

Climate of fear grips sunny Rome

John Hooper in Rome, The Guardian, Wednesday September 17 2008

Of all the inhabitants of the world's great cities, Muscovites - living in a country with a murder rate 16 times that of the UK - might have most to fear. Or perhaps the citizens of Mumbai or Sao Paulo, with their sprawling slums.

But according to a study to be published this month, the most frightened of all are those who live in sunny, scenic Rome. Asked to identify their outlook on life, 46% of those polled chose uncertainty, while 12% chose outright fear. Adding the two figures to produce an overall apprehension index, researchers found Rome's score of 58% was significantly higher than the 36% average of 10 big cities across the globe from Tokyo to New York.

The results, if representative of Italians in general, may help to explain why Silvio Berlusconi was returned to power this year on a hardline law-and-order platform. The capital's mayor, Gianni Alemanno, a Berlusconi ally and former neofascist, said: "Unfortunately, Rome has serious problems with security." The opposition argued that the prevailing climate was the result of a campaign by the right to promote anxiety. Maria Pia Garavaglia, the deputy mayor in Rome's last, centre-left administration, said Alemanno had "spent the election campaign depicting Rome as the Bronx of some years ago".

Rome is certainly not the most dangerous city in a country that statistics indicate is safer than many in the developed world. Comparisons are difficult because of different definitions and reporting rates, but according to the NationMaster.com website, the murder rate in Italy is lower than in Britain or France.

The survey was carried out by the Censis foundation for a World Social Summit opening in Rome next Wednesday.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/17/italy1/print>