

Homicide Dispatch 4

Homicides of children and adolescents in Brazil

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Abstract

Brazil is the world's most homicidal country in absolute terms. It also exhibits some of the most prolific lethal violence against children and adolescents. The following assessment demonstrates an exponential increase in the total number and prevalence rate of child and youth homicides between 1980 and 2014 — 476.4% and 485%, respectively. Such violence is not evenly distributed. Several northeastern states exhibit the highest rates of intentional homicide in Brazil, with the most common victims consisting of 16- and 17-year old black males.

Introduction

Brazil is suffering from a homicide epidemic. Despite the introduction of a comprehensive legal framework designed to protect and care for children and adolescents¹, homicide is the number one cause of their death. Between 1980 and 2014, 218,580 children and adolescents were murdered in Brazil. Today Brazil has the third highest child and youth homicide rate in the world, preceded only by Mexico and El Salvador.

This Homicide Dispatch focuses on the scope, scale and dynamics of homicidal violence involving Brazil's young people. Among the key findings are:

- Between 1980 and 2014, the number of child and youth homicides increased by 476.4% and the homicide rate increased by 485%.
- Firearm regulation strategies, including the Disarmament Statute, introduced in over the past two decades had an impact in the growth of the child and youth homicide rate. It dropped from a 6.2% increase per year between 1980 and 2003 to a 3.3% average decrease after 2004. Yet, from 2006 onwards, it started to increase again. Between 2006 and 2011, annual increase was 3,8% Since 2011 the growth rate increased steeply and surpassed 8.9% per year.
- The incidence of homicidal violence varies over the life cycle of young people. It is particularly acute for male adolescents – as many ten 16-17 year olds were assassinated every day in 2014.

¹ See the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), Article 227 of the Brazilian Federal Constitution (1988), Statute of the Child and Adolescent (1990).

- The geographical distribution of homicidal violence is diverse. It is especially concentrated in the northeastern states: six of the ten states with the highest child and youth homicide rates are located there.
- The demographic concentration of violence among males is profound. Approximately 92% of all homicide victims between ages 0 and 19 are males. For victims aged 17 and above, the proportion rises to 95%.
- The vast majority of murder victims are black. There were 195.3% more black victims than white, which corresponds to three black children/adolescents for each white victim. This ratio varies from state to state. For example, while in Piauí state, the ratio is 20 to 1 black to white children and adolescents. In Alagoas, the ratio is 15 to 1.

This Dispatch is divided into three main sections. The first section addresses the methodology and sources used for collecting and reviewing homicide data. The second section reports on major trends regarding child and youth homicide. The final section presents the main conclusions of this study and a specific reflection on the 16–17 age group. This latter group is the object of controversy due to a contentious debate over the age of criminal responsibility in the Brazilian Congress.

Methodology

Compiling homicide data is complicated in every country. Information is often not made available because it is considered political sensitive and a social taboo. In other cases, data is only sporadically collected and centralized.

Associated with these challenges, there are difficulties in calculating homicide rate per age, as population data disaggregated by age is inconsistent. As a result, homicide rates were separated into five-year age groups. Also, this study defines children and adolescents as between the ages of 0 and 19.²

The following datasets were used in the preparation of this assessment.

- Homicides in Brazil The Mortality Information System (SIM/ DATASUS/SVS/MS) lists relevant categories of intentional homicide in sections X85–Y09.
- Global homicide data The same mortality categories described above were also retrieved from the World Health Organization Statiscal Information System (WHOSIS/WHO)³ database which tracks intentional homicide.
- **Population in Brazil** In order to calculate the different homicide rates, demographic (census) data was retrieved from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)⁴ and the Department of Information Technology of the Unified Health System (DATASUS).⁵ At the time of the analysis, DATASUS had published theses estimates up to 2012; subsequent years were calculated using a linear interpolation between the 2000 and 2010 censuses. For population estimates by race/ethnicity, population projections were retrieved from the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD/IBGE).

² The Statute of the Child and Adolescent sets these age limits for each category: someone is a child before 12 years of age and an adolescent between 12 and 18.

³ World Health Organization Statistical Information System.

⁴ See http://www.ibge.gov.br/home.

⁵ See http://datasus.saude.gov.br.

 Global population data – The WHOSIS population databases were also used to calculate the mortality rates of the various countries in the world. Due to data gaps, the international database of the United States Census Bureau⁶ was used to account for missing data.

Homicides of children and adolescents

According to the Ministry of Health a total of 218,580 children and adolescents were murdered in Brazil between 1980 and 2013. The homicide rate also increased over time. While there were 1,825 homicides in 1980 the number increased sixfold to 11,142 by 2014, an average of 30.5 homicides per day. This increase of 510.5% in homicide compares to a minor 4.2% increase in the population of children and adolescents over the same period.

It is often difficult to convey the scale of homicide by statistics alone. To put the size of Brazil's youth homicide problem, there is the equivalent of three Realengo massacres every day. The Realengo massacre involved the mass shooting of 12 students (13-16 year olds) in a Rio de Janeiro-based school in April 2011. The shooter, a young man armed with a firearm entered the Tasso da Silveira Municipal School in Realengo and open-fired before committing suicide. That shooting shocked the country and generated widespread international repercussions.

The speed at which Brazil's homicide rate has increased is remarkable. In 1980, the homicide rate of children and adolescents (aged between 0-19 years old) increased from 3.1 per 100,000 to 18.1 by 2014 - some

⁶ Available at http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/summaries.html. Accessed in July 2015.

483.9%. This increase was not consistent over time, as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. In fact, between 1980 and 2003, there was an almost uninterrupted increase in the homicide rate - about 6.2% per year. After 2003, the rates dropped by 3.3% per year. This was largely due to the new disarmament statute put in place. However, the homicide rate started climbing again in 2006 reaching 3.8% per year by 2011. With the expanding political and economic crisis, homicide rates have shot-up since 2012 by roughly 8.9% a year.

Table 1. Evolution of the number and rates (per 100,000) of child and youth homicides (ages 0–19), Brazil, 1980–2014

Year	N.	Rate
1980	1,825	3.1
1981	1,920	3.2
1982	1,899	3.2
1983	2,266	3.7
1984	2,596	4.2
1985	2,908	4.7
1986	3,134	5
1987	3,396	5.4
1988	3,422	5.3
1989	4,456	6.9
1990	5,004	7.7
1991	4,674	7.1
1992	4,165	6.4
1993	4,782	7
1994	5,168	7.5
1995	5,925	8.5
1996	6,170	9.3
1997	6,645	9.9
1998	7,181	10.5
1999	7,355	10.6
2000	8,132	11.9

Year	N.	Rate
2001	8,480	12.2
2002	8,817	12.6
2003	8,787	12.4
2004	8,309	11.5
2005	8,361	11.3
2006	8,414	11.2
2007	8,166	12.1
2008	8,433	12.7
2009	8,393	13
2010	8,686	13.8
2011	8,894	14
2012	10,155	15.9
2013	10,520	16.3
2014	11,142	18.1
Total 80/14	218,580	
1980-2003	174 .2	300
2003-2006	62.5	-9.7
20011-2014	21	29.5
1980-2014	476	485

⁷ Cerqueira et al (2013)

18.1 Homicide rate per 100,000 12.4 11.2

Figure 1. Child and youth Homicide rate evolution, Brazil, 1980/2014

Homicidal violence fluctuates over the life cycle of children and adolescents. Table 2 reveals relatively high levels of intentional violence in the first year of life (3.7 per 100,000) decreasing to below 1 per 100,000 for children aged 3 and 12 years old. From age 12 onward, there is a sharp increase in homicide victimization. Adolescents aged 16 and 17 years old are the most at risk. Indeed, 1,686 16 years old teenagers were murdered in 2014, corresponding to 4.6 victims per day. Meanwhile, a total of 2,267 17-years-old adolescents were murdered that same year: 6.2 per day.

It is worth noting that, in Brazil, there is a controversial debate in Congress about lowering the penal age from 18 to 16. Yet the debate fails to account for the fact this is precisely the age group that suffers most from homicidal violence. Indeed, lowering the penal age places the blame for Brazil's violence problem precisely on the shoulders of its main victims.

Table 2. Number and rates (per 100,000) of child and youth homicides by individual age, Brazil, 2014

•		Homicide
Age	N	Rate
0	96	3.7
1	44	1.7
2	26	1
3	19	0.7
4	25	0.9
5	18	0.7
6	31	1.1
7	26	0.9
8	21	0.7
9	21	0.7
10	22	0.7
11	23	0.8
12	54	1.7
13	175	5.4
14	465	13
15	905	25.7
16	1686	48
17	2267	64.5
18	2591	72.4
19	2627	77.9

There is considerable geographical variation of homicidal violence across Brazilian states. The state of Alagoas, for example, features a child and youth homicide rate of 41.8 per 100,000. Meanwhile, Santa Catarina has a homicide rate of 7.2 per 100,000, equivalent to the global average and three times below the national average. Indeed, six northeastern states were ranked among the top ten most violent states in the country. They include Alagoas, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Sergipe, Paraíba and Bahia.

Table 3. Number and rates (per 100,000) of child and youth homicides (ages 0–19) by state and region, Brazil, 2014

State	N	Rate (100 thousand)
AL	502	41.8
CE	1,129	39.6
ES	433	37.3
RN	346	32.3
RR	50	26.5
SE	193	25.5
DF	218	25.4
PB	316	24.9
RJ	1,068	24.7
ВА	1,197	24.4
GO	482	24.2
AP	66	21.8
PE	600	20.4
PA	608	19.9
MT	181	17.7
MS	135	16.8
MG	910	15.3
PR	473	14.8
AM	205	13.4
ТО	70	13.3
MA	356	13.2
PI	138	12.6
AC	40	11.9
RS	339	11.5
RO	67	11.3
SP	888	7.4
SC	132	7.2
Brazil	11,142	18.1

There is also an extremely high prevalence of male victims of homicidal violence. This tendency is not dissimilar to other countries around the world. Indeed, 92% of all homicide victims aged 0–19 were male, as shown in Table 4. This proportion of male victims increases significantly from age 13 and reaches 95% over age 17.

Table 4. Number and rates (per 100,000) of child and youth homicides (ages 0–19) by gender, Brazil, 2014

A	S	ex	Male	
Age	Male	Female	IMale	•
0	60	35		63.2%
1	23	21		52.3%
2	14	12		53.8%
3	12	7		63.2%
4	15	10		60.0%
5	9	9		50.0%
6	17	14		54.8%
7	14	12		53.8%
8	11	10		52.4%
9	11	10		52.4%
10	9	13		40.9%
11	14	9		60.9%
12	33	21		61.1%
13	132	43		75.4%
14	383	82		82.4%
15	811	93		89.7%
16	1577	109		93.5%
17	2155	112		95.1%
18	2463	128		95.1%
19	2482	145		94.5%
Total	10245	895		92.0%

There is also a distinct racial selectivity when it comes to homicide in Brazil. Even when adjusted for population size, roughly three black children and adolescents are murdered for every white victim. Table 5 and Figures 2, 3 and 4 highlight the considerable disparity between white and black victims. Of all 2014 victims, 2,089 were white and 8,249 were black. The white child and youth homicide rate was 8 per 100,000 while that of black victims was 23.6 per 100,000. Considering the size of each of the two populations, the black victimization rate was 195.3% higher.

Cross-tabulating racial information with geo-locations reveals an even more complex picture. The states of Paraná, Goiás and Rio de Janeiro, have comparatively high white child and youth homicide rates: over 13 per 100,000. At the other end of the scale is the state of Piauí, with a rate of under 1 per 100,000, while none died in the state of Roraima in 2014. Meanwhile, states like Alagoas have very high homicide rates for black children - some 55.9 per 100,000. Rates in Espírito Santo and Rio Grande do Norte are also high and surpass 46 murders per 100,000 residents.

All told, there is an extremely high black victimization rate among children and adolescents. Piauí exhibits the highest difference, with a 1,878% black victimization rate. In 2014, the white child and youth homicide rate was 0.7 per 100,000 and 14.1 per 100,000 for black counterparts. In other words, almost 20 black children and adolescents were murdered for each white victim. A similar ratio can be observed in Alagoas. The homicide rate for white children and adolescents was 3.8 per 100,000 as compared to 55.9 per 100,000 for black victims. The latter's victimization rate is 1,377% - or 15 black child and adolescent victims for each white victim.

⁸ The National Household Sample Survey (PNAD/IBGE) was used as a source for categorizing the population by race or color in the calculation of these rates. The data was collected in a national sample, with representation by state and self-classification by the respondents, who chose one of five options in terms of color: white, black, brown, yellow or indigenous. For race/color, both the Mortality Information System (SIM, of the Ministry of Health) and the IBGE use five categories: white, black, brown, yellow and indigenous. However, in this analysis only two categories - white and black - were used, the latter resulting from the sum of black and brown.

⁹ The black victimization rate is calculated as the relationship between the rates of white victims and black victims, indicating the ratio of black victims over white victims.

Table 5. Homicide count and rate (per 100 thousand) of children and adolescents (0 to 19 years old) by race and % of black victimization, per region and state in Brazil, 2013.

21 / 12 /	Co	unt	Ra	ate	
State/Region	White	Black	White	Black	Victimization
Acre	7	32	10	12.9	28.8
Amapá	7	55	9.5	24.1	155.1
Amazonas	8	186	2.3	16.3	607.8
Pará	30	571	5.3	23.4	343.2
Rondônia	13	53	7.3	12.8	76.6
Roraima	0	13	0	9.5	
Tocantins	12	58	10.5	14.2	35
North	77	968	5.5	19.3	250
Alagoas	13	478	3.8	55.9	1376.9
Bahia	63	1103	6.6	28.2	330.3
Ceará	56	557	6.2	28.6	358.8
Maranhão	27	322	5.4	14.8	171.9
Paraíba	17	271	3.6	34.6	859.8
Pernambuco	68	517	6.8	26.9	295.3
Piauí	2	114	0.7	14.1	1877.5
Rio Grande do Norte	57	276	12.2	46.1	277.2
Sergipe	14	178	7.4	31.5	325.2
Northeast	317	1816	6.2	28.1	353
Espírito Santo	43	369	11.1	48	331.4
Minas Gerais	176	717	7.4	20.4	176.8
Rio de Janeiro	243	818	13.2	33.1	149.8
São Paulo	365	509	5.1	10.8	112.6
Southeast	827	1213	7	21	200.1
Paraná	349	120	16.2	11.7	-27.8
Rio Grande do Sul	224	102	9.8	15.4	56.7
Santa Catarina	102	28	6.7	9	34.1
South	675	250	11.3	12.5	10.3
Distrito Federal	23	192	6.6	38.1	480.5
Goiás	103	376	13.7	30.6	123.3
Mato Grosso	28	148	8	22	173.2
Mato Grosso do Sul	39	86	10.3	20.6	100.4
Center-West	193	802	10.6	28.4	169.2
Brazil	2089	8249	8	23.6	195.3

Figure 2. Homicide rate of white children and adolescents by state, Brazil, 2014

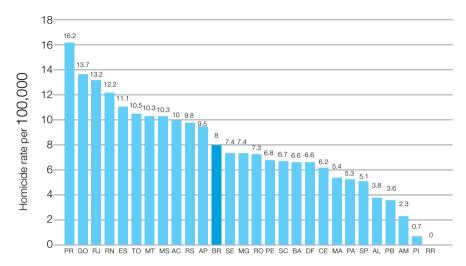
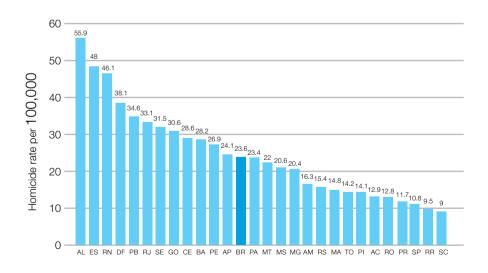


Figure 3. Black child and youth homicide rate by state, Brazil, 2014



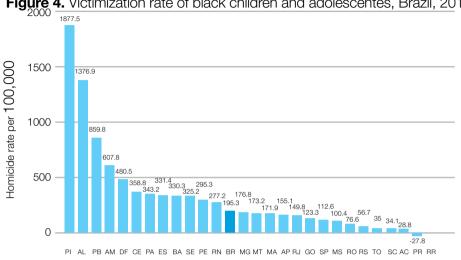


Figure 4. Victimization rate of black children and adolescentes, Brazil, 2014

All told, Brazil's children and youth homicide rate is one of the highest in the world. 10 As shown in Table 6, Brazil is among the top ten most violent countries across all age brackets, except 5-9 year olds who register a homicide rate of 0.7 per 100,000. In the <1-4 age bracket, the situation is worse: Brazil is in seventh position. In the 10-19 age bracket (as well as in the combined <1-19 age bracket), Brazil is third, preceded only by Mexico and El Salvador.

Brazil's position in international context is a clear index of the severity of the problem. It is in jarring contrast with countries that report not one single reported homicide of this kind, including Denmark, Scotland, Slovenia, Switzerland, and others. Brazil's homicide rate of 54.9 per 100,000 for people aged 15–19 is 275 times higher than that of countries such as Austria, Japan, the United Kingdom or Belgium (whose rates are 0.2) and 183 times higher than that of Korea, Germany or Egypt.

¹⁰ WHO mortality databases were used to calculate rates across the world.

< 1 year old

Country	Year	Rate	Rank
Israel	2012	20.9	1
Estonia	2012	13.8	2
Mexico	2012	10.9	3
Cyprus	2012	9.9	4
United States	2010	7.9	5
Uruguay	2010	6.7	6
Brazil	2013	6	7
El Salvador	2012	5.7	8
New Zeland	2011	4.8	9
Bulgaria	2012	4.7	10

5 to 9 years old

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Country	Year	Rate	Rank
Cayman Islands	2010	31.2	1
Mexico	2012	2.4	2
Colombia	2011	1	3
South Korea	2012	0.9	4
Panama	2012	0.9	5
Costa Rica	2012	0.8	6
Belgium	2012	0.8	7
Hungary	2013	0.8	8
Lithuania	2012	0.7	9
Brazil	2013	0.7	10

15 to 19 years old

Country	Year	Rate	Rank
Mexico	2012	95.6	1
El Salvador	2012	55.8	2
Brazil	2013	54.9	3
Colombia	2011	49.3	4
Panama	2012	39.7	5
Puerto Rico	2010	31.5	6
Guatemala	2012	29.6	7
South Africa	2013	14.4	8
S. Vicent and the Grenadines	2013	11.1	9
Guadalupe	2011	10.3	10

1 to 4 years old

Country	Year	Rate	Rank
Surinam	2012	2.5	1
North Ireland	2013	2	2
Mexico	2012	1.7	3
Canada	2011	1.4	4
Servia	2013	1.1	5
Puerto Rico	2010	1.1	6
Brazil	2013	0.9	7
United States	2010	0.9	8
Lithuania	2012	0.8	9
Jordan	2011	0.5	10

10 to 14 years old

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Country	Year	Rate	Rank		
Mexico	2012	12.4	1		
El Salvador	2012	6.9	2		
Brazil	2013	4.3	3		
Guatemala	2012	3.8	4		
Panama	2012	3.7	5		
Colombia	2011	3.7	6		
Guyana	2011	2.8	7		
Puerto Rico	2010	2.2	8		
Surinam	2012	1.8	9		
Peru	2012	1.2	10		

0 to 19 years old

Country	Year	Rate	Rank
Mexico	2012	26.7	1
El Salvador	2012	17.5	2
Brazil	2013	16.9	3
Colombia	2011	14.3	4
Panama	2012	10.8	5
Puerto Rico	2010	9.7	6
Guatemala	2012	8.6	7
Cayman Islands	2010	7.6	8
South Africa	2013	3.4	9
Uruguay	2010	3.3	10

Conclusion

Brazil's homicide problem will get worse before it improves. According to the 2010 national census, there were 35.6 million children under the age of 12 and 24 million adolescents between ages 12 and 18. In other words, roughly one third of the country is under 18. Astonishingly, child and adolescent homicide increased by 476.4% and the rate by 485% over the past two decades.

These staggeringly high increases are not generating a corresponding level of anxiety in the public mood. Indeed, there is a tolerance and banalization of child and youth violence in the country. The fact that efforts are underway to lower the penal age is testament to the tendency to blame the victim. Violence – especially involving poor young black people – is accepted, even seen as necessary in some quarters. This acceptance is observed even among state entities who's primary responsibility is the security and care of Brazilian citizens.

While all lives are equally precious, it is worth underlining the particular vulnerabilities faced by Brazilian teenagers. Those aged 16 and 17, or 1.8% of the country's population, are most at risk of homicide in Brazil. They are also at the center of a dark debate over the age of criminal responsibility in the Brazilian Congress. The popular support behind the drive to lower the age of criminal responsibility is disconcerting, especially when considering how dangerous their lives already are.

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The **Homicide Dispatches** are a series of short analytical articles highlighting the underlying risks and far-reaching consequences of murder, ways that governments count homicide, and innovative strategies to prevent and reduce lethal violence. The Homicide Dispatches are part of the Homicide Monitor, a data visualization tool developed by the Igarapé Institute in partnership with the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), with contributions from the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC).





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Editors:

Robert Muggah, Renata Giannini and Katherine Aguirre

Layout:

Raphael Durão - STORM.pt

ISSN 2359-0998

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