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COST OF VIOLENCE STUDY: COSTA RICA

A HALVING GLOBAL
VIOLENCE REPORT

PATHFINDERS

FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

HOSTED BY THE NYU CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

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About the Program

The [Grand Challenge on Halving Global Violence \(HGV\)](#) is creating a movement to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals targets for peace. It brings together communities of practice working on different forms of violence in order to highlight interlinkages and amplify impact on the ground. While most international attention concentrates on armed conflicts, evidence shows that it is interpersonal violence, especially interpersonal violence occurring in urban zones, that has the most impact on people's daily lives and has a direct effect on other sustainable development indicators. For this reason, Halving Global Violence largely focuses on interpersonal violence and seeks to better understand how to address, in part through studies like this.

The movement is spearheaded by the high-level [Halving Global Violence Task Force](#), a coalition of world leaders and experts committed to leveraging their knowledge, expertise, and networks to identify and disseminate evidence-based solutions to significantly reduce global violence.

HGV is an initiative of the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, a cross-regional impact hub of 46 member states, as well as partners across international organizations, civil society, and the private sector committed to advancing the Sustainable Development Goal targets for peace, justice, inclusion, and equality (SDG16+). Pathfinders is hosted at New York University's Center on International Cooperation.

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Executive Summary

Costa Rica faces an unprecedented challenge in the form of escalating violence concentrated within specific regions of the country. This report delves into the country's administrative divisions, shedding light on its eighty-two cantons, where critical security data is localized. Recent statistics up to September 2023 underline a concerning situation. While violence in Costa Rica remains lower than the regional average for Latin America, it is the country in the region where violence has grown the most since 1995.

Levels of intentional homicide have surpassed the threshold of 10 per 100,000 people, which makes it an epidemic in the country according to the World Health Organization's classification. Moreover, while violence remains a localized issue, the number of cantons surpassing ten homicides per 100,000 inhabitants has increased, especially in coastal and border regions. Much of this increase can be attributed to organized crime and the proliferation of illegal weapons, which is made clear by the fact that the cantons that saw the most increase in violence are territories through which the entry and transit of drugs occur in the region.

Beyond homicide, non-lethal assault and intimate partner violence are issues that have their own effects in society. While official statistics put the rate of assault at less than one percent, survey data shows the number to be close to 4 percent, and evenly spread between men and women. Intimate partner violence affects 7 percent of adult women, and has increased over the last few years.

These statistics add to a diminishing perception of safety, with 65 percent of the population reporting feeling that the country is not safe. For women, the feeling of unsafety is even higher, with 73 percent of female respondents expressing that they feel a high likelihood of being assaulted, compared to 57 percent of male respondents.

Specific recommendations are delineated to counter these challenges. First, a thorough reevaluation and update of previous social programs is imperative. This evaluation should delve deep into identifying flaws in the existing programs. Such scrutiny enables timely corrections and reveals valuable lessons to be gleaned from previous work. Second, a regional focus for targeted interventions is proposed. By channeling efforts into the six cantons witnessing the steepest rise in homicides, particularly those strategically located along coasts and borders, Costa Rica can address the problems at their source. These areas often serve as primary entry points for drug trafficking, requiring concentrated and specialized interventions.

Finally, an integrated strategy involving local, national, and international stakeholders is emphasized. Present programs often lack alignment and coordination to address recent violence patterns, emphasizing the need for cohesive collaboration. This strategy should foster a cooperative spirit between local governments, ensuring harmonized and effective efforts. These joint initiatives can significantly curb violence in specific cantons by integrating local insights with national expertise.

1 Introduction

Violence is a pervasive issue with far-reaching consequences, posing significant challenges to societies worldwide. It threatens the safety and well-being of individuals and hampers economic development and social cohesion. Understanding the magnitude and implications of violence is crucial to formulating effective strategies to address this pressing problem. Previous studies, including those conducted by organizations like the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) (Jaitman, 2017) and regional research initiatives (UNFPA, 2009), have provided valuable insights into various aspects of violence. Building on this existing knowledge, our research aims to delve deeper into the specific context of Costa Rica.

At a global level, violence remains a prominent concern. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 1.25 million people worldwide lose their lives each year due to violence-related injuries.¹ In contrast, countless others suffer physical, emotional, and psychological harm. The economic burden of violence is staggering, with costs encompassing healthcare expenses, loss of productivity, legal and criminal justice system expenditures, and long-term social consequences.

Within the Latin American region, violence has been particularly pervasive. Numerous countries in Latin America face high rates of homicide, gang-related activities, and interpersonal violence. These challenges have profound social, economic, and public health implications, impacting individuals and families, undermining community stability, and hindering social progress and sustainable development.

Against this backdrop, it is crucial to understand the specific implications of violence in Costa Rica. A country known for its democracy and stability, commitment to peace, investment in health and education, and focus on sustainability and preservation of nature, Costa Rica nonetheless has not been immune to regional and global violence trends. By analyzing this phenomenon within the Costa Rican context, policymakers, researchers, and civil society can gain valuable insights into the scope of the problem, identify key areas for intervention, and allocate resources effectively.

In this regard, analysis of the costs of violence (direct and indirect) is a necessary input to assess the effect of investments in citizen security. Costing studies help to identify the full impact of violence on a country, build political will for increased investments, and help guide investments to where they will have the greatest return. This study was affected by lack of access to data that would allow for robust estimates of these costs. Access to data pertaining to the cost of domestic violence and the direct healthcare expenses within the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS) was requested. This specifically involved hospital costs associated with different types of accidents or violence, with a particular emphasis on domestic violence. However, it proved unfeasible to obtain the requested information as the institution lacks operational processes enabling the classification of medical care information by accident type or other variables essential for the study.² This aspect should be strengthened in future research. Absent this data, the study still attempts to better understand how and where violence manifests in Costa Rica and presents an analysis of available data on public expenditures to reduce violence, which appear to be primarily focused on the security sector.

By comprehensively understanding the nature of violence and exploring innovative approaches to combat it, our work contributes to broader efforts to foster a safer and more secure society in Costa Rica.

2 Prevalence and Drivers of Violence

2.1 The case of Costa Rica

Costa Rica is regarded as a model of democracy characterized by its separation of powers, transparency, accountability, freedom, respect, and fair and free elections. Additionally, it is recognized for its stable and peaceful democracy, having made a significant decision seventy-four years ago to abolish the army (Abarca & Ramírez, 2017) and provide various social, economic, and educational guarantees to all its citizens. Recent data shows that Costa Rica is ranked as the second country in Latin America and the 17th worldwide in terms of stable democracies.³

The country has built robust institutions as the foundation of its democracy and has defended them for decades. Early on, Costa Rica recognized health and education policies as fundamental tools for building a prosperous nation, even before they were widely acknowledged as pivotal elements of a country's social progress and well-being.

Despite this historical context, the country faces several challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these challenges are long-standing and have now become structural issues for which the Government has struggled to find sustainable solutions (Fernández, 2023). A range of socioeconomic challenges place stress on the government's capacity to respond to any single issue, including violence, which is similarly linked to these challenges.

For example, Costa Rica's labor market continues to experience high levels of informality, with nearly half of all jobs falling into this category before the pandemic, leading to labor rights violations, and a decline in their well-being. Moreover, both the fragmented labor market and low female participation impact families' well-being and hamper the economy's growth potential (OECD, 2023).

The pension fund system also faces challenges and may soon be unable to guarantee basic pensions for those in need. This predicament is exacerbated by the demographic shift underway in the country. Costa Rica not only experiences the lowest birth rate in the Latin America (LATAM) region but is also projected to witness a substantial increase in the population aged sixty-five and above, escalating from 20 percent to 30 percent between 2020 and 2030. This demographic transformation comes with a consequential reduction in the working-age population, posing a financial strain on the ability to fully fund pensions for those entering retirement. These factors create a pressing concern for the pension system's sustainability, necessitating comprehensive reforms and strategic planning to address the impending challenges associated with an aging population and shifting demographics.

The education system has also greatly declined, with only half of the students completing high school. This deterioration is further compounded by an unprecedented reduction in the educational budget, plummeting from 7.8 percent of the GDP in 2017 to a mere 5.2 percent in 2023. This drastic cut in funding has far-reaching implications, affecting the quality of

education, teacher-student ratios, and overall educational outcomes. The diminishing financial support for education raises concerns about the system's capacity to provide adequate resources, infrastructure, and opportunities for students, potentially hindering the country's ability to cultivate a skilled and competitive workforce.

For almost fifteen years, citizen insecurity has become another pressing issue, and violence has emerged as a noteworthy concern (Gimenez, Tkacheva, Svitková, & Barrado, 2021). Costa Rica is not accustomed to facing such high rates of violence, which will be discussed in the following sections. It is important to recognize that Costa Rica's fiscal context and obligations to other areas of human and social development limit the government's capacity to respond to violence, further complicating the search for solutions to this issue. This adds to the list of significant challenges the country has postponed resolving for decades with consequences of this becoming increasingly apparent each year.

2.2 Violence in Costa Rica from a comparative perspective

A country's institutional environment has long been considered a determining factor in its competitiveness. According to the World Economic Forum, the Security dimension of the Global Competitiveness Index (WEF, 2020) has succeeded in capturing differences in security levels between countries, showing higher levels of competitiveness in economies with higher levels of security. Homicide rate is the preferred indicator used to capture these differences, as homicide statistics are more robust than similar indicators. In almost all countries, homicides are crimes that are highly reported, addressed, and accounted for by each nation's security forces. Accordingly, this paper utilizes Costa Rica's homicide rate to analyze the evolution and increase of citizen insecurity compared to other regions and countries, while recognizing that violence takes harmful and costly forms apart from homicide that should be better captured in data collection.

According to data from the OECD, the global homicide rate has fluctuated between 6.1 and 5.5 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants over the last decade, showing a slight decrease over this period. Furthermore, it has been widely documented that countries with high-income levels tend to have stronger institutions, including higher levels of security (WEF, 2020). This is reflected in the homicide rates of countries analyzed by income groups when comparing extremes (e.g., high income vs. low income). However, in the middle of the distribution, there doesn't seem to be a clear correlation between these variables.

Table 1: Homicide rates by income level or the countries, selected years between 2010-2021

Country group	2010	2015	2019	2020	2021
High-income	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.6	2.7
Upper middle-income	7.4	6.8	6.5	6.4	6.5
Lower middle-income	5.4	5.1	4.5	4.4	4.5
Low-income	9.6	10.7	10.6	10.4	10.5

If a homicide rate of 10 reveals a pressing situation, it worsens when the data is disaggregated by regions. The Latin American region is by far the most violent region in the world, and this persists despite the observed decrease in the homicide rate over the last decade. The rates in Latin America remain at double the global average, and up to ten times higher than in more developed countries in Europe and Asia.

Table 2: Homicide rate by region, selected years between 2010-2021

Country group	2010	2015	2019	2020	2021
East Asia & Pacific	1.5	1.3	1.0	1.0	0.9
Europe and Central Asia	3.7	3.3	2.5	2.5	2.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	13.6	13.7	13.5	13.2	13.9
Latin America & Caribbean	23.8	22.6	20.9	20.1	19.5

Latin America in general has large inequalities in terms of economic level, democracy, literacy and education, access to employment opportunities, and insecurity (WEF, 2020). While Costa Rica may not yet have as high rates of homicides as other countries in the region (such as Honduras and Mexico), the current homicide rate exceeds 12 deaths per year per 100,000 inhabitants. This places Costa Rica over the threshold of 10 intentional homicides per 100,000 people, which according to the World Health Organization establishes as a critical point for considering it an epidemic in societies worldwide.

Table 3: Homicide rates in Latin America by country, selected years between 1995-2022

Country name	1995	2005	2010	2015	2021	2022
Honduras	26.4	42.5	73.8	55.4	38.3	35.8
Colombia	62.1	42.9	34.5	27.1	27.5	26.1
Ecuador	11.9	15.9	17.5	6.5	14	25.9
Mexico	17.4	9.4	22.9	17.3	28.2	25.2
Brazil	20.8	25.5	26.6	28.4	22.4	18.8
Puerto Rico	23.3	21.7	27.7	17.6	17	17.4
Guatemala	31.5	40.6	41	33.4	20	17.3
Costa Rica	5.1	7.8	11.4	11.4	11.4	12.2
Dominican Republic	12.8	26.1	25.3	17.6	10.5	11.9
Panama	13.9	11	12.7	11.9	12.7	11.5
Uruguay	6	5.7	6.1	8.6	8.9	11.2
Paraguay		16.2	12.8	10	7.8	8
El Salvador	139	64.3	65.2	107	18.2	7.8
Nicaragua	15	13.4	13.4	8.3	11	6.7
Chile		3.6	3.2	2.3	3.6	4.6
Argentina		5.6	5.8	6.6	4.6	4.2

Since 1995, Costa Rica is the country in the region where violence has grown the most, with the homicide rate more than doubling since then. It is also one of the few countries in the region where the homicide rate has remained stagnant or increased since 2010; in most countries, by contrast, levels of homicide have been declining since 1995.

The homicide rate for 2022 increased to 12.6 per 100,000 inhabitants; during 2023, it has increased to over 16.6 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (as of September, 2023).

However, homicides only tell part of the story, and it is important to also analyze other types of violence that disproportionately affect the population.

The assault rate in Costa Rica, as recorded by official authorities, is less than 1 percent (see the next section). The underrepresentation of these figures is better captured by surveying the residents. Data collected from Gallup's World Poll database illustrates this significant difference, reaching almost 4 percent in the country, with a similar impact on both men and women.

Table 4: Percentage of the population that has been a victim of assaults, 2018-2022

Country	All	Female	Male
Ecuador	12.48	10.65	14.49
Venezuela	11.98	10.65	13.32
Peru	11.74	11.38	12.12
Argentina	10.31	10.30	10.32
Dominican Republic	10.28	10.83	9.72
Colombia	9.32	9.08	9.58
Mexico	8.16	6.93	9.49
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	7.96	9.05	6.90
Guatemala	7.85	7.54	8.19
Chile	6.95	6.31	7.68
Honduras	6.73	6.32	7.24
Trinidad and Tobago	6.57	7.80	5.29
Nicaragua	6.29	4.74	7.98
Paraguay	5.93	6.23	5.63
Brazil	5.46	4.83	6.14
Uruguay	4.84	4.88	4.79
El Salvador	4.38	4.11	4.74
Costa Rica	3.93	3.94	3.91
Panama	2.41	2.19	2.65

Source: Gallup's World Poll database, downloaded on April 5, 2023.

The assault rates reported by inhabitants in Costa Rica are low in the regional context of LATAM, where half of the countries have rates that are double or even triple those figures.

Another factor to consider is intimate partner violence. Here, Costa Rica is in an intermediate position in the Latin American region, with 7 percent of adult women reported as being victims of intimate partner violence.⁴ While some countries have even double the level of Costa Rica, the number is still alarmingly high, and official administrative records show increases in recent years (see next section).

Table 5: Percentage of women that has been a victim of Intimate partner violence, 2018-2022

Country	IPV %
Bolivia	18.0
Colombia	11.9
Peru	11.1
Mexico	9.9
Dominican Republic	9.6
Ecuador	8.1
Venezuela	8.0
Panama	7.8
Trinidad and Tobago	7.5
Guatemala	7.3
Costa Rica	7.2
Honduras	7.2
Brazil	6.5
Nicaragua	6.4
Chile	5.8
El Salvador	5.7
Paraguay	5.5
Cuba	5.0
Argentina	4.5
Uruguay	4.3

Source: Gallup's World Poll database, downloaded on April 5, 2023.

2.3 Understanding the violence in Costa Rica

The Political Constitution of Costa Rica and the country's Law No. 8 establish the foundations for the functioning of the Judiciary, delegating its authority to the Supreme Court of Justice. The Executive Branch oversees the Ministry of Public Security, which is responsible for citizen security; maintaining public order; organizing the police forces; preventing manifestations of crime; and, if necessary, defending national sovereignty.

Data and statistics on violence cases in Costa Rica are collected and processed by administrative departments of the Judiciary, which have also established specialized units for monitoring and tracking violence. Examples include the Violence Observatory and the Observatory on Gender Violence against Women and Access to Justice. Other ministries and administrative units work with this data to monitor the situation of violence against specific groups of the population, such as the National Institute for Women of Costa Rica.

In this section, we will examine some of the main violence statistics in Costa Rica.

2.3.1 Classification of crimes

For statistical purposes, most crimes recorded in Costa Rica can be classified into three major categories:

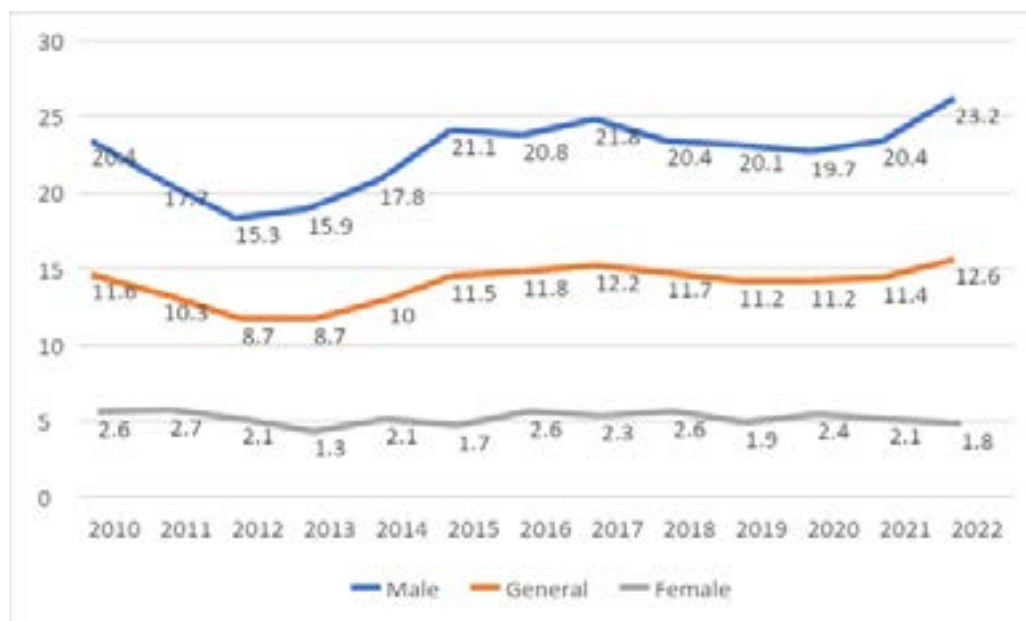
- Crimes against life
- Crimes against integrity
- Crimes against property

Crimes against life refer to offenses that involve the taking or endangering of human life. These crimes directly harm individuals and are generally considered to be among the most serious offenses in legal systems. For statistical purposes, homicide is the main crime recorded under this category and is defined as:

Homicides: Includes homicides due to settling of disputes or brawls, femicide in the commission of another crime, professional, retaliation for criminal activity, domestic violence, and others not specified.

As mentioned earlier, following a post-2010 decrease in homicide rates, that trend was reversed starting in 2014. Although the rate remained stable in subsequent years, there has been an upward trend since 2020, which has elevated the homicide rate to 16.6 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. Out of all crimes, 62 percent of homicides were linked to organized crime and territorial disputes in the illegal drug trade. This figure has been increasing over the past four years, estimated at 46 percent in 2019.

Figure 1: Homicide rate in Costa Rica by sex, 2010-2022



In line with trends in other regions, the homicide rate among men is notably higher than that among women, but the former has shown an upward trend in the last three years. In both cases, the most affected age group is between 20 and 34 years old, highlighting a significant risk for the young population, who are more exposed to the influence of organized criminal groups.

Within this category of crimes against life, it is important to address femicides. Although the absolute number may seem low (19 out of 48 homicides annually against women were classified in this category in 2022), the reality is that the number has shown no signs of decreasing for several years. On the contrary, it has fluctuated between 19 and 28 cases per year in the last decade, with the aggravating factor that these types of crimes are strongly linked to domestic violence, where the perpetrator is usually the woman's partner. In 2022, 75 percent of the victims were mothers, and 50 percent of the dependents left behind were minors. This highlights the significant impact of femicides on families and children, leaving them orphaned and vulnerable.

Crimes against integrity is the second category of systematized violence statistics in Costa Rica. Domestic violence and violence against women are the main indicators in this category. Domestic violence includes any situation of physical, psychological, sexual, or economic abuse in which the perpetrator has a blood, marital, or adoptive relationship with the victim.

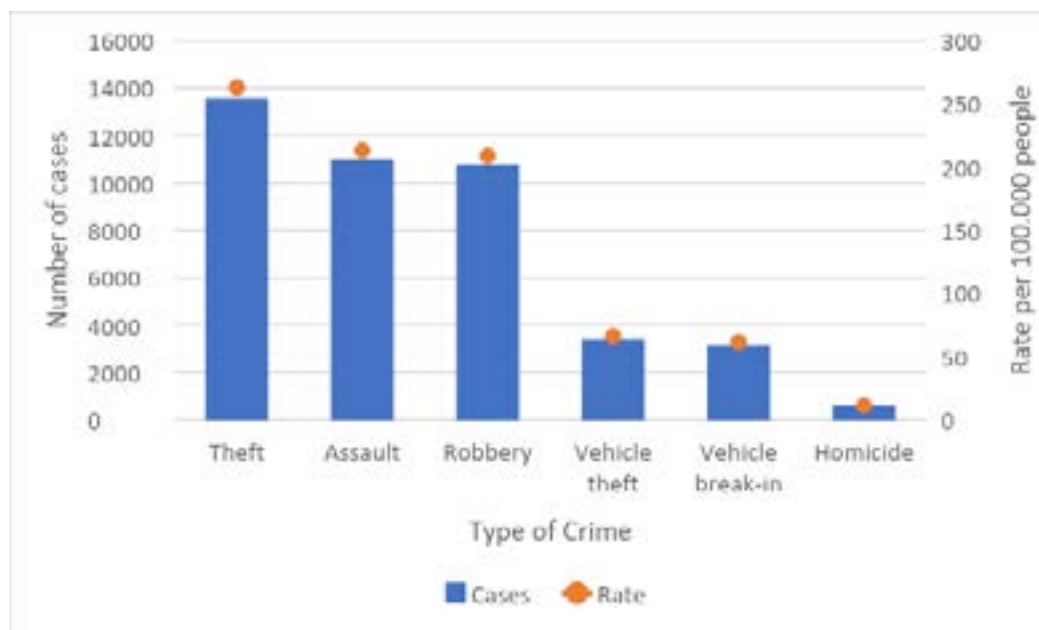
In 2022, a total of 9,679 individuals were charged with violating Costa Rica's Law Against Domestic Violence. Although this showed a 5 percent reduction compared to the previous year, it continues the upward trend observed since 2019. Over 80 percent of the domestic violence victims in Costa Rica are women. Among the most common types of aggression in these cases, 57 percent fall under psychological abuse and 36 percent under physical violence.

The third and final category, **crimes against property**, is broken down as follows:

- Assaults: Includes assaults with a knife, blunt weapon, or firearm, snatching, punches, immobilization, verbal intimidation, and others.
- Thefts: includes thefts due to carelessness, trust, and pickpocketing—with trickery or prior distraction—among others.
- Robberies: includes robberies involving forced entry, burglary, and window breaking or forcing, among others.
- Vehicle thefts: these include thefts of vehicles with prior trickery due to carelessness, armed robbery, and carjacking, among others.
- Vehicle tampering: this category includes acts of tampering with vehicles, e.g., unauthorized entry, theft of parts or accessories, vandalism, or any other form of intentional damage to a vehicle.

In 2022 alone, theft, assault, and robbery accumulated the highest number of reported cases, surpassing 10,000. For a country with just over five million inhabitants, these crimes have rates exceeding 200 cases per 100,000 inhabitants. This is one of the highest rates in the Latin American region, comparable to those observed in Mexico and Colombia (244 and 179 respectively), but significantly above the rate of OECD countries (which is below 50 cases per 100,000 inhabitants in most member countries of the organization).⁵

Figure 2: Cases of crimes against property by type or crime, 2022



Unlike theft, which rarely involves any form of direct physical aggression toward the victim, assaults do involve some form of physical aggression. In Costa Rica, half of the assaults that occurred in 2022 involved firearms, while one-fifth were committed with bladed weapons.

Table 5: Percentage of crimes that involve physical aggression, 2022

Type	Victim (person)	Total	Percentage
Theft	6,503	13,578	47.9%
Assault	7,648	11,002	69.5%
Robbery	353	10,785	3.3%
Vehicle theft	2	3 411	0.1%
Vehicle break-in	59	3,179	1.9%
Homicide	590	590	100,0%
Total	15,155	42,545	35.6%

This is an important distinction, as individuals are the primary targets of assaults, whereas homes and other buildings are the main targets of robberies.

Table 6: Percentage of crimes committed against females by type of crime, 2022

Type of crime	Total	Unknown	Male	Female	Percentage against female
Theft	6,503	732	3,082	2,689	47%
Assault	7,648	965	4,595	2,088	27%
Robbery	353	39	211	103	29%
Vehicle theft	2		2		0%
Vehicle break-in	59	10	28	21	36%
Homicide	590	83	462	45	8%
Total	15,155	1,829	8,380	4,946	33%

Finally, out of the 15000 crimes where the victim is a person, in one-third of these cases the victim was a woman, particularly due to the prevalence of assaults and robberies in this calculation. In extreme cases, almost half of the thefts occurred against women, while less than one in ten homicides in 2022 had a female victim.

2.4 From reported cases to citizen perception

Most crimes—i.e., those not involving an attempt on human life—are not accurately captured by a country’s official administrative records due to the comparatively low level of citizens reporting these types of crimes. For this reason, understanding the perceptions and experiences of citizens regarding security provides a more comprehensive perspective of the reality of citizen insecurity.

In 2022, the University of Costa Rica and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) presented the results of the National Citizen Security Survey, conducted between April and July, on a sample of adult citizens (UCR, 2022).

Regarding the perception of citizen insecurity, the survey revealed noteworthy findings:

- Sixty-five percent of respondents expressed the view that the country is perceived as not very or not at all secure. It is however important to note that this assessment often relates to the perception of safety compared to other regions of the country, as 64 percent of respondents consider their residential areas very safe.
- Women report a heightened sense of insecurity within Costa Rica. A striking 73 percent of female respondents perceive a high likelihood of being assaulted in the country (compared to 57 percent of male respondents). Furthermore, a significant 25 percent of women believe there is a substantial risk of falling victim to kidnapping or assault, compared to 20 percent of men.
- Over 75 percent of Costa Ricans consider it more likely to experience criminal incidents on the streets or in public places. Additionally, 44 percent express a high or very high level of concern about the possibility of being attacked with a weapon outside their homes, while 40 percent fear violent assaults.
- Despite acknowledging the crucial role of the police force in providing protection and instilling confidence, a considerable 71 percent of respondents feel that the battle against crime is being lost. Moreover, 59.2 percent disagree that judges ensure prompt and equitable justice in Costa Rica.

In the same year, the UNDP released the findings of the Victimization Module included in the 2022 National Household Survey (ENAHO) conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC).

According to the survey, 20.6 percent of households in Costa Rica fell victim to some form of crime (including attempts) against property or integrity between July 2021 and June 2022. The majority (81.4 percent) of victimized households in Costa Rica were concentrated in urban areas, resulting in 23.1 percent of urban residents experiencing victimization compared to 13.9 percent of rural households.

Robbery or assault outside the home was the fourth most prevalent crime type in Costa Rican households according to ENAHO 2022, just behind non-violent crimes of burglary and electronic scams. Between July 2021 and June 2022, 2.9 percent of the total were victims of this crime. Aggression against a household member was the sixth most prevalent type of victimization. Specifically, 1.5 percent of the total, at least one member experienced aggression such as physical or psychological violence or even sexual harassment. As these percentages reveal, the prevalence of violence in Costa Rica is much higher than official figures indicate, owing to underreporting of incidents. All told, various types of violence constitute a scourge affecting one in every five households in Costa Rica.

2.5 Violence in Costa Rica: the intra-regional gaps

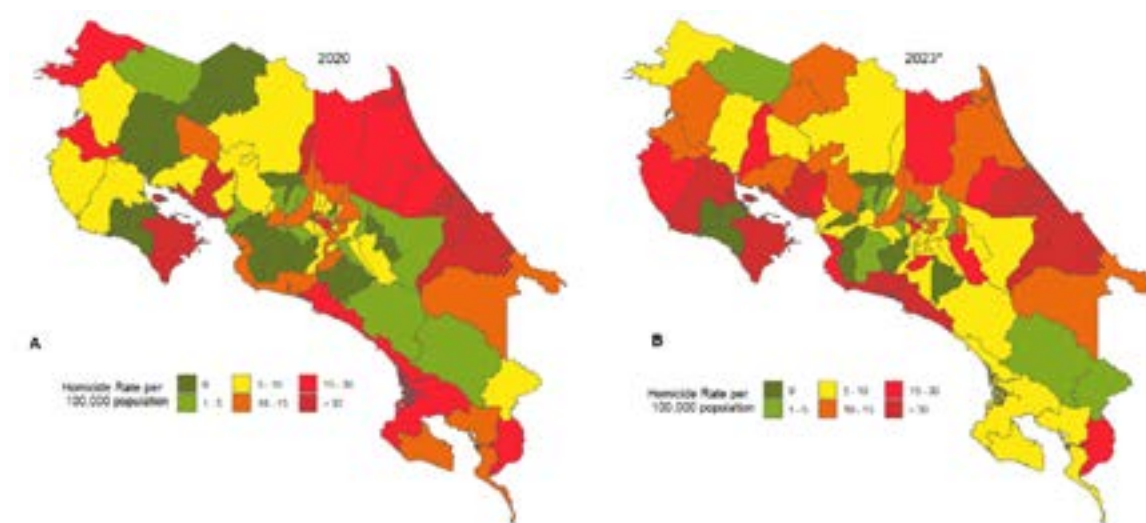
Costa Rica has seven provinces and 82 cantons. In addition to having a central government (president, ministers, etc.), local governments are consolidated around the cantons, led by the mayors of the municipalities.⁶

Costa Rica's security statistics are based on the cantons' statistics. The National Competitiveness Index of the Council for the Promotion of Competitiveness⁷ incorporates a Security Dimension, which includes disaggregated data at the cantonal level. This Index allows us to appreciate what has happened with security indicators in recent years.

The following map shows the distribution of the homicide rate in Costa Rica for each of its 82 cantons for the years 2020 and 2023 (as of September 2023). While the data for 2023 still need to incorporate events occurring between October and December, as of September, 696 homicides had been recorded, significantly more than the numbers reported in the years 2020, 2021, and 2022 (569, 590, 661, respectively).

Side-by-side comparison of the maps reveals higher homicide rates. In 2020, 20 out of the 82 cantons had no homicides recorded, a figure that has been decreasing. In 2023, only 11 cantons had not recorded homicides between January and September 2023.

Figure 3: Homicide rate in Costa Rica by Cantons, 2020 (complete) and 2023 (as of September)*

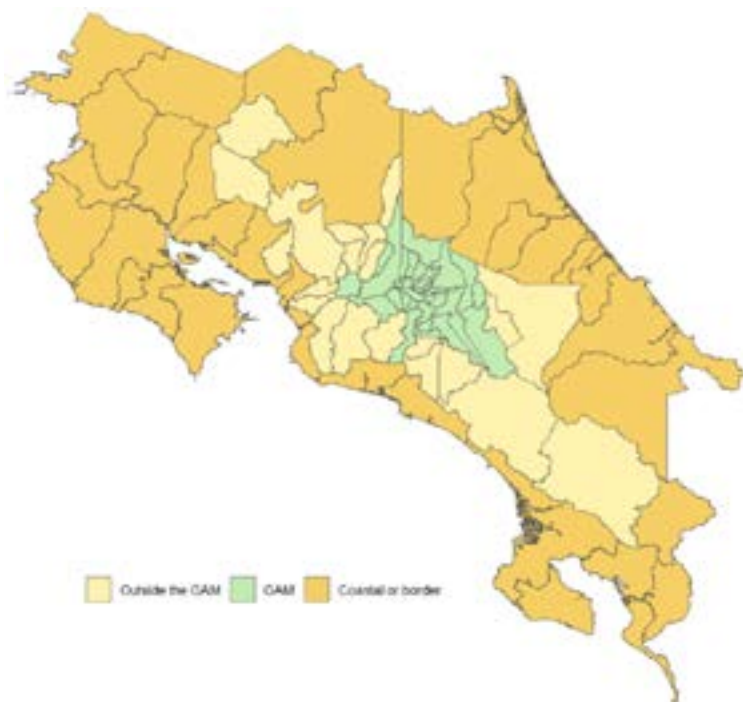


Second, only 28 exceeded the threshold of 10 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2020, while in 2022, the number increased to 38 cantons.

The most alarming figure, however, is the number of cantons with homicide rates exceeding 30 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. In 2020, only four cantons reached these figures, two of which had rates of 48 and 51 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, respectively. So far in 2023, seven cantons have rates above the threshold of 30, where the two highest ones already show rates of 75 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants located in the Caribbean region.

To better understand these trends, cantonal statistics can be grouped according to the degree of urbanization and centralization of cities and towns. In Costa Rica, the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM) refers to the country's main urban agglomeration, including the most populous cities. The GAM comprises 31 cantons, and although it only covers 7 percent of the country's territory, it is home to 52 percent of the population. The second grouping consists of 21 cantons that surround the GAM but are not part of the country's periphery. These 21 cantons outside the GAM cover 23 percent of the territory and 15 percent of the population. Finally, the cantons outside the GAM and on the country's periphery are known as coastal or border cantons. There are 30 of these cantons encompassing 71 percent of Costa Rica's territory, but only a third of the population resides there. Figure 4 displays this grouping.

Figure 4: Grouping of Costa Rica's cantons based on urbanization and population concentration.



This division is significant because statistics on social development, human development, social progress, and competitiveness are usually more favorable for cantons in the GAM. The grouping reveals that most homicides occur in the central part of the country (GAM) and its periphery (coasts and borders). The issue is more severe in the country's periphery, where homicides are consistently reported at higher rates than the rest of the country though absolute numbers are lower due to the smaller population (see Table 4).

It is in the less urbanized coastal and border cantons where homicide rates have grown the most in the country. In fact, all six cantons with the greatest increase between 2020 and 2023 are located on the coasts and borders.

Table 7: Number of homicides and homicide rate in Costa Rica according to canton grouping, 2020-2023*

Division	Homicides				Homicide Rate			
	2020	2021	2022	2023*	2020	2021	2022	2023*
GAM	258	235	232	261	9.5	8.7	8.5	9.5
Outside the GAM	33	35	59	47	4.2	4.5	7.5	6.0
Coastal or border	278	320	370	388	16.6	19.1	21.8	22.5
Total	569	590	661	696	11.0	11.4	12.7	13.2

*January to September, 2023

According to messages issued by Costa Rica’s security authorities, there are two main direct causes of the increase in homicide rates: organized crime, and the proliferation of illegal weapons. It is worth noting that borders and coastlines, considered "hotspots" for homicides, are territories through which the entry and transit of drugs occur in the region. Along these lines, municipalities with high homicide rates are located along international drug trafficking routes, which is a factor associated with the increase in homicidal violence in recent years (PEN, 2022).

The crime landscape in Costa Rica has undergone significant changes. Among the primary crimes, transnational crime linked to drug trafficking has demonstrated an unprecedented rise in prevalence. In 2020, 62 percent of homicides were linked to organized crime and territorial disputes for the illegal drug trade, a steady increase over the past four years from an estimated 46 percent in 2019.

Addressing this issue poses considerable challenges, as local actions are insufficient. Solutions largely depend on regional and international coordination. Costa Rica has long been considered a transit zone for drug trafficking. However, that assessment has evolved, and not positively: nowadays the country serves as a de facto warehouse, transit route, local market, drug export hub, and corruption hub. Regionally, it has been observed that drug traffickers compensate their operatives with drugs and weapons, essentially forming their own small armies. The international scenario has shifted due to illicit markets (Barrantes Castegnaro, 2023).

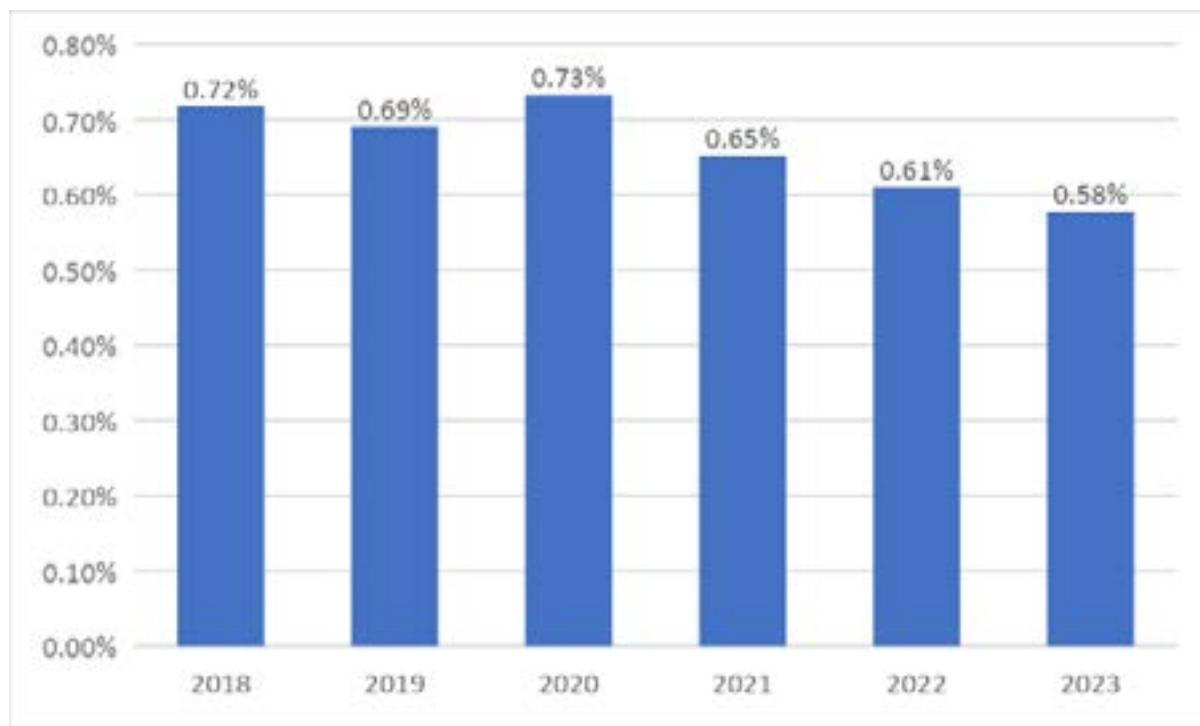
Until now, anti-drug policy has primarily focused on the supply side, attempting to combat production (e.g., eradicating crops, burning laboratories in jungles, and providing incentives to farmers to cultivate other products). However, recent changes in consumption patterns, evident in the massive production of synthetic drugs, necessitate a broader policy shift toward addressing the demand for narcotics (Barrantes Castegnaro, 2023).

3 The Security Investment

Security investment is one critical aspect of any comprehensive strategy designed to address the rising crime rates and violence in Costa Rica. As demonstrated in some contexts, smart investment in security and prevention can positively impact the scourge of violence. Some studies show that increased investment in security applied as part of a comprehensive and multisectoral strategy is associated with lower levels of homicides, robberies, and assaults (Muhammad Waqar & Amir-ud-Din, 2019).

However, in Costa Rica, the public budget allocated to fight citizen insecurity has been decreasing over time, similar to what has been seen in other areas of expenditure such as education and health. While the government dedicated an amount equivalent to 0.72 percent of GDP to the Ministry of Public Security, by the end of 2023 the allocated budget will barely reach 0.58 percent of GDP. Similarly, funding for the education sector, important in its own right, as well as part of a comprehensive violence reduction effort, as a proportion of GDP decreased from 7.4 percent to 5.4 percent in the same period, even though the country's constitution establishes a minimum of 8 percent.

Figure 5: Security investment as a percentage of GDP, 2018-2023



According to the Costa Rican government, for the period 2023-2026, the goals included in the National Development and Public Investment Plan for the Sector of Citizen Security and Justice will focus on the following:

- Reduce crime rates at the national and regional levels to create safe environments for the population.
- Fully implement the infrastructure and public investment program to renovate and construct penitentiary facilities and police stations.
- Propose initiatives to improve the reintegration of incarcerated individuals through job and educational opportunities (approximately 5,000 people).
- Disrupt forty criminal organizations linked to international drug trafficking and 300 criminal groups at the national level.
- Implement a police management model for the Public Force, including cooperative operations with other law enforcement bodies and public institutions.
- Reduce the vulnerability of migrant populations to human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and other crimes.
- Dismantle at least four criminal gangs engaged in human trafficking and exploitation of migrant populations.
- Expand the reach of the Civic Centers for Peace program, which aims to provide activities for young people in at-risk communities, with a target of reaching 65 percent of program participants.
- Provide support and assistance to 10,000 women who are victims of gender-based violence and are in institutional support centers.

These actions have a national scope and are expected to encompass the entire population by preventing and reducing violence and crime inside Costa Rica's borders. Based on the above priorities, the government's budget for 2023 includes the following objectives, aligned with the proposed objectives in the National Development Plan:

- Strengthen the preventive management of the police to improve security and civic coexistence.
- Implement the Costa Rican Police Education Policy to enhance capabilities in fulfilling police duties.
- Enhance firearm traceability through existing legislation to improve control over the acquisition, possession, carrying, and trafficking of firearms, ammunition, and related materials.
- Crack down on activities related to drug trafficking, organized crime, cross-border crime, and related activities to enhance security and civic coexistence in the national territory.
- Implement measures to address social risk factors associated with crime and violence.
- Strengthen police action to provide timely and effective responses.
- Transform management models to achieve greater efficiency.

To achieve these objectives, the budget allocated to public security is divided into six main programs. Some are dedicated to administrative matters, such as equipment acquisition or personnel training, while others are directly related to the type of service and population they serve, such as border or air services.

Specifically, the Citizen Security Service program concentrates the largest portion of resources, accounting for approximately three-quarters of the total security budget. According to the government, this program ensures through preventive actions the exercise of constitutional guarantees, national sovereignty, the protection of public order, and the security and safety of residents and their properties, thereby enabling the preservation of social peace.

Table 7: Budget allocated to the public by type of programs

Program	2020	2021	2022	2023
Central Activities	6.2	6.1	6.1	6.0
Common Activities of Services	3.5	3.5	3.3	3.0
Citizen Security Service	75.5	75.9	76.2	76.8
Border Security Service	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.6
Air Security Service	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.5
Maritime Security Service	4.8	4.7	4.7	4.5
Repression Services for Drug Trafficking	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

As is customary in public services, the largest portion of the security sector’s budget is related to the expenditures on salaries and other remunerations for the personnel involved in public safety (i.e., police). Nearly 80 percent of the security budget is allocated to salaries and salary incentives, payment for years of experience or public service, and contributions to pension and retirement plans. Another 16 percent of the budget is used for basic operational services and the procurement of materials and equipment to provide security services.

Table 8: Budget allocated to public security by type of expenditure

Type of expenditure	2020	2021	2022	2023
Salaries, pensions, and associated costs	79.1	83.0	77.9	79.6
Services	8.2	7.4	9.5	8.3
Materials and supplies	9.1	6.7	8.2	7.8
Capital goods	2.9	1.8	3.0	3.3
Current transfers	0.7	1.1	1.5	1.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Research is lacking regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of using these resources, as most projects and actions implemented in the public safety field do not incorporate monitoring and evaluation as part of their mandate. However, it does indicate that the government primarily views its approach to violence reduction through the lens of policing, as that is where the overwhelming majority of the budget is applied. Citizen opinion rankings identify public insecurity as the fourth most important issue in the country, behind the cost of living, the economy, and unemployment. Also, Costa Rican citizens believe there is limited capacity to address security issues, with only a third of citizens considering the government capable.⁸

In the following section, we will discuss a selection of policies, programs, and interventions that, to some extent, attempt to evaluate the country’s public safety policies.

4 Policies, Programs, and Interventions

As mentioned above, the issue of violence has gained relevance in Costa Rica in recent years, with trends that concern both authorities and citizens. In a recent editorial, *La Nación*, one of the country's most important print media, pointed out that:"

The response from the authorities has been punctual, without a clear orientation of a broad public policy. Isolated efforts, without belonging to a structured plan to address crime, are unlikely to succeed. The absence of such a strategy is confirmed by the Government's own confession. In April, under pressure from the wave of homicides, the administration held a public event to announce an anti-crime plan, but it only demonstrated the absence of the plan.

Indeed, in December 2022, the General Comptroller of the Republic of Costa Rica presented a report on the effectiveness of the country's citizen security system. Analyzing the period between 2014 and 2022 (CGR, 2022), the study demonstrated that the country has not had a clear policy on citizen security. Additionally, the report indicated other institutions are unaware of their roles and responsibilities within the Citizen Security System. This lack of awareness extends beyond their individual competencies and powers defined by legal mandate and implies coordination issues.

Furthermore, it was determined that over the past nine years, the institutions comprising the sector have had only short- and medium-term direction, materialized in the National Plan for the Integral Development of Citizen Security (PNDIP). As a result, the Citizen Security System does not operate according to a national vision that establishes short-, medium-, and long-term action plans—in other words, a sustainable strategy over time.

There are no formalized mechanisms for including stakeholders (i.e., local governments, other strategic sectors of the Executive Branch, the private sector, and especially citizens) in institutional and sectoral planning. Additionally, institutions that include actions to address vulnerable populations do so individually, without a sector-wide vision.

Finally, a lack of sectoral direction inhibits strengthening the allocation of financial resources for citizen security and the care of vulnerable populations.

For these reasons, the comptroller's office requested the executive branch, through the minister of security and the president of the republic, to develop a National Citizen Security Policy with a forward-looking approach to address citizen (in)security. The policy is intended to guide the strategic planning of the institutions comprising the Citizen Security System over the medium and long term, contributing to the sustained resolution of public problems.

The policy was presented by the Costa Rican government on November 22, 2023, under the name *National Public Security Policy Costa Rica: Secure Plus 2023-2030*, and includes four strategic areas: 1) prevention; 2) police proactivity in the face of criminal actions related to common crime; 3) police proactivity in the face of criminal actions linked to organized crime and drug trafficking; and 4) protection and defense of the nation.

However, the issued policy lacks specific actions and explanations of how the proposed objectives are intended to be achieved. In the case of prevention, the sole proposal comprises four goals, namely: increase the percentage of people who perceive the country as safe (from 34 percent to 55 percent); reduce the number of street robberies by half; decrease the number of property crimes (from 46,000 to 36,000 reported cases); and reduce recidivism from 14 percent to 7 percent. Notwithstanding these stated objectives, the sole strategy mentioned to achieve them is to carry out a “multidimensional and multicausal approach from the social perspective of risk factors for violence and crime commission.”

For Strategic Area 2, the only proposal is to reduce the “number of households that experienced at least one victimization event in the last 12 months” from 356,000 to 200,000, while Strategic Area 3 also has just one proposal, to reduce the homicide rate from 12.6 to 9.5 per 100,000 inhabitants. For Strategic Area 4, the only proposal is to increase the number of police operations (border and coast guard).

It is worth noting that the current government (2022–2026) proposes that these goals be achieved by the year 2030 and initially evaluated in the year 2027, meaning that there are no commitments to partial progress while they are in power.

4.1 Evaluation of public security policies

Little to no research has been conducted in the country evaluating public security policies. For instance, the Evidence Platform led by the Citizen Security and Justice Team of the Division of Innovation to Serve the Citizen of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) contains no documents related to Costa Rica.

Few investigations have even attempted to touch on the subject, and most of these are merely descriptive studies of the main insecurity indicators. In 2005, researchers from the University of Costa Rica used domestic and sexual violence cases against women from that year to estimate the economic and social cost of violence against women, as well as the average costs of stays in emergency medical services. However, the case study was limited to calculating the exact cost for fifty women, a low figure compared to the country's dimensions. According to the results of that study, 78 percent of women treated for domestic and sexual violence were not hospitalized. Among those who were hospitalized, the average length of stay was 3.5 days. The average cost of care for the women in the study was USD 316 (adjusted to 2023), an amount that is above, for example, the national poverty threshold in Costa Rica, which is approximately USD 216 monthly per person, but below the monthly minimum wage in the country (approximately USD 464).

More recently, in 2020, the Comptroller General of the Republic of Costa Rica, responsible for overseeing and evaluating the use of public resources by the country's institutions, issued two evaluation reports. The first report addressed the efficiency and effectiveness of the Ministry of Public Security in providing emergency response services for citizen security.

One of the evaluation's main findings was that the average time required for police resources to arrive at an incident site following a 9-1-1 call was 38 minutes. In comparison, Mexico has defined a time of nine minutes for this purpose, while the New York Police Department records an average of seven minutes for similar incidents. Additionally, it was

determined that there is an eight-minute average time difference among police stations for dispatching police resources.

Weaknesses were also identified in the chain of custody of evidence handling, packaging, and delivery of items collected by the officers of the Public Force, which may jeopardize the integrity of elements that could be used as evidence in legal proceedings.

These situations increase the risk of reduced effectiveness of police interventions (in incident response and previously planned police actions) and can limit the application of the legal framework by judicial authorities, while also reducing public trust and harming the credibility of both entities.

The findings determined by the comptroller general do not foster conditions to reduce forms of violence against individuals and increase access to the justice system, as they indicate deficiencies in the policing sector and a budget analysis shows a relative lack of investments in other key sectors needed to reduce violence. This is in opposition to Costa Rica's commitments in Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16 of the United Nations General Assembly's 2030 agenda.

The second report examined the effectiveness of preventive police management, that refers to the strategic planning, organization, and implementation of measures by law enforcement agencies to prevent or reduce criminal activities and maintain public order. It was found that the Ministry of Planning primarily deals with activities related to the Community Security Strategy, executed through preventive police programs such as training for children and youth in educational centers, consolidation of citizen and commercial security committees, and establishment of cantonal and district commissions. However, there are few planned activities for patrolling and surveillance, despite these being substantive functions of the Directorate. Additionally, it is impossible to determine the amount of the budget directed to preventive police service.

On the other hand, it was evident that the Directorate General of the Public Force bases its decisions around preventive police service on criminal data and the analysis of apprehensions and seizures, rather than the analysis of structural risk factors that influence the care of disadvantaged social groups, e.g., unemployment, education, and poverty. Furthermore, there is evidence that decision-making is solely based on information and data exchange with the Judicial Investigation Agency (OIJ) regarding crime incidence, not with other institutions involved in preventive matters. Generally speaking, police intervention in prevention is directed to areas with higher crime rates. However, preventive functions also include patrolling, controlling, and responding to citizen demands on issues beyond crime.

Additionally, monitoring of preventive actions by the Directorate is limited to analyzing the results of management indicators associated with criminal incidents, rather than focusing on the preventive intervention itself.

4.2 Program for violence prevention and social reintegration

In response to the deterioration in security and violence-related statistics (e.g., the increase in homicide rate, the use of firearms for homicides, victim-offender relationships, home

invasions with violence, and the number of reports received by the Public Ministry under the Psychotropic Substances Act), Costa Rica initiated the Program for Violence Prevention and Social Reintegration in 2015 with technical and budgetary support from the IDB. This paper focuses primarily on this specific program because it is one of the few interventions for which data and sufficient public information is available.

Some of the main causes of increased insecurity since that year were (a) the advance and regional displacement of organized crime and the low selectivity and training level of the State to combat it; (b) the influence of drug trafficking and drug consumption on the commission of crimes and their increased violence; (c) inadequate preventive targeting policies aimed at addressing social risk factors in the most critical territorial areas and the younger population; and (d) a general lack of coordination among institutional actors to manage a comprehensive policy that includes crime control and prevention, as well as significant weaknesses at the police and penitentiary levels.

In this context, considering both the diagnosis of the situation and its possible causes, the Violence Prevention and Social Inclusion Promotion Program was designed. For its implementation, the Costa Rican Government signed a loan agreement with the IDB for USD 187,752,000 (USD 132,441,110 from IDB contribution, and USD 55,310,890 from local contribution).

The program was aimed at contributing to the reduction of violent crime in Costa Rica. This was achieved through the execution of three main components: (1) Institutional Strengthening of the Ministry of Justice and Peace, including the construction and operation of police delegations, the Development of a curriculum for training prison police and public officials, and the design and development of a Penitentiary Information System; (2) Actions for the prevention of violent crime at the local level, through the establishment of Civic Centers for Peace (CCP); and (3) Actions for rehabilitation and social reintegration, through a post-penitentiary care program and the construction and equipping of Productive Units, a rehabilitation model that combines education and work.

The Civic Centers for Peace (CCP) are places created by and for the community especially for children, adolescents, and young people up to eighteen years of age. They constitute a physical space where strategies are implemented to prevent violence, strengthen citizen coexistence skills, and create development opportunities through education, technology, art, sports, and recreation. Each CCP offers several institutional services including:

- Access and retention in the education system;
- Life skills training; strengthening of job skills and productive enterprises;
- Personal care through healthy habits;
- Development of capacities for peaceful conflict resolution and dialogue;
- and other activities that contribute to social fabric and the construction of democratic citizenship.

According to the program's final report in 2018, positive results were presented in the indicators related to the three defined specific objectives that could be measured. Most notable were the indicators related to the national robbery rate, perception of security, and police quality, all of which improved in citizens' perception. Many other indicators of intermediate results could not be correctly measured. Therefore, the final report states that the program's effectiveness rating could be more satisfactory, with just 51.6 percent of the Loan Proposal Results Matrix goals achieved. Despite this, the report concluded that "the benefit-cost ratio is USD 2.12, indicating that the program generates USD 2.12 through crime prevention and reduction for every dollar invested." (IDB, 2018)

Another loan agreement with IDB, the Citizen Security and Violence Prevention Program, was signed in March 2021 under Law No. 9968, with the Ministry of Justice as the executing agency for the funding of up to USD 100,000,000. This new contract aims to a) improve police effectiveness to prevent crime in prioritized districts (focused on homicides and robberies), and b) reduce delinquent behaviors of adolescents and young people vulnerable to violence in districts with concentrated disadvantages. According to the Costa Rican Government, the project will involve the construction of eight Civic Centers for Peace, more than thirty police delegations, and the implementation of technological improvements for security and prevention. These initiatives will benefit approximately 655,000 people and create between 4,000 and 6,000 direct jobs and at least 3,000 indirect jobs. As of the date of this report, this new program is still in the execution phase.

Finally, recognizing that the increase in violence indicators is concentrated in certain territories before spreading to the rest of the country, conceptualization and articulation of the so-called "Territorial Violence Prevention Strategy in the Canton of Puntarenas" began in 2021. This canton is one of the 82 where the homicide rate is highest (31 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2020) and has shown the biggest increase in recent years (38.4 per 100,000 inhabitants between January and September 2023).

Reported results from the first year of strategy implementation highlighted successes at the beginning of the strategy, including support from both central and local government. This support gradually waned, however, resulting in further challenges:

- sustaining the participation of institutional leaders in follow-up meetings;
- strengthening the leadership of local government and promoting the role of local offices of national institutions;
- maintaining political will during periods of government transition;
- differentiating between intervention and political agendas;
- strengthening the notion of the Strategy as a tool for coordination; and
- the understanding of violence as a multidimensional phenomenon among institutional and community actors (FLACSO, 2022).

5 Recommendations

The case of Costa Rica presented in this study shows specific weaknesses in the country's diagnosis, analysis, and solutions for violence and citizen insecurity. First, the collection and systematization of data and indicators beyond simply counting crimes is weak. Second, a comprehensive public policy on this matter is lacking. Third, evaluation of the impact of programs and projects is not taken into consideration by the entities responsible for planning citizen security in Costa Rica. Furthermore, the country lacks the necessary data to make robust estimates of the direct and indirect violence costs for society, preventing a clear analysis of the profitability and impacts of any implemented interventions. Given the above, the following general recommendations are issued:

Short-term recommendations

Strengthening data collection and monitoring

A robust foundation of accurate data is crucial to making informed decisions. Establishing a comprehensive and standardized database is the first step, enabling the collection and analysis of violence and crime data across diverse regions and demographics. Improving coordination among administrative departments will ensure consistency and precision in data collection. Regular updates and dissemination of violence-related statistics are essential, facilitating evidence-based policymaking and the evaluation of intervention effectiveness. This should similarly be supplemented by more rigorous collection of socioeconomic data needed to better conduct a robust costing study, critical to building political will for violence reduction and guiding investments.

Implementing targeted measures to address specific forms of violence

Preventive policies addressing root causes of violence (e.g., poverty, education gaps, and unemployment) are crucial. Specialized programs combating violence against women, femicide, and domestic violence should be developed, tailored to the vulnerabilities faced by these populations. Initiatives combating organized crime and drug trafficking are pivotal, given the significant role both play in exacerbating violence.

Reevaluate past programs and projects

A comprehensive evaluation of past programs and projects should be undertaken to identify flaws in the planning process. This assessment can enhance the effectiveness of current strategies by enabling real-time corrections. Learning from past mistakes is crucial to evolving and optimizing ongoing efforts. In particular, an evaluation of the Program for violence prevention and social reintegration, and other programs of a similar nature, which have had as a common denominator the external funding from an international organization and have focused on reducing violence in specific districts of the country, it would be opportune to systematize the experiences already implemented in the country.

Medium-term recommendations

Designing projects with impact evaluations embedded in their definition

Projects aimed at curbing violence must prioritize impact evaluations. Rigorous evaluation methodologies should be incorporated to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of interventions. Evaluations should also identify successful approaches and guide resource allocation toward the most effective programs, ensuring optimal results.

Enhancing institutional capacity and efficiency

Investment in law enforcement capabilities, judicial system strengthening, and crime prevention measures is essential. Police training and equipment upgrades enhance response times and effectiveness in handling criminal incidents. Streamlining evidence collection and management processes guarantees evidence integrity for legal proceedings, reinforcing the justice system.

Long-term recommendations

Adopting evidence-based policymaking

Policymakers should be encouraged to rely on data and evidence when designing violence prevention strategies. Research initiatives evaluating public safety policies and programs are instrumental. Collaboration between academia, civil society, and government agencies fosters evidence-based decision-making, ensuring policies are grounded in proven effectiveness.

Prioritizing sustainable solutions

Addressing underlying structural issues (e.g., fiscal challenges and labor market informality) is vital, as is developing long-term plans that emphasize violence prevention and community well-being over reactive measures. Education and public health investments build human capital, paving the way for a stable and prosperous society.

International cooperation and knowledge sharing

Collaboration with regional and international organizations facilitates the exchange of best practices in tackling violence and crime. Seeking support from international partners enhances Costa Rica's capacity to address violence effectively, particularly as related to transnational issues like organized crime and narcotics trafficking. Active participation in regional initiatives fosters cooperation, enabling the sharing of successful strategies to tackle common security challenges.

Addressing the complex challenge of rising violence in Costa Rica necessitates specific, targeted actions. Here are two detailed recommendations aimed at refining existing strategies and fostering collaboration and coordination for more effective outcomes:

1. Regional focus for targeted interventions

Efforts should be concentrated at a regional level, especially in the six cantons experiencing the sharpest increase in homicides, all of which are situated along the coasts or borders. These areas serve as potential entry points for drug shipments into Costa Rica. Focused interventions in these territories can increase the likelihood of slowing their alarming increase in homicides and violence.

2. Develop a coordinated strategy involving local and national stakeholders

Collaboration and joint planning among local and national stakeholders should be fostered and encouraged. Existing violence reduction programs often employ territorial selection criteria that might not align with recent patterns of violence escalation. Coordinated strategies that encourage cooperation between local governments are urgently needed. Integrating local insights with national expertise can curb violence effectively in specific clusters of cantons.

These recommendations emphasize the importance of adaptability, regional focus, and collaborative planning. Costa Rica can reduce violence and build safer communities by reevaluating past initiatives, concentrating efforts in high-impact regions, and fostering cooperation among local and national entities.

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Endnotes

1 World Health Organization, [Injuries and violence](#), Key Facts, March 2021.

2 The Hospital Cost Accounting Department of the CCSS stated: "Institutional costs are focused on medical, surgical, diagnostic, and treatment services or procedures, rather than patient diagnoses. Therefore, to provide information on costs associated with these events, statistical data on the mentioned types of accidents is required, along with the input of a professional expert capable of listing the surgeries, examinations, consultations, average stays, diagnostic procedures, among others, that these patients may have required during a specific period based on statistical data. This is necessary for us to provide the costs of the identified services."

3 According to the [Economist's Democracy Index 2022](#).

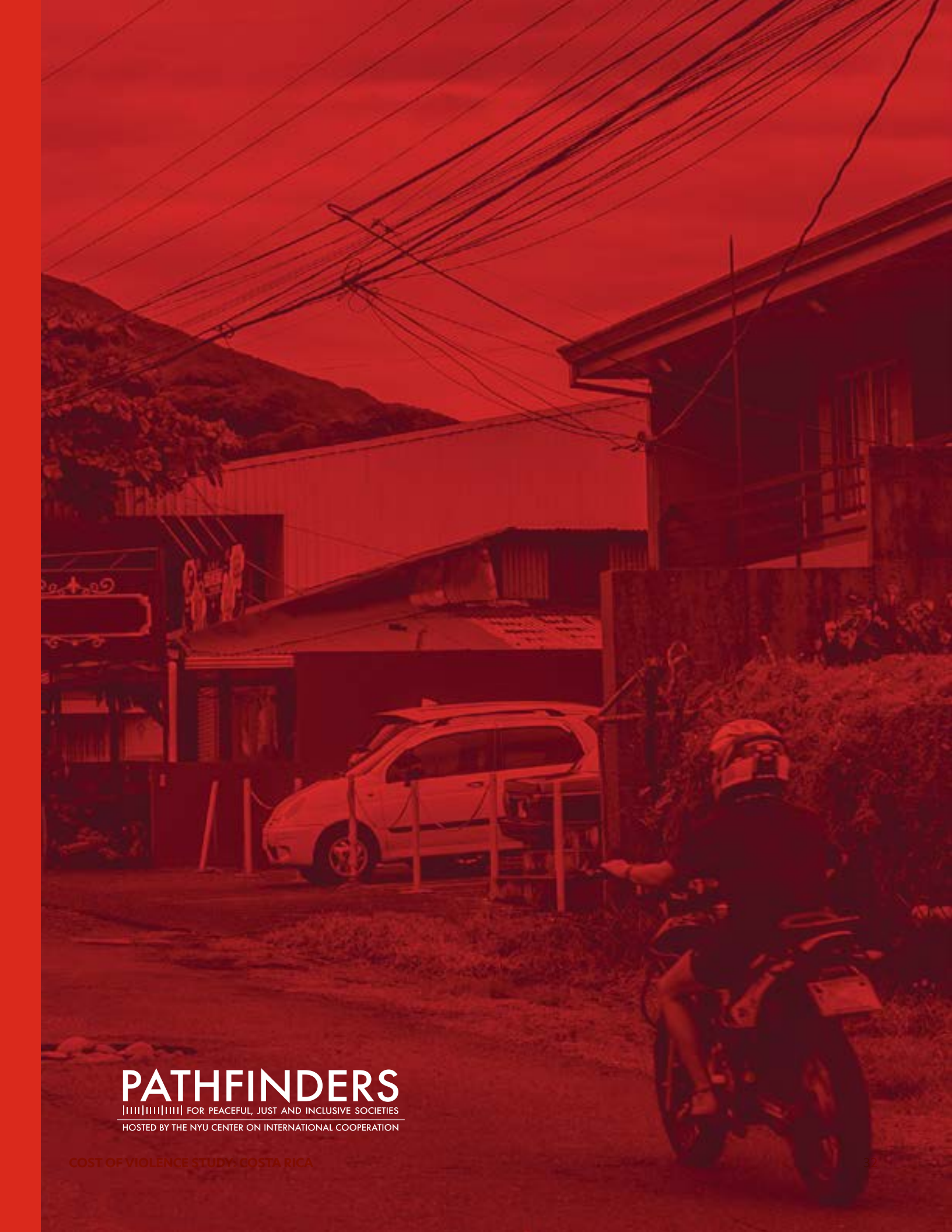
4 Intimate partner violence is the percentage of ever-partnered women 15 years old or older in a given population who have been subjected to physical and sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the 12 months (preceding the survey).

5 theGlobalEconomy.com, [Data of 2017](#) for OECD countries.

6 In February 2024, Costa Rica will prepare for the municipal elections to elect mayors in 84 cantons.

7 Índice de Competitividad Nacional, Hallazgos del informe 2022, <https://icn.cr>.

8 UNDP, [National Survey on Citizen Security in Costa Rica](#), 2022.



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