

Police in Brazil kill six people a day

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A report released last week in Sao Paulo indicates that Brazilian police on average killed six people every day last year. A total of 2,212 Brazilians lost their lives to police violence in 2013.

The shocking statistics are consistent with a trend that has prevailed over the whole past period and, in fact, represent an insignificant decline from 2012, when 2,332 people were reported to have died at the hands of the Brazilian police.

The release of the report by the Brazilian Public Security Forum came barely two weeks after the re-election of Workers Party (PT) President Dilma Rousseff, which elements of the pseudo-left in Brazil and elsewhere were still celebrating as a supposed victory against political reaction and imperialist pressure.

What the numbers reveal, however, is that the Workers Party, after nearly a dozen years in power, has failed to curb the repressive violence of a Military Police force, which is the legacy of the country's two decades of US-backed military dictatorship. Moreover, its minimal social assistance programs notwithstanding, the PT, which represents the interests of Brazilian corporations and finance capital, has presided over levels of social inequality that have generated violence on the scale of a low-level civil war.

Since 2009, when the Public Security Forum first issued such a report, it has recorded 11,197 police killings in Brazil. It took 30 years for the police in the United States, which has a population that is 50 percent greater, to achieve the same number of homicides.

The latest report on police killing has been criticized by human rights and social organizations in Brazil as a significant underestimation of the real death toll, in part because the figures do not include many murders carried out by off-duty police acting as death squads, either on their own account or in the service of business interests. Few states keep accurate records of these off-

duty slayings.

Indeed, barely a week before the report was released, the northern city of Belem, the capital of the state of Para, saw a rampage by off-duty Military Police that left at least 10 people dead. Allegedly taking revenge for the killing of one of their number, masked police armed with heavy weapons sealed off at least five neighborhoods in the city and then hunted down and systematically shot their victims. Some residents reported that the death toll was significantly higher than ten and that the authorities had taken away bodies.

The statistical report also showed that 490 police officers were killed last year in Brazil. Over 75 percent of these deaths, however, took place while the cops were off duty. While the number of line-of-duty deaths has fallen, the number of police killed off duty has risen sharply over the last two years. In part, the report attributed this to cops moonlighting because of low salaries as well as to acts of revenge.

The report also documented a stunning 53,646 homicides in Brazil in 2013, an average of one person being murdered every 10 minutes. This compares with 14,196 murders in the US, which has the highest murder rate of any of the so-called developed countries.

The report included an article stating that the issue of police killings and crime had placed on the agenda a debate over whether the "military police should be separated from the Army or should stay tied to the Armed Forces."

Such a minimal reform remains unresolved nearly 30 years after the end of the military dictatorship. This demonstrates the continuing influence of the military in Brazilian political life and the cowardice of successive civilian governments, particularly those of the PT.

The Brazilian military has never been held accountable for the widespread political killings, disappearances, torture and other crimes carried out under the dictatorship. An Amnesty Law imposed in

1979 by the country's last military ruler, Gen. Joao Figueiredo, bars prosecution of members of the security forces for these crimes. There is no doubt that this impunity bestowed upon the military has emboldened the Military Police in carrying out wholesale killings in the years following the end of the dictatorship.

On Tuesday, Dalmo Dallari, the coordinator of a "National Truth Commission" set up by Rousseff in 2012 to investigate crimes carried out by the dictatorship between 1964 and 1985, announced that the panel would recommend the prosecution of around 100 members of the military.

"We are going to indicate the necessity of holding them responsible," Dallari told the *Folha de Sao Paulo*. He said that a report that is to be released on December 10 would include "concrete cases with concrete victims and concrete authors."

At the same time, Dallari acknowledged that for any prosecution to take place, the government, the congress and the courts would have to act to upend the Amnesty Law, something for which they have shown no appetite.



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