

There is a worrying status quo among Brazilians with respect to the consolidation of democratic principles, despite all the country's advances in recent decades in the economic and social realms. When comparing and analyzing data collected over the 25 years since its creation, the coordinators working at the USP Center for the Study of Violence (NEV/USP) since its foundation were impressed by the conservative mindset of the Brazilian population with respect to violence. There is clearly an authoritarian bias, with an inclination to solve conflicts on one's own.

"A reactionary vestige has not disappeared with the advance of democracy," observes researcher Nancy Cardia, vice-coordinator of NEV/USP. "Democracy has not yet become a universal value and, despite all the gains and progress achieved in recent decades, one-third of Brazilians would support a military coup, something rejected much more strongly in neighboring countries in Latin America, such as Chile, Uruguay and

Argentina." For specialists who investigate the type of democracy and governance developing in Brazil through the relationships between violence, democracy and human rights, these antidemocratic traces are alarming.

The coordinator of NEV/USP, Sergio Adorno, explains that the center's work has been focused on investigating the advances of Brazilian society, but always taking into account the country's context, where serious human rights violations persist, where areas dominated by organized crime continue to exist and homicide rates are high, among other problems. "We have seen profound changes, especially during this last decade, with better work opportunities, a reduction in the immense inequalities that still prevail in Brazilian society and improved access to institutions promoting well-being," he argues, "But there is still a long way to go."

According to Cardia, the belief that the law applies to everyone is not entrenched here in Brazil. She recalls that, despite campaigns for disarmament, re-

cent NEV/USP studies show that the belief that having a weapon at home leads to security persists. "The people believe that they are protected in this way. There is a general feeling that laws do not work and the citizen must protect himself."

The courts, one of the pillars of democracy, have been unable to convince the people of their purpose and do not reinforce the fact that they serve to protect the citizen from potential abuse of power by the government. "People cannot understand this," says Cardia. "Brazilians still consider themselves outside justice." When you ask a Brazilian if it is better to let 10 guilty men free to guarantee that one innocent person does not suffer from an error in the courts, or jail the innocent person, the majority prefer to keep him in jail. "This response is the opposite of international opinion, which does not believe that a single citizen should be harmed by an error," notes Cardia.

Since 1999, Cardia has coordinated a study whose goal is to focus on the contact different urban subgroups have with

Permitted Violence

The authoritarian bias of the Brazilian mindset is one of the concerns of the USP Center for the Study of Violence

Marili Ribeiro



The lives of street children
is one of the areas studied
by NEV/USP

violence. The study was carried out at five different times in the city of São Paulo (2001, 2003, 2006, 2008 and 2010) and twice (1999 and 2010) in 11 state capitals. The results tell us which social strata are more vulnerable to violence and which have more conservative attitudes, resistant to universal access to rights. These results could guide campaigns promoting awareness of rights and greater tolerance for social differences.

One of the conclusions is that, after 27 years of democracy, the support for civil and political rights is not as solid as we would expect. In the two surveys carried out in 11 capitals, the proportion of people who disagree with the statement that “courts can accept evidence obtained through torture” decreased. It was 71.2% in 1999 and fell to 52.5% in 2010. Additionally, the proportion of those who agree with torture in part doubled (from 8.8% in 1999 to 18.3% in 2010).

THE LABORATORY

NEV/USP's goal has been to face challenges with scientific data and an interdisciplinary approach to improve public policy on democratic control of violence. Some topics require long-term research, in addition to being new fields. There are few studies in the international literature showing how democratic nations are built. This is why it was so important that NEV/USP became a Research, Innovation and Dissemination Center (RIDC) supported

by FAPESP from 2000 to 2011. The RIDC program, a long-term type of grant, allowed NEV/USP to maintain a laboratory and a database in this research area, both a standard of excellence in Latin America today.

The general public's interest in violence is not proportional to the care with which records of crimes are kept, nor to the maintenance of case files over time. The surveys show that data collected at police stations are faulty and are often not even kept. For the last 11 years, Sergio Adorno has been studying, among other topics, the origin of impunity in Brazil. The study, *Police investigations and procedure in São Paulo: homicides*, was financed by FAPESP and is in its final stages. It traces the steps through the justice system, from police stations to the final judgment. Of the 344,000 police reports that were analyzed, only 6% became investigations. Of these, about 4,000 were homicides, and Adorno monitored 600. “It took two years to recover the data for just 197 investigations. The others were not found,” he recounts. Another hurdle was that the investigation is based solely on witness testimony, which leads to weak procedures. Assessment of evidence is little understood. “Similar cases have different outcomes,” says Adorno. Cautious, he prefers to avoid suppositions. However, it is impossible to discard the possibility that the problems in the system strengthen the lack of belief in justice.



Police search at an alleged meeting place of members of the crime faction *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC), in the city of São Bernardo do Campo: weak investigations hamper the justice system





Youth executed by drug traffickers in the Morro do Macaco neighborhood, in the city of Rio de Janeiro: the profile of crime has changed, but the incidence has not diminished

FALL IN NUMBER OF HOMICIDES

According to Adorno, the fall in the homicide rate in São Paulo is an opportunity for NEV/USP to test—at least in part—to what extent and with what importance social and economic improvements, plus changes in public safety, explain this trend. One of NEV/USP's studies sought to identify the extent of the fall in murders in the state of São Paulo and the factors contributing to it. A second study intends to identify the factors related to the fall in homicides in the city of São Paulo, beginning in 2000, using both a quantitative and a qualitative approach.

Since 1989, violence has become one of the four principal causes of death in Brazil. Taking homicide rates as indicators of violence, the seriousness of this situation can be confirmed: in the period from 1980 to 2010 there were 1,093,710 homicides. “The profile and the distribution of violent crime in the country have changed some, but the overall incidence does not appear to have decreased,” says Adorno. “Cases of muggings and robber-

ies involving deaths have increased in the state of São Paulo.” Information on these crimes in other states is scarce or of dubious credibility. On the other hand, national data on homicide rates, collected by the Ministry of Health, show that, whereas in the North and Northeast homicide rates have increased, there has been a sustained decrease in São Paulo in the last 10 years: the homicide rate fell from 64.2 cases per 100,000 inhabitants in 1999 to 9.9 in 2011. The fall in the homicide rate in the cities of the state of São Paulo cannot be attributed to a single combination of factors. “Notwithstanding, we have identified correlations between the fall in murders and changes in demographics and socioeconomic aspects, as well as improvements in management and control mechanisms, especially in actions adopted by the Secretariat of Public Safety in the last decade.”

Since its inception, the USP Center for the Study of Violence has tried to create methodologies that produce reports, with special participation in international organizations. The credibility and consistency of the studies open doors, including important participation in the “Report on violence against children,” published by the United Nations (UN). The work was initially coordinated by Prof. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, one of NEV/USP's founders and greatest supporters. The data collected are public and can be accessed at www.nevusp.org. ■

PROJECT

Center for the Study of Violence – No. 1998/14262-5 (2000-2012)

GRANT MECHANISM

Research, Innovation and Dissemination Center (RIDC)

COORDINATOR

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INVESTMENT

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FROM OUR ARCHIVES

Numbers to Change Brazil
Special RIDC Issue – May 2007