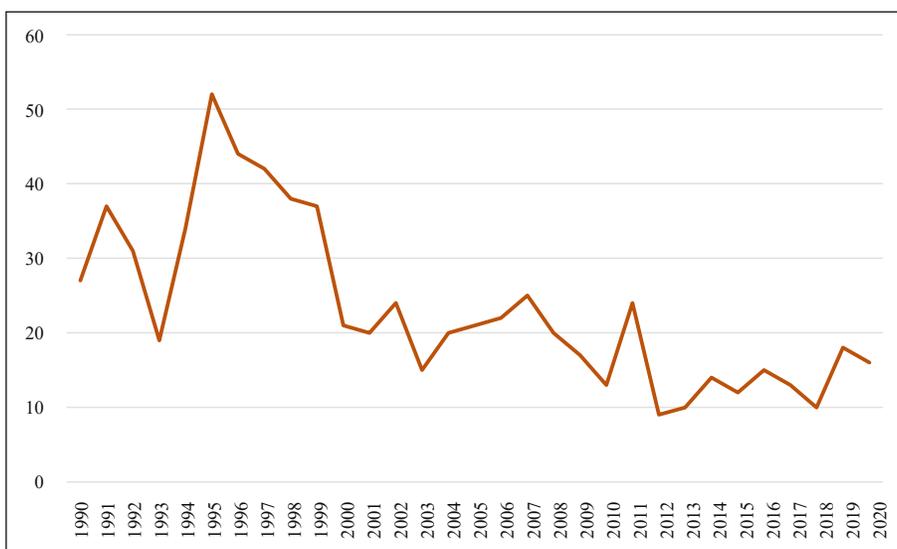
Source: ORFK Criminal Analysis and Evaluation Department.

Figure 6: *Endangerment resulting in death as criminal offense in Hungary 1990-2020.*



Source: ORFK Criminal Analysis and Evaluation Department.

Figure 7: *Involuntary manslaughter as criminal offense in Hungary 1990-2020.*



Source: ORFK Criminal Analysis and Evaluation Department.

The charts show that the notion, that the decrease in the number of intentional, completed homicides is due to an increase in the number of crimes adjacent to homicide resulting from a kind of official ‘transfer’ can be refuted. In terms of both fatal bodily harm, negligent homicide, and endangerment in the course of a fatal occupation, the number of cases is similar to or greater than intentional homicide registered by ENYÜBS in the examined period between 1990 and 2020.

Latency in homicide cases

Latency means that the crime in question does not come to the attention of the authority. In the case of homicide, this is likely to be much lower than in property crimes. The disappearance of a person usually calls the attention of someone. From the family, in the absence of that friends, buddies, possibly the authorities. The other possibility is that the deceased person is found, but in the absence of a trace of external injury, despite of an autopsy, the cause of death is determined by the coroner, due to some natural reason or other reasons. It can also cause latency if the person’s disappearance is reported to the authorities, but the measures taken to find it do not lead to results. In this case, the person will remain missing in the Tracking Information System for a long time.

The National Police Headquarters (ORFK) has developed new strategies to reduce the latency in homicide cases. They work according to a conscious processing methodology for adult disappearances beyond ninety days. These cases are investigated individually. If there is a suspicion that a crime may be behind the disappearance, the ORFK headquarters will initiate an investigation at the relevant county police headquarters to investigate the matter more thoroughly, involving the National Bureau of Investigation.

Since the 1990s, police have been searching thousands of adults in the long run due to disappearances, and trying to identify thousands of unknown corpses or body parts in the same period. As a result, the authority found murder in connection with twenty unidentified bodies. In the case of unknown but later identified corpses, in many cases, it turns out that no one searched for them.

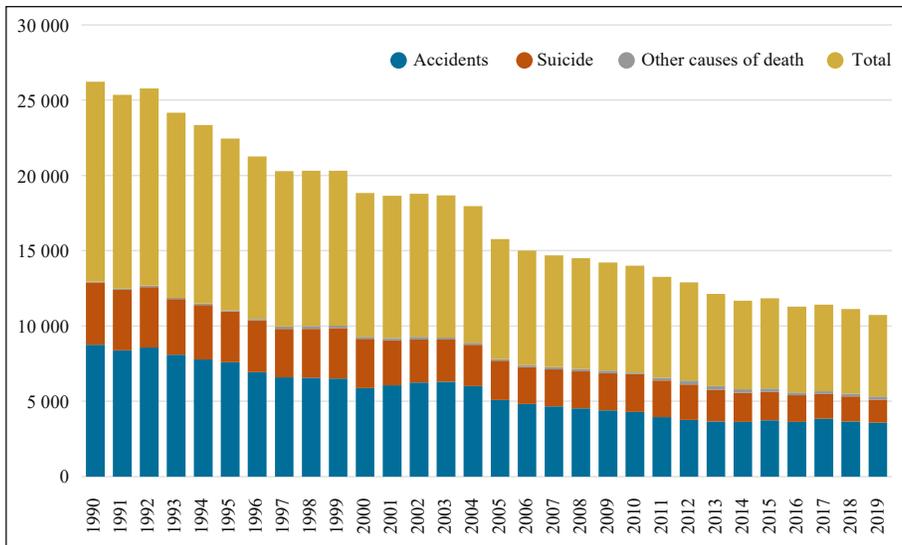
ORFK is also looking for a solution in this matter. They initiate at the Central Office of Public Administration and Electronic Public Services (KEKKH), who are the persons who do not respond to the authority’s request, for example, when their new document is prepared. The ORFK has also recently initiated a review of emergency deaths during the period 2016 - 2020 by county police headquarters.

Extraordinary deaths

In addition to the above indicators, I found it relevant to examine the number of notable deaths, so I contacted the National Police Headquarters to provide information how the number of notable deaths has developed from 1990 to 2020 in Hungary. According to the answer, for 1990-2020 the Police do not have official statistics on the number of extraordinary deaths that occurred in this period. 24/2014 on the police procedure to be followed in the event of an extraordinary death. (VII.11.) The ORFK instruction stipulates the obligation to provide information to the regional police bodies, the content of which, however, has been continuously expanded and modified over the years. CLV 2016 on official statistics.

I then contacted the Central Statistical Office, where the following information was provided.

Figure 8: Extraordinary deaths in Hungary between 1990-2020.



Source: CSO (data available for 1990-2019. Due to the amount of data, the table can only be displayed every few years, so 2019 is lagging).

The data clearly shows that there has also been a significant reduction in these extraordinary causes of mortality over the last twenty years. Based on these, the assumption that the investigating authorities register many allegedly undetectable homicide cases as notable deaths can be refuted. I am writing this although several cases discovered later show that such a trend is scattered.

Completion

As I mentioned in my introduction, I intend to act my publication as a stimulus. I hope many of those, who put the domestic homicide statistics into question, will read it.

In summary, the opinions that suggested statistical gimmicks behind the decrease in homicides in Hungary should be accepted as decreasing figures according to the current state of research. It is also a common argument that the ENYÜBS data, due to their output nature, do not show the current situation, as they include the bias caused by the length of the cases or their differences. In this regard, it can be stated that in a trend of nearly twenty years, these distortions disappear and do not significantly affect the evaluation of the data. I welcome suggestions as to what data still needs to be examined to verify the authenticity of criminal statistics.

A few words about the possible reasons for the decline. *‘Among the background factors are the impact of economic recovery and declining unemployment, demographic factors, immigration and policy factors such as increasing lengths of imprisonment and the generalization of selective neutralization. Among the reasons for the decline in the proliferation of security devices, which has reduced the chances of committing crimes. If the chances of committing a crime decrease, fewer commit the first crime that marks the beginning of their criminal career. Demographic change has had a major impact on the declining trend in crime, particularly the decline in the proportion of young men in the age group 15-25, which is the main determinant of the age distribution of the offending population. The other side of demographic change is, due to advances in medicine and advances in technology, the extension of the average age and the significant increase in the age group of the older population. The population of the elderly is growing mainly in Europe: the European population over the age of 65 has tripled in the last sixty years, and the number of people over the age of sixty is six times higher than in 1950. However, as you get older, you become less likely to commit a crime. Emigration is a particularly crime-reducing factor in Eastern Europe: for example, the Hungarian population lacks nearly half a million young people of working age in the West.’ (Kerezsi, 2020).*

The statement by János Lázár (at the time Minister, was leading the Prime Minister’s Office), that public employment impacted crime trends, were widely outraged. *‘János Lázár told in a public forum in Hódmezővásárhely that he thinks, public work is useful because those who work from early morning until 3 in the afternoon will not feel like stealing. For anti-poor and racist statements protested both advocacy organizations, representing public workers.’*

(URL2). The style of Lázár's statement was, of course, rightly criticized, but it can be agreed that some of the strata affected by crime were forced to participate in public employment, which took their energy away from crime and contributed, albeit minimally, to make a living, thereby reducing the motivation to commit a crime.

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Online links in the article

- URL1: *Bármilyen erőszakosnak is tűnik a világ, egyre kevésbé gyilkoljuk egymást.* <https://qubit.hu/2018/07/24/az-eroszak-alkonya-barmilyen-eroszakosnak-is-tunik-a-vilag-egyre-kevesbe-gyilkoljuk-egymast>
- URL2: *Közmunkások jelentik fel Lázárt, amiért szerinte azért jó a közmunka, mert így nincs kedvük lopni.* <https://merce.hu/2018/01/31/feljelentik-a-kozmunkasok-lazart-amiert-szerinte-azert-jo-a-kozmunka-mert-igy-nincs-kedvuk-lopni/>

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