

Despite Bleak Picture Murder Rates Are Falling in Brazil

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The homicides rate in Brazil has fallen from 28 per 100,000 people, in 2001, to 26.9 in 2004. This represents a 3.9% reduction, although the murder rate is still very high.

In comparison, according to the FBI, homicides rate in the US in 2004 was 5.5 per 100,000 people. The Brazilian numbers come from Brazil's Informatics Department of the Unified Health System (DataSUS) and 2004 is the last year for which there are statistics.

The biggest fall in the homicides rates happened in the state of São Paulo. The government's data show that the number of murders in São Paulo fell 29% in the three period, from 15,731 in 2001 to 11,204 in 2004. The rate for 100 thousand inhabitants dropped from 41.4 to 28.1, a reduction of 32,1%.

While the three-year picture seems promising we shouldn't forget that Brazil has been experiencing one of the world's largest increases in murders. In 1980 the city of São Paulo, South America's largest city, with about 11 million inhabitants, had 18 homicides per 100,000. By 2004 this number had zoomed to 54. In Rio, the index was 42 in 2004.

Among American largest cities, New Orleans, Louisiana, comes in first as the murder capital of the US, with 56 homicides per 100,000. In Washington, D.C. (4th place), the rate is 35.8. Los Angeles appears in 16th place with 13.4 murders. In New York, which is 37 in the list, the rate is 7 homicides per 100,000. El Paso, Texas, 45th in list, has the smallest rate among major American cities: 1.9.

In Brazil, homicide is the main cause of death for men between the ages of 15 and 44. As a way of comparing homicides rates in the UK, the US and Brazil, the World Health Organization has presented the following gradation: if the United Kingdom gets weight 1, the United States would be 6 and Brazil, 27.

As for the recent falling trend, from 2001 to 2004, the homicides rate in the state of Rio also fell 5.9%. After São Paulo, the state with the largest drop in murder rates were Roraima (29.6%), Mato Grosso (17.5%), Sergipe (16.7%), Amapá (16%) and Pernambuco (15.6%).

On the other side of the coin, homicide has raised 74% in the state of Minas Gerais, the worst result in the country for the three-year period. Following Minas, these are the Brazilian states with the largest increases in homicides: Pará (47.7%), Paraíba (37.3%), Bahia (34.8%), Paraná (32.7%) and Santa Catarina (28%). Santa Catarina together with Piauí, both with 10.9 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, are Brazil's safest places.

São Paulo is celebrating its fall in the murder ranking. In 2001, the state had the fourth worst homicides rate in Brazil, losing only to Pernambuco (58.4), Rio (50.1) and Espírito Santo (45.6).

Three years later, nine states are in worse shape than São Paulo: Pernambuco (49.4), Espírito Santo (48.3), Rio (47.2), Rondônia (36), Alagoas (34.8), Amapá (31.4), Mato Grosso (31), Federal District (30.2) and Mato Grosso do Sul (29.2).