

Homicides in V.I.

BY DANIEL SHEA (DAILY NEWS STAFF)

Published: January 13, 2011

Forget having the highest murder rate in the country; if the U.S. Virgin Islands were an independent nation, it would have one of the highest murder rates in the world.

The record 66 homicides committed across the territory in 2010 is 10 more than in 2009, and makes the Virgin Islands is the most violent place in the United States, on a per-capita basis.

The territory has about 110,000 residents, according to the latest projections, which means the Virgin Islands' per-capita homicide rate is 60 homicides per 100,000 people.

The United States has a nationwide rate of 5.2 homicides per 100,000.

Compared with the most recent statistics available, which are from 2008, that number would rank the territory second in the world, behind only Honduras, for the number of homicides per 100,000 residents.

According to the FBI, New Orleans had the highest murder rate of municipalities per 100,000 residents in the United States in 2009 with 28 homicides per 100,000. The trend through June 2010 was that murders were up significantly across the nation.

While the per-capita homicide rate in the Virgin Islands is staggering, the murders themselves, with a few exceptions, are not random in occurrence. The victims and killers tend to be young men involved in criminal activities, V.I. Police Commissioner Novelle Francis said.

About 60 percent of the victims - or 40 of them - had criminal records, and a number of others were known to police, according to Francis, who said that suspects in some of the crimes were themselves killed later.

"The majority of the crime that we have seen - from 60 to 70 percent - was from violent retaliation," Francis said.

The number of homicides was the only major crime rate that increased in 2010, with all other crime numbers down, Francis pointed out. Police are solving the cases at a higher rate - 67 percent - he said.

"I think, certainly, we have seen an increase in violent crime throughout the entire Caribbean," Francis said. "And the Virgin Islands is no exception to what we've seen."

While the territory is part of the United States, it also is intricately tied to the Caribbean, which has become increasingly violent over the last decade.

According to the United Nations' latest figures, which are from 2008, Honduras had the highest per-capita homicide rate, with 60.8 per 100,000 people. That year, the Virgin Islands had almost 41 homicides per 100,000 people, and was sixth behind Honduras, Jamaica, El Salvador, Venezuela and Guatemala.

While the territory's 2010 numbers are high, they tend to fit a rising trend in the Caribbean as a whole. Jamaica - which had 59.5 homicides per 100,000 in 2008 according to the United Nations' statistics - has perennially been near the top of the world's list of highest homicide rates. Trinidad and Tobago, with 39.6 homicides per 100,000 in 2008, and St. Kitts and Nevis, with 35.2 homicides per 100,000 in 2008, also have high rates.

The other U.S. Caribbean territory, Puerto Rico, had a homicide rate of 20.3 per 100,000 in 2008.

Global and local leaders alike are pointing to a number of factors as having caused the dramatic spike in violent crime. As the war between drug lords and the Mexican government intensifies, drug producers from Latin America have shifted their transportation increasingly to the Caribbean. With the drugs has come a steady and heavy flow of illegal firearms that end up in the hands of boys and young men with few options and fewer inhibitions. . . .

V.I. homicide rate plummets in 2013 Murder rates around the world

BY JENNY KANE (DAILY NEWS STAFF)
Published: January 17, 2014



Daily News File Photo St. Thomas Bureau of Motor Vehicles employee Akil Greig, 33, was murdered at his workplace on Nov. 8 in a brazen daytime shooting. Shandos Powell, 24, of St. Thomas, was charged with the murder after surrendering himself to police, but has pleaded not guilty.

ST. THOMAS - Though the territory still yields one of the highest per capita murder rates in the nation and in the world, the numbers decreased significantly in 2013 and the Virgin Islands dropped several places in the list of deadliest places to live.

In 2013, 38 people died in homicides, four of which were vehicular homicides. Of those 38 deaths, 19 were recorded on St. Thomas, and 19 on St. Croix.

The V.I. Police Department reported 34 homicides, because it does not include vehicular homicides in its statistics, according to V.I. Police Commissioner Rodney Querrard Sr.

The territory has a population of about 106,405, according to the most recent 2010 U.S. Census, leaving it with a per capita homicide rate of about 35.5 per 100,000 people.

The territory's per capita murder rate - minus the four vehicular homicides - is 31.7.

Of the territory's 38 homicides, 32 were shootings; one was a stabbing; one was a suffocation; and four were vehicular homicides.

By comparison, the Virgin Islands had 59 homicides in 2012 and a per capita murder rate of about 56 per 100,000 people.

"The community's assistance has a lot to do with the reduction," Querrard said about the 2013 homicide rate.

Homicide in the V.I.

During the last year, the territory saw the lowest homicide rate since 2005, when it was 31.5, according to an online report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

At the time, that was a significant increase from the number of homicides in the early 2000s, when homicides numbered in the low 20s.

However, in the two years following 2005, the homicide rate jumped to 39 per 100,000, and in 2010, the territory reached an all-time high of 66 homicides, spiking the rate to about 60 homicides per 100,000 at the time.

Since 2010, the rate has fluctuated, with 48 homicides in 2011 and 59 in 2012.

National comparison

Even though the homicide rate for 2013 was cut almost in half from the previous year, the territory's per capita homicide rate still is well above the national average, which is reported as 4.7 per 100,000 people in 2012 by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's uniform crime reports of 2012.

The FBI's numbers for 2013 are not yet available, according to FBI spokesman Steven Fischer Jr.

Compared with the FBI's 2012 numbers, the territory's current homicide rate would have been in line with the murder rates of some of the largest U.S. cities, including St. Louis, Mo., which had a nearly identical per capita murder rate in 2012 - 35.4 - to the territory's current homicide rate.

Other cities with comparable rates included Baltimore, with a per capita murder rate of 34.9 per 100,000 people in 2012; Newark, N.J., with a per capita murder rate of 34.4 in 2012; and Oakland, Calif., with a per capita murder rate of 31.8 in 2012.

Caribbean comparison

Worldwide, the Caribbean region is notorious across-the-board for high homicide rates, including those reflecting murder rates, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

The most recent United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report is for 2011 and showed that the territory is more in line with the most recently reported homicide rates of Central American countries such as Guatemala, which had a per capita murder rate of 38.5; Belize, which had a per capita murder rate of 39; and Colombia, which had a per capita murder rate of 33.2.