

Latin America: Way more violent than the U.S.

InSight Crime is “a [foundation](#) dedicated to the study of the principal threat to national and citizen security in Latin America and the Caribbean: organized crime.” Toward that end, the foundation put together a fascinating chart comparing the homicide rate between the various countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Here it is:



Regarding the statistics, InSight Crime reports:

The most notable development in this year’s round-up is the change that occurred at the top of the list. El Salvador has eclipsed neighboring Honduras as the most violent nation in the Western Hemisphere following its worst year of violence since the country’s civil war ended.

There were several other important homicide-related developments in the region as well. Costa Rica witnessed a record number of homicides in 2015, while Colombia, once the world’s murder capital, registered its lowest murder rate in two decades.

For those who are constantly told how violent the United States is, you may be curious to know our homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants. While the 2015 numbers aren’t yet available, the 2014 homicide rate is incredibly low compared to Latin America and the Caribbean: [4.5](#).

The only country south of the American border that is less violent than the United States is Chile. Nearly all of the other countries are multiples more violent than America, with some being 5, 10, or even 20 times more violent.

It's worth asking why there is such a difference. Natural resources abound in many Latin American countries and they have great geography for trade. Yet in the Western Hemisphere, only Canada and the United States have seen great growth and stability over the last several hundred years. At times countries like Argentina have shined, but none have really seen lasting peace and prosperity. Again, why?

What stands out, of course, is culture and civilizational heritage. Both the United States and Canada are deeply rooted in the Anglo-Saxon heritage as a result of being British colonies. The traditions of Western civilization are woven into their very being. In Latin America and the Caribbean, that is not the case.

The colonization of Latin America by Spain and Portugal (mostly) was very different than that of America and Canada. The latter countries were literally settled by Westerners who transported their culture and civilizational heritage to what they saw as raw, virgin land. The cultures and traditions of those settlers are very much still alive today in both America and Canada, though they have evolved in varying degrees.

Latin America, on the other hand, wasn't truly "settled" by the Spanish or the Portuguese. Instead, those countries largely sent in troops and a few colonial rulers who imposed their civilization and culture on to existing native cultures and civilizations. Over time, the traditions blended, but carrying the Western tradition forward was never an organic process as it was in America or Canada.

To many modern Americans, we want to blame things like poverty and American imperialism for all of the problems to our south. Certainly those issues should be taken into consideration. But it seems that digging even deeper into how the various regions developed over the centuries, particularly when we have contrasts such as the United States and Mexico as neighbors, paints a more nuanced and compelling reason for the

differences.

In the end, we are far less free of the cultures and traditions of our civilizations than we probably care to admit. All the more reason why we should take their study seriously.