

**PROSEGUR RESEARCH**

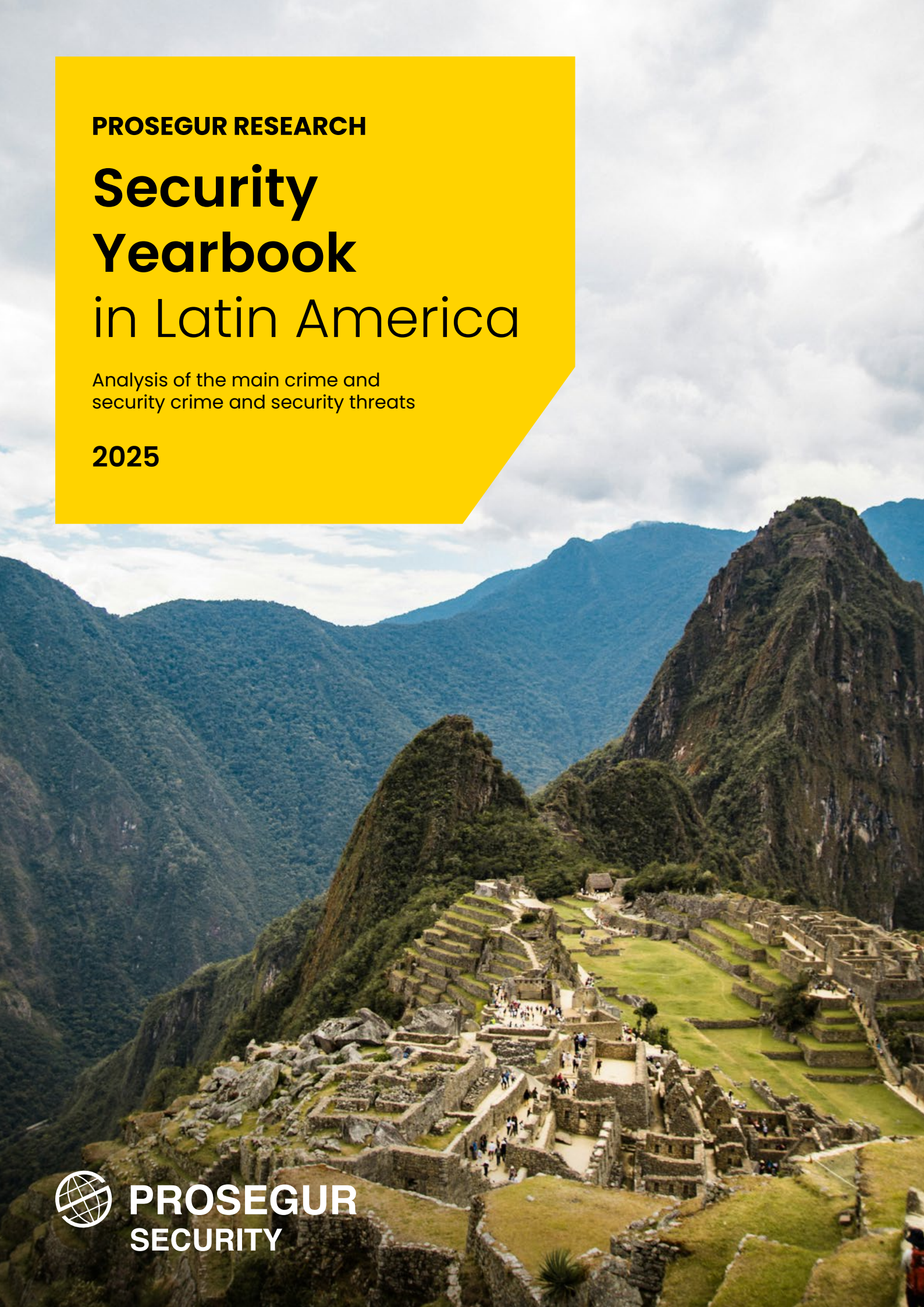
# **Security Yearbook in Latin America**

Analysis of the main crime and  
security crime and security threats

**2025**



**PROSEGUR  
SECURITY**





# 01

## Introduction

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# 1. Introduction

Violence and high levels of organized crime in Latin America are not a contemporary problem. To understand the current context, it is necessary to broaden our gaze and dig into the deep historical and structural roots that explain, at least in part, the several factors that have led to an environment conducive to the development of criminal organizations and high levels of violence. In this first Latin American Security Yearbook, we aim to delve not so much into the effects, but rather into the **causes that make Latin America one of the most violent regions in the world.**

Since the 20th century, Latin America has been the scene of several types of conflict. Civil wars, coups d'état, dictatorships, and guerrilla confrontations have left a legacy of structural violence whose mark remains. Although it would be a mistake not to think of the ideological struggle and the use of political violence as a tool of control during the Cold War in order to understand the region, since the **1980s organized crime has become the undisputed main actor in the transformation of violence**, changing its relations and becoming irremediably linked to the criminal economy, the impact of which is still present today.

The strength, penetration and evolution of organized crime in societies has revolutionized the region, moving from traditional hierarchical structures, such as drug cartels, to more **decentralized and flexible networks that operate transnationally** and extend their links beyond American soil. These organizations have been able to adapt to a globalized environment,

in which they take advantage of the deficiencies and structural weaknesses of states to consolidate their power, control territories and expand their activities, turning **Latin America into a platform for exporting criminal and drug distribution models.**

Criminality and violence in Latin America cannot be studied from a single place. A multidimensional vision is needed that takes into account political, social and economic factors as well as cultural and religious factors. Violence and crime must be understood as interconnected phenomena that require comprehensive solutions that address not only the symptoms but also the underlying causes.

The profound impact that organized crime has on the Latin American social fabric does not go unnoticed either. It has the capacity to generate mechanisms of social control through fear, violence and, in some cases, even being the provider of basic services in Guillermo O'Donnell's so-called brown zones, those where organized crime exercises power over the population at its discretion. Added to this is the development of a so-called narcoculture, which glorifies criminal leaders through music or films and other popular media, turning them into heroes and role models and immortalizing the narrative that success and power can be achieved through violence and crime.

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<sup>1</sup>O'Donnell, Guillermo, Democracia, agencia y Estado. Teoría con intención comparativa, Buenos Aires, Prometeo, 2010, p. 172.



This dynamic has led to the standardization of violence in many communities, where members are attracted by the promise of power and wealth offered by criminal groups and are a constant source of recruitment, perpetuating the culture of violence and social exclusion.

In any case, it is impossible to understand the relevance of these groups without understanding their economic power. **The illicit economy in Latin America has expanded to such an extent that it is an integral part of many local and national economies**, controlling various illicit supply chains, from drug trafficking to human trafficking, illegal mining to arms trafficking. In addition, money laundering and the infiltration of these groups into formal economic sectors allow for the consolidation of their illegal activities, becoming providers of employment, which reinforces their social influence.

**The outlook for violence in Latin America does not seem to show signs of improvement in the short term.** Homicide rates are among the highest in the world and the diversification of criminal activities adds new challenges for states in their fight against organized crime. **Criminal groups in Latin America have demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation and innovation in the global and local environment and continue to evolve and consolidate their power.** The fight against these groups requires not only security efforts, but also broader social and economic policies that reduce opportunities for organized crime.

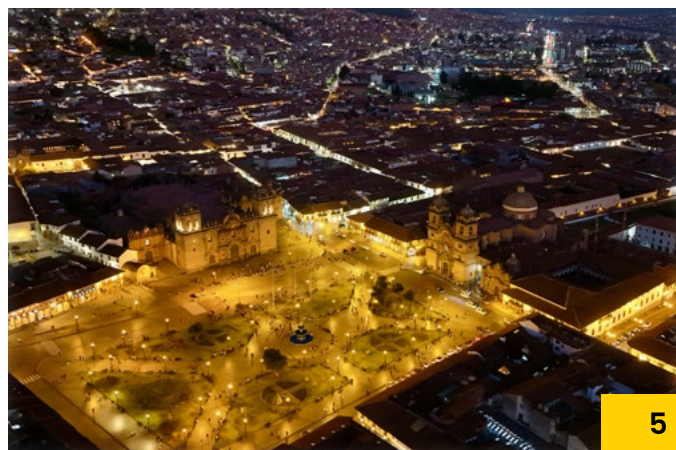
Latin America and the Caribbean has established itself as the world's most violent region in terms of homicides, accounting for approximately 33 per cent of global homicides, despite having less than 10 per cent of the world's population. According to the Global Peace Index (2024), Latin America has experienced a sustained deterioration in its levels of peace, with countries such as Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia and Honduras ranking at the bottom of the index. In terms of organized crime, the Global Organized Crime Index (2023) reveals that several Latin American countries occupy the top positions worldwide, highlighting the presence of transnational criminal networks involving drug trafficking, arms, extortion, kidnapping and money laundering. Colombia, Mexico and Paraguay appear, after Myanmar, as the countries with the highest level of criminality in the world. The World Population Review annually lists the fifty most dangerous cities in the world, based on homicide rates. Thirty-eight of them are in Latin America, including 17 cities in Brazil and 12 in Mexico. These data show an **environment of chronic insecurity that not only affects the population, but also companies and organizations, which must invest more and more in security measures.**

In this first Latin American Security Yearbook, different experts provide regional and local views on the current security context. The conclusions section includes a series of reflective aspects to consider. **Violence and crime in Latin America are complex and multifaceted problems that require a comprehensive approach.** Despite numerous studies and diagnoses, there is still a lack of effective implementation and adequate funding. This phenomenon is fueled by structural factors, aggravated by the resilience of organized crime, which constantly adapts its strategies.

To address this challenge, **a multidimensional approach is needed** that includes not only repressive measures, but also economic and social actions. Legitimate job opportunities should be promoted, education strengthened, and local economies diversified to reduce vulnerability to criminal networks, and policies differentiated according to the typology of criminal groups and their specific dynamics should be adopted.

While institutional strengthening for anticipation and prevention is key, especially in areas such as intelligence and law enforcement, it is not the only area where work needs to be done. International cooperation is essential, given the transnational nature of many criminal activities, but so is the strengthening of the public security chain, which incorporates police, justice and prisons, to reduce impunity.

Fighting predatory crime, perpetrated through activities such as extortion, kidnapping and micro-trafficking, is as important as dismantling large cartels, as these crimes have a direct impact on the population. And in this sense, there are already lessons that Europe can learn from the Latin American context, especially in relation to the organizational and social dynamics of criminal groups, the activities carried out and the modus operandi employed, and how a phenomenon that is still rather opaque in the old continent is beginning, with force, to show its severe impacts.



# 2022

**The geography  
of security**  
in Latin America

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# Mexico and the Caribbean

# 2.1 Mexico and the Caribbean

## Guillermo Mendoza Bazán

### 2.1.1. Introduction

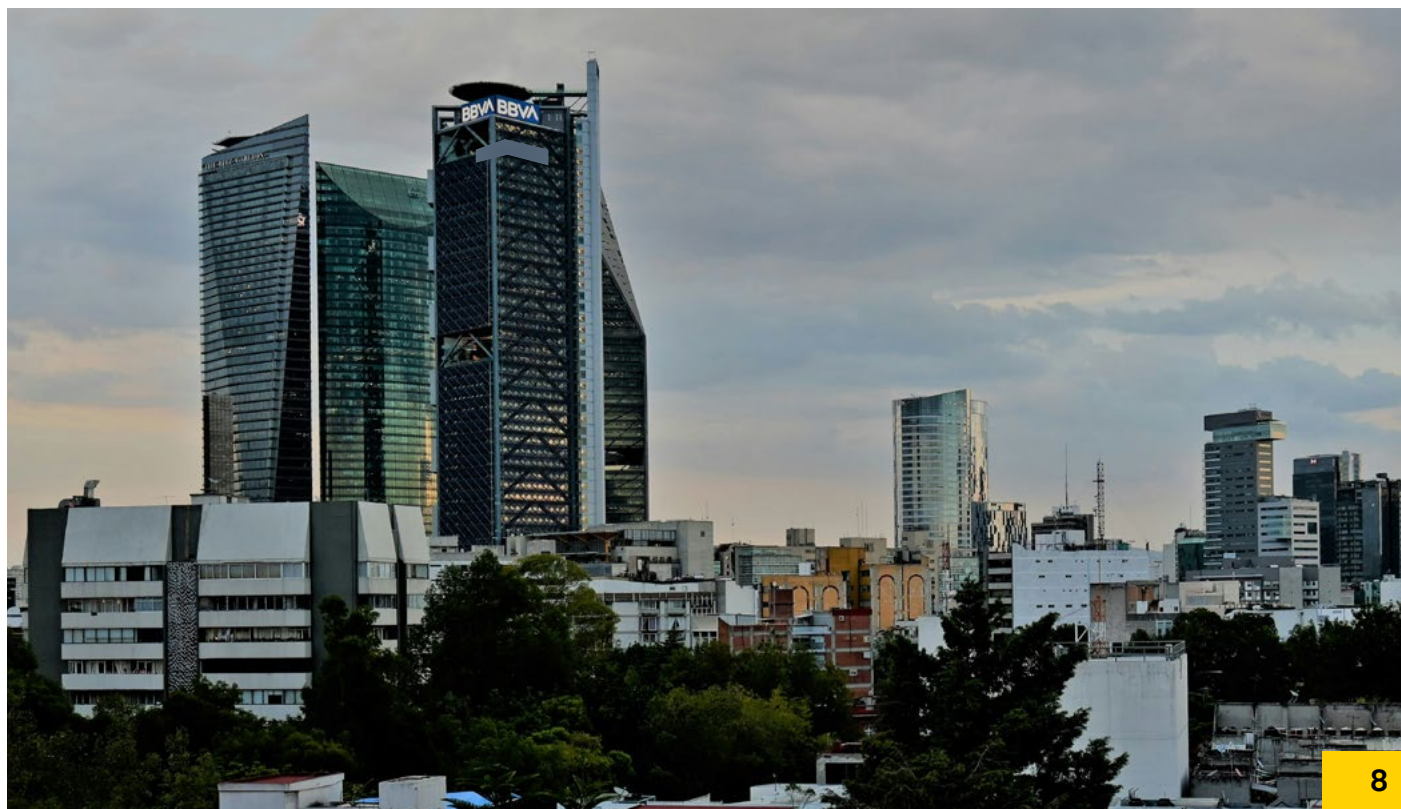
Over the past 30 years, Mexico has increased its international presence both because of its growing importance as a global manufacturing center and because it is **home to some of the main criminal organizations in the Americas**. These organizations exercise violence and control illegal economies within its territory and beyond its borders.

Mexican criminal organizations, known worldwide for specializing in the cultivation, processing and distribution of narcotics, have expanded their illegal activities into arms trafficking, money laundering, migrant smuggling, sex trafficking, bribery, extortion and many other crimes. In addition, **they have**

**infiltrated legal markets that**, in some parts of the country, are largely controlled by them.

According to the [Global Organized Crime Index 2023](#), **Mexico ranks first in criminal market scores**. The country leads in human trafficking and smuggling, extortion and illegal protection rackets, arms trafficking, trade in counterfeit goods, and illicit trade in taxable consumer goods.

On the other hand, **the Caribbean remains an important regional hub for the distribution of drugs, mainly cocaine, to the US and European markets**, and other associated crimes have expanded.



## 2.1.2. Social protests and political violence

In June 2024, Mexico experienced the largest election day in its history, with more than 20,000 elected positions at stake, it was also **the most violent cycle in the country's democratic history.**

According to *Causa en Común's* compilation, from June 2023 to Election Day, a total of 65 murders of political actors were recorded, including 38 candidates. Among the assassinations, there was no reported bias towards any particular political party: 92% of the murdered candidates were competing for positions at the municipal level.

Claudia Sheinbaum, the winning candidate, has been cautious about radically changing the lines of the security strategy.

## 2.1.3. Crime trends in Mexico

According to data from the *Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (SESNSP)*, as of 30 June 2024, a total of 1,071,366 crimes have been reported in Mexico, which represents a decrease of 2.6% compared to the first semester of 2023, which reported 1,100,315 crimes, and an increase of 2.8% compared to the same period in 2022, which counted 1,069,695 crimes.

It should be noted that the information presented by the SESNSP represents only 7.6% of reported crimes. **The number of unreported crimes in Mexico is estimated at 92.4% of the total number of cases.** According to data from the Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (ENVIPE), the underreporting by specific crime is 97.4% for extortion; 96.5% for fraud; 94.2% for partial vehicle theft; and 86.4% for kidnapping.



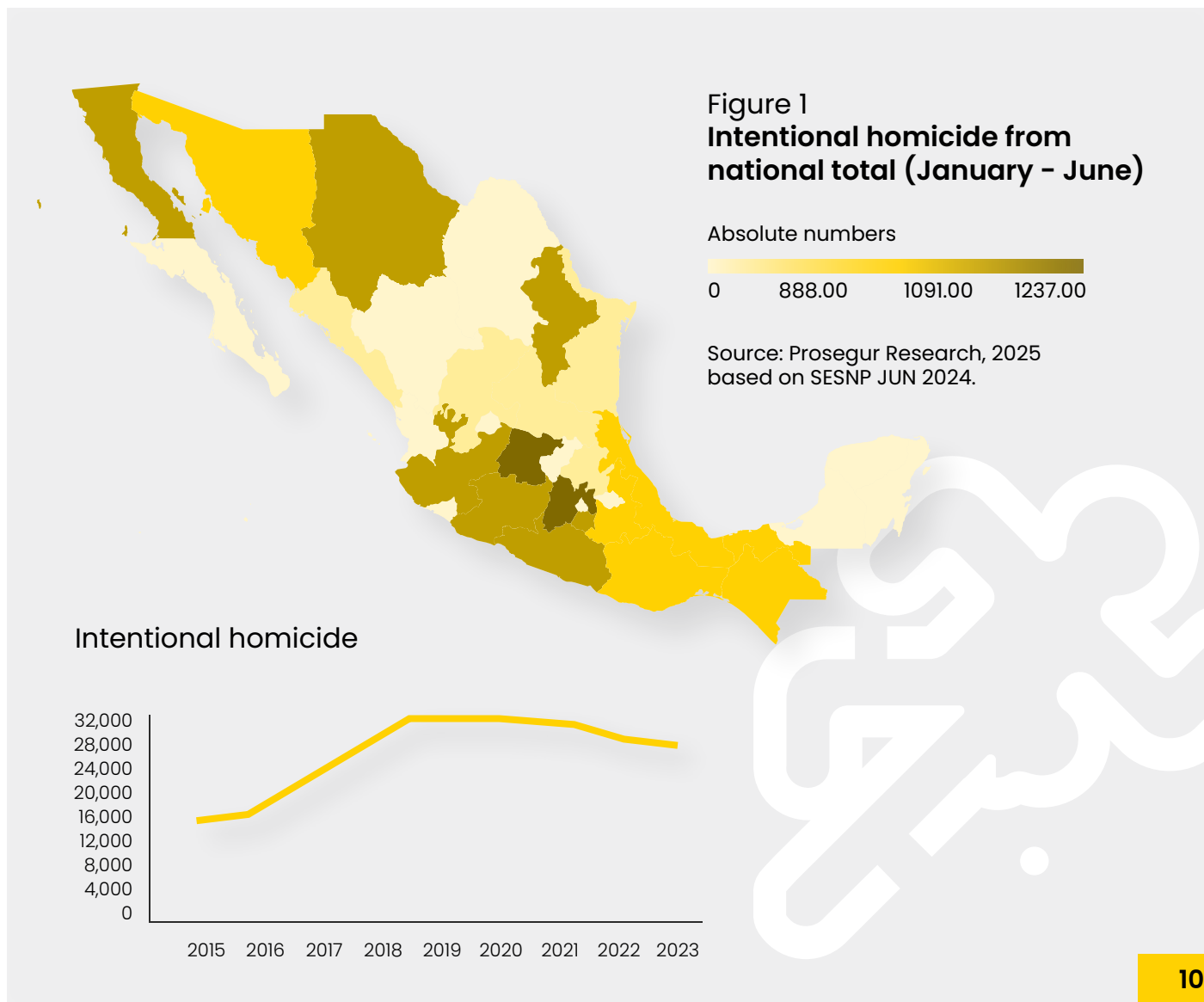
## CRIMES AGAINST PERSONS AND LIBERTY

Analysis of the incidence of crime in Mexico reveals a varied trend in crimes that directly affect people and their freedom.

### Homicide

During the first half of 2024, a total of 21,906 homicides were recorded in Mexico, an increase of 3.49% compared to the 21,167 reported in the same period of 2023 and a decrease of 0.18% compared to the 21,206 incidents recorded in the first half of 2022. **From 2015 to June 2024, Guanajuato stands out as the state with the highest cumulative incidence of homicides**, with a total of 32,894 cases.

It is followed by the State of Mexico with 30,924 incidents and Michoacán de Ocampo with 23,476 cases. Baja California, Jalisco and Guerrero are also among the entities with the highest numbers, with 23,290, 21,889 and 19,592 homicides, respectively. Chihuahua, Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave, Mexico City and Oaxaca complete the top 10 with 18,378, 18,257, 15,173 and 14,522 cases.

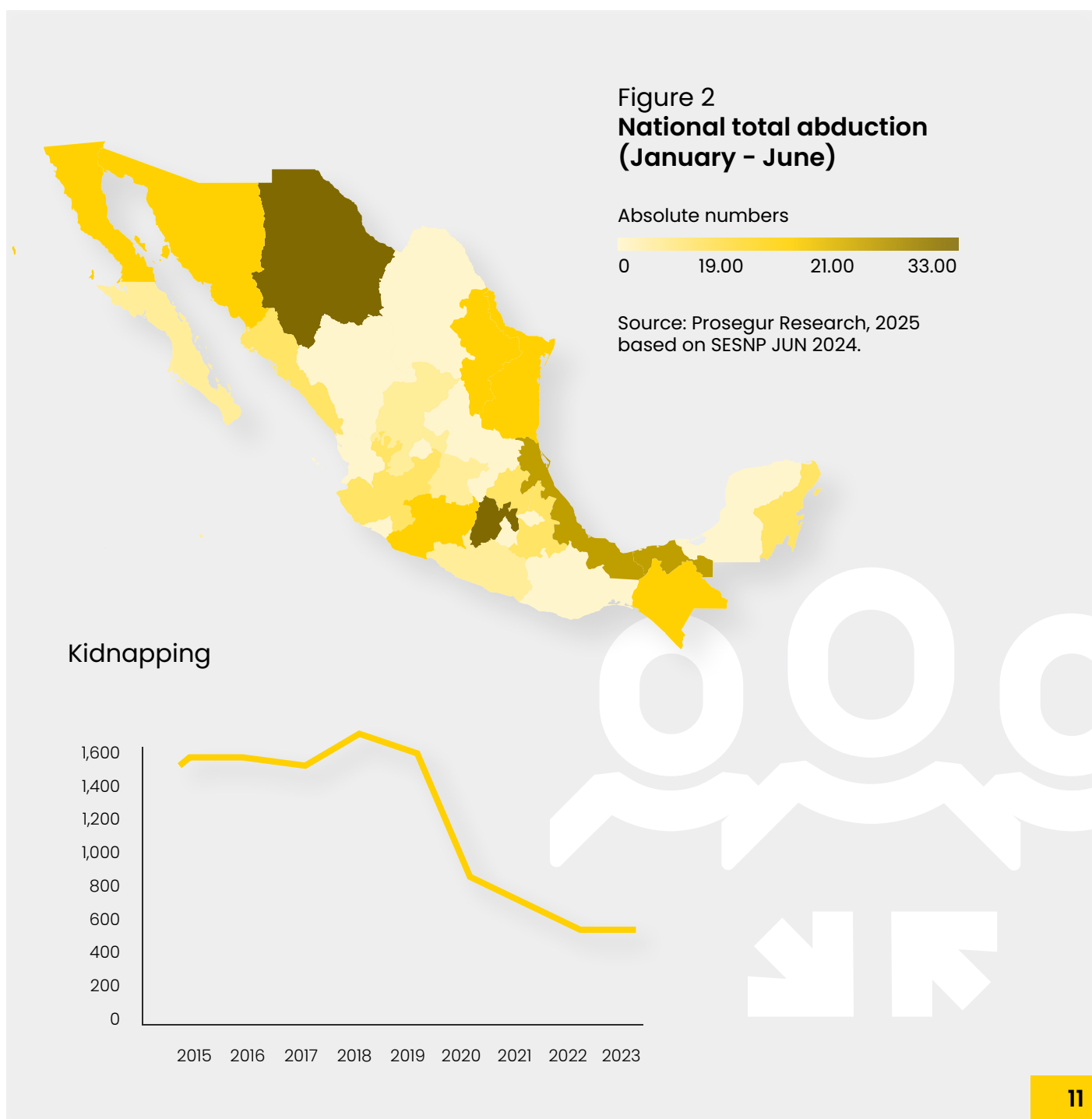


### Kidnapping

In the first half of 2024, a total of 246 kidnapping cases were reported in Mexico, representing an increase of 9.33% compared to the 225 incidents recorded in the same period in 2023, and a decrease of 21.33% compared to the 286 cases in the first half of 2022.

**From 2015 to June 2024, the State of Mexico tops the list with the highest cumulative number of**

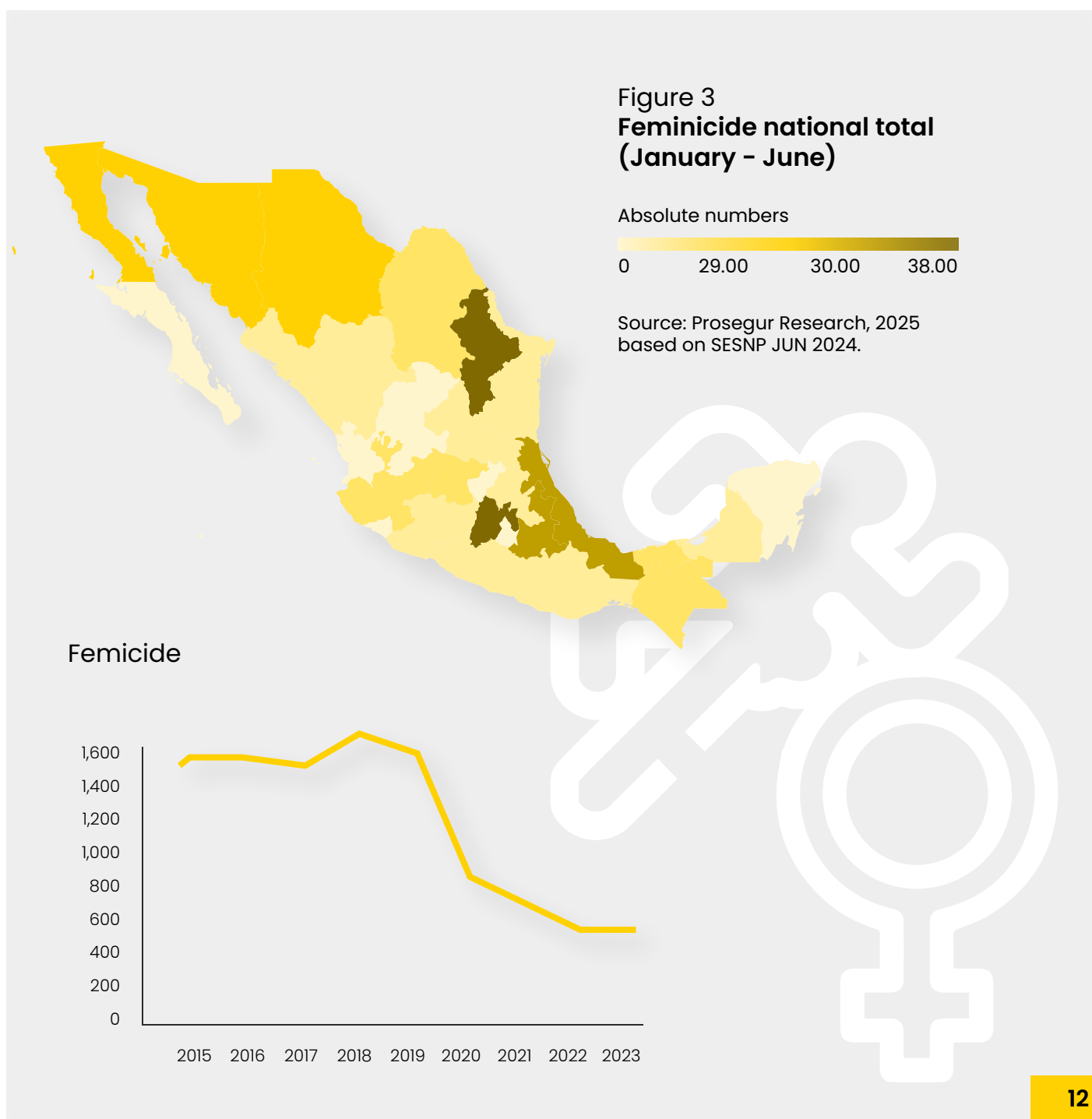
**kidnappings**, totaling 1,416. Veracruz de la Llave follows with 1,111 incidents, while Mexico City reports 773 cases. Tamaulipas, Tabasco and Guerrero also show significant figures, with 744, 455 and 389 incidents, respectively. Morelos, Michoacán de Ocampo, Puebla and Zacatecas complete the top 10 with 364, 304, 292 and 279 cases.



*Femicide*

During the first six months of 2024, a total of 401 cases of femicide were reported in Mexico. This figure represents a decrease of 8.86% compared to the 440 incidents registered in the same period of 2023 and a reduction of 12.87% compared to the 505 cases reported in the first six months of 2022.

**From 2015 to June 2024, the State of Mexico remains the entity with the highest cumulative number of femicides**, with a total of 946 cases. Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave ranks second with 647 incidents, while Mexico City reports 538 cases. Nuevo León, Jalisco, Oaxaca and Sinaloa also have significant figures, with 501, 454, 347 and 335 cases, respectively. Chiapas, Sonora and Puebla complete the top 10 with 291, 291 and 278 cases.





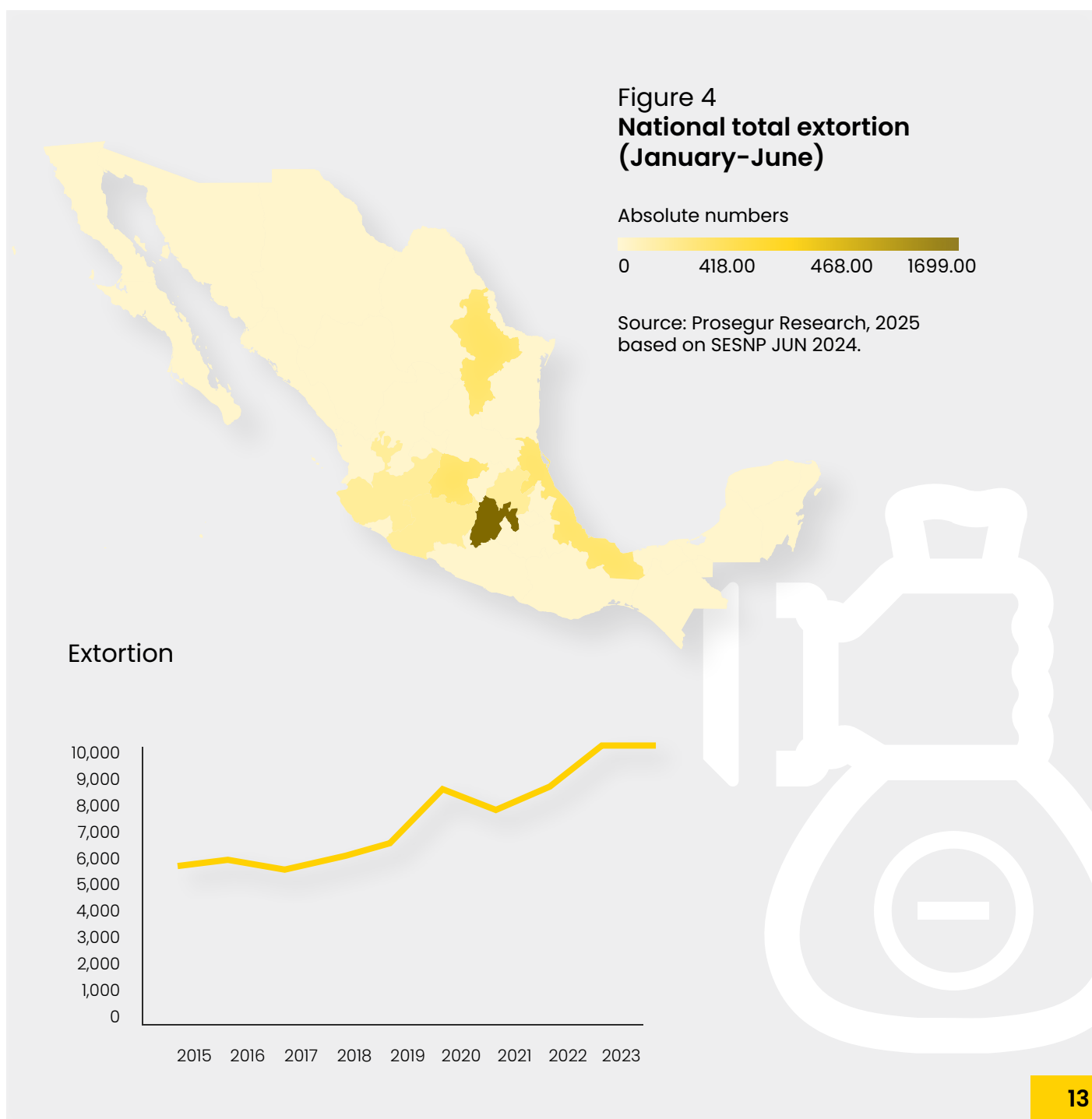
## CRIMES AGAINST BUSINESS

### Extortion

In the first semester of 2024, 5,143 cases of extortion were reported in Mexico, which represents an increase of 1.62% compared to the 5,061 cases registered during the same

period in 2023. However, this figure shows a decrease of 6.93% compared to the 5,438 cases reported in the first half of 2022.

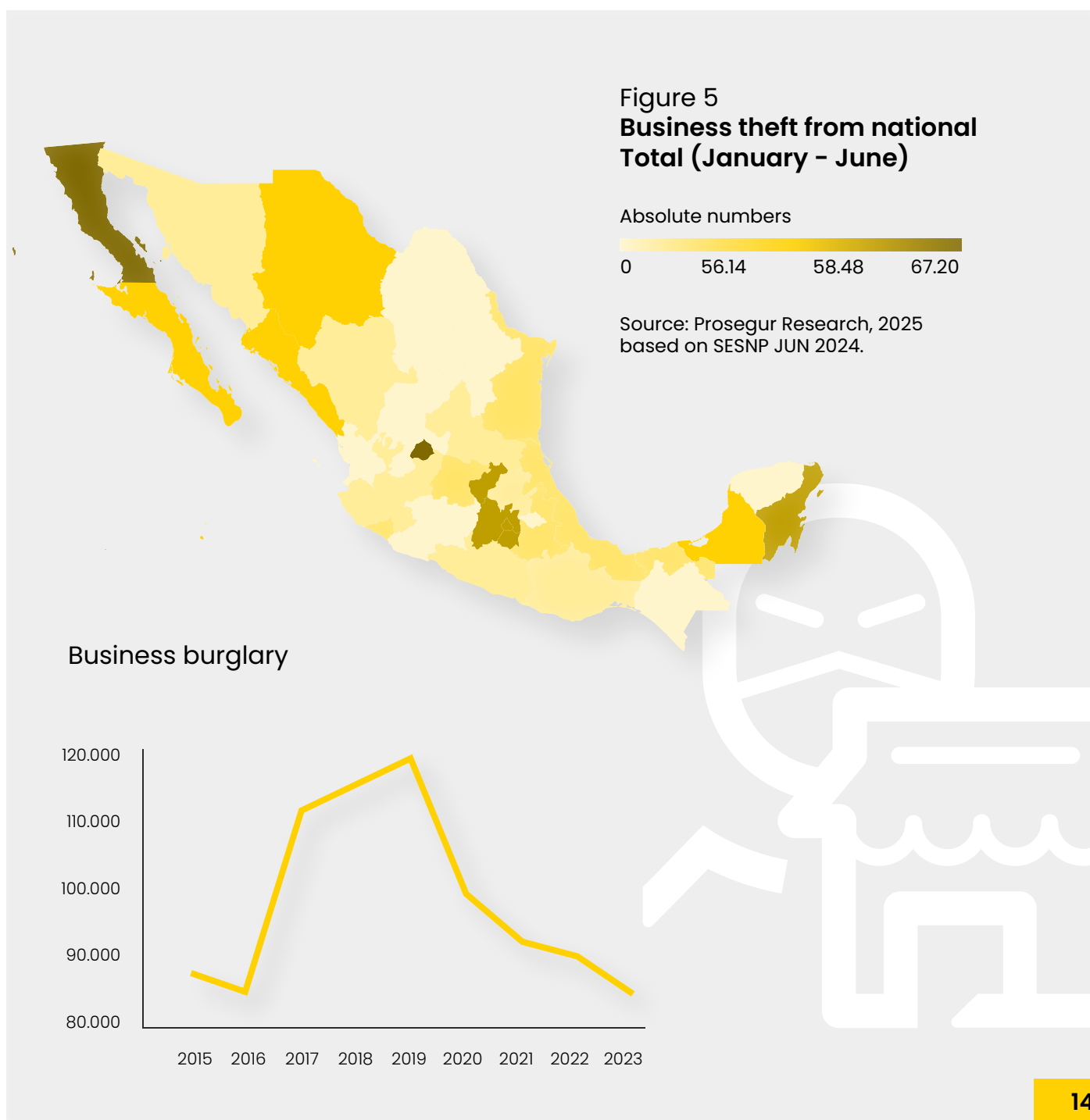
Nationally, **the State of Mexico leads with 22,993 accumulated cases of extortion from 2015 to June 2024.** Jalisco ranks second with 6,128 incidents, followed by Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave with 5,472 cases and Nuevo León with 5,391. Mexico City reports 4,858 cases, while Zacatecas, Guerrero, Guanajuato, Tabasco and Baja California complete the top 10 with 2,343; 1,842; 1,679; 1,585 and 1,525 cases respectively.



### Business burglary

In the first half of 2024, 37,650 cases of business burglary were reported, which represents a decrease of 2.26% compared to the 38,522 cases recorded during the same period in 2023. This figure is also 8.85% lower than the 42,264 cases reported in the first half of 2022.

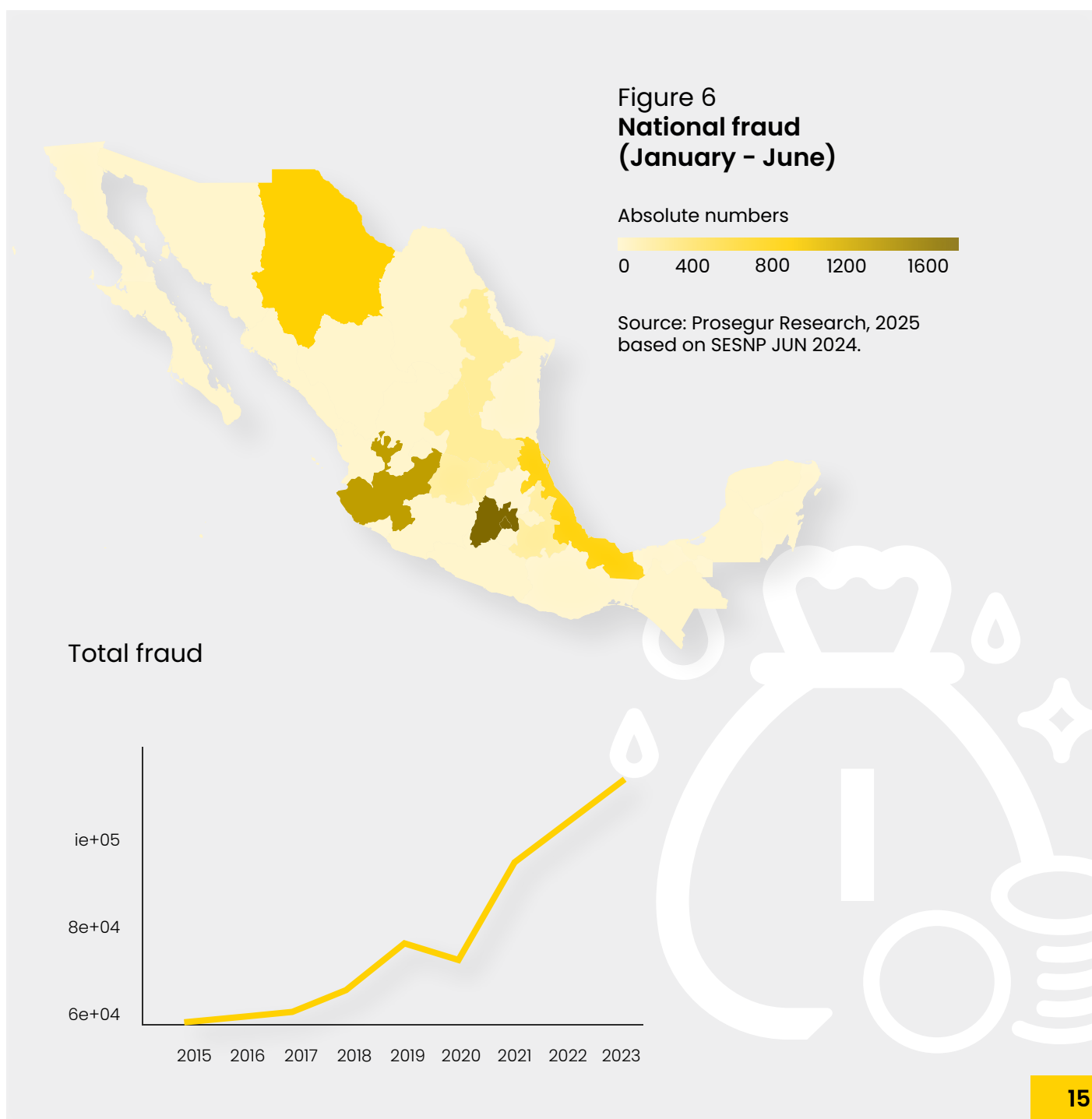
Nationally, **the State of Mexico tops the list with a total of 147,792 incidents from 2015 to June 2024**. It is followed by Mexico City with 141,435 cases, Jalisco with 87,582, Baja California with 49,539 and Guanajuato with 49,093. Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave, Puebla, Quintana Roo, Querétaro and Nuevo León complete the top 10 with 43,799; 34,919; 27,258; 25,180 and 24,455 cases, respectively.



Fraud

During the first half of 2024, 59,111 cases of fraud were recorded, marking a 6.38% increase compared to the 55,564 cases in the same period of 2023. This figure also represents an 11.08% rise compared to the 50,021 cases reported in the first half of 2022. **Mexico City leads with a total of 143,311 accumulated incidents from 2015 to June 2024.**

Following Mexico City are the State of Mexico with 85,076 cases, Jalisco with 70,285, Nuevo León with 40,549, and Chihuahua with 32,994. Puebla, Guanajuato, Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave, Querétaro, and Baja California complete the top 10 with 31,801; 28,108; 26,951; 24,675; and 19,089 cases, respectively.



### Theft against transporters

In the first half of 2024, 4,029 cases of theft against transporters were reported, representing a **15.36% decrease** compared to the **4,760 incidents** in the same period of 2023. However, this figure also marks an **11.58% increase** over the **4,266 cases** recorded in the first semester of 2022.

From **2015 to June 2024, the State of Mexico stands out with a total of 36,260 cases**. Puebla ranks second with 14,213 cases, followed by Michoacán de Ocampo with 9,394, Nuevo León with 5,871, and Morelos with 5,735. Completing the top ten are Jalisco (4,409 cases), Tlaxcala (3,932), San Luis Potosí (2,989), Mexico City (1,437), and Oaxaca (1,002 cases).

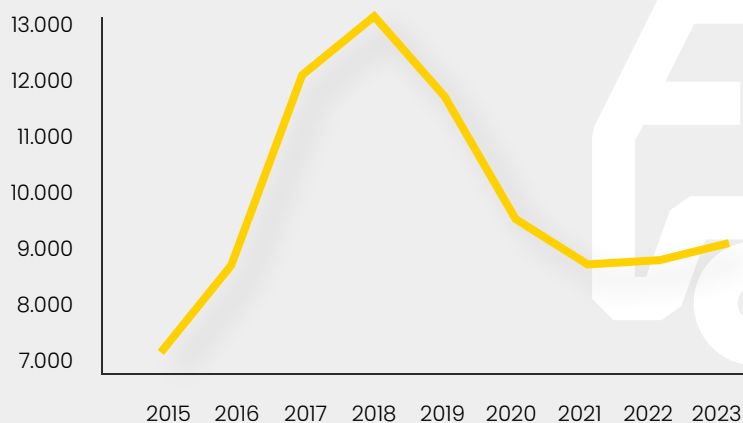
Figure 7  
Theft against transporters  
(January/June)

Absolute numbers

0 100 200 300

Source: Prosegur Research, 2025  
based on SESNP JUN 2024.

Total of theft against transporters

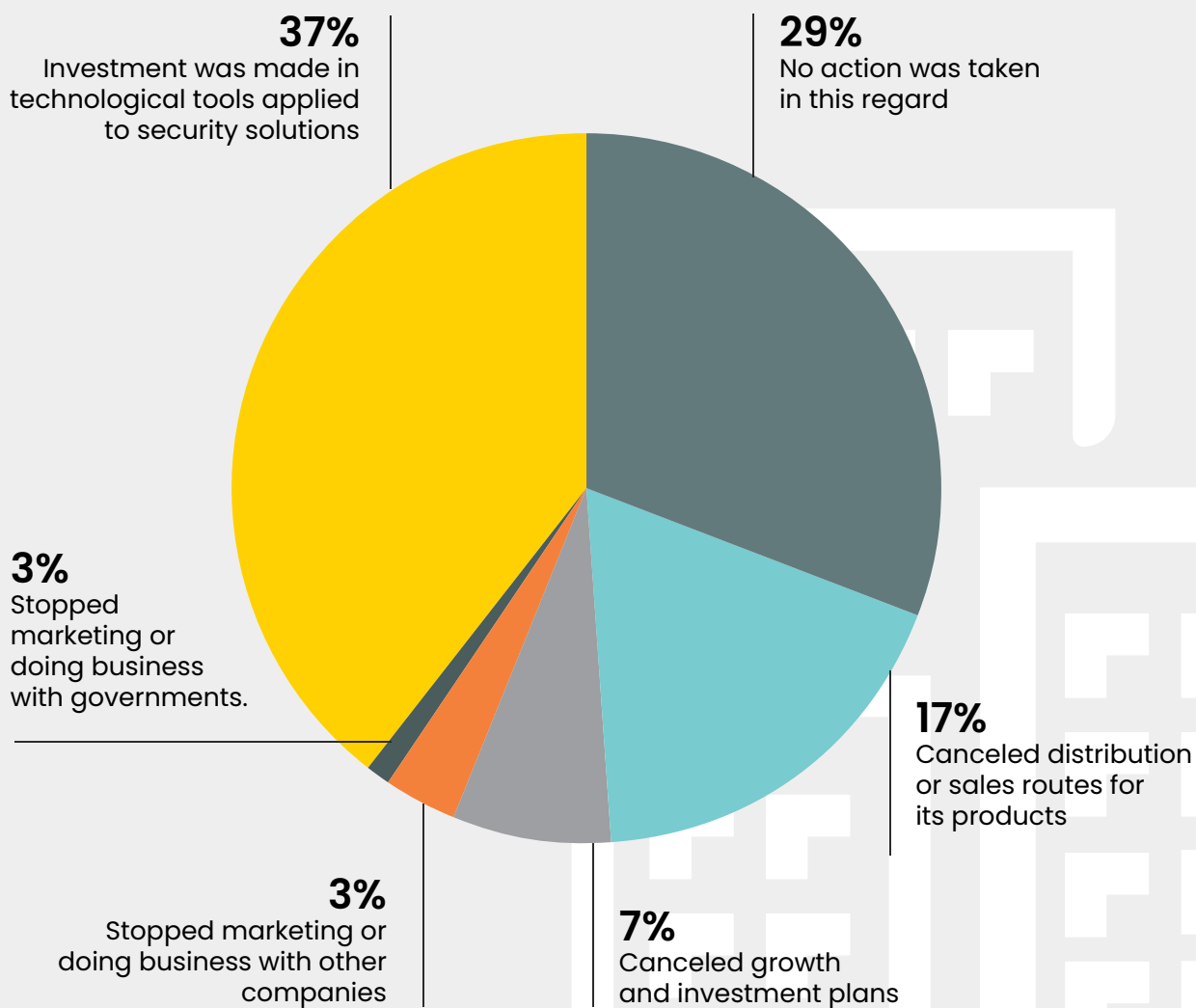


The ENVE reveals that **24.6% of economic units in Mexico were victims of some type of crime in the previous year**, affecting 1.2 million units out of a total of 4.8 million. **The most impacted sectors were commerce (27.8%), industry (19.4%), and services (22.7%).**

The total cost of insecurity and crime for economic units in Mexico is estimated at 120 billion pesos, equivalent to 0.67% of the national GDP.

The rising insecurity trends in Mexico have led to various reactions from businesses: ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

Figure 8  
**Business actions in response to insecurity**

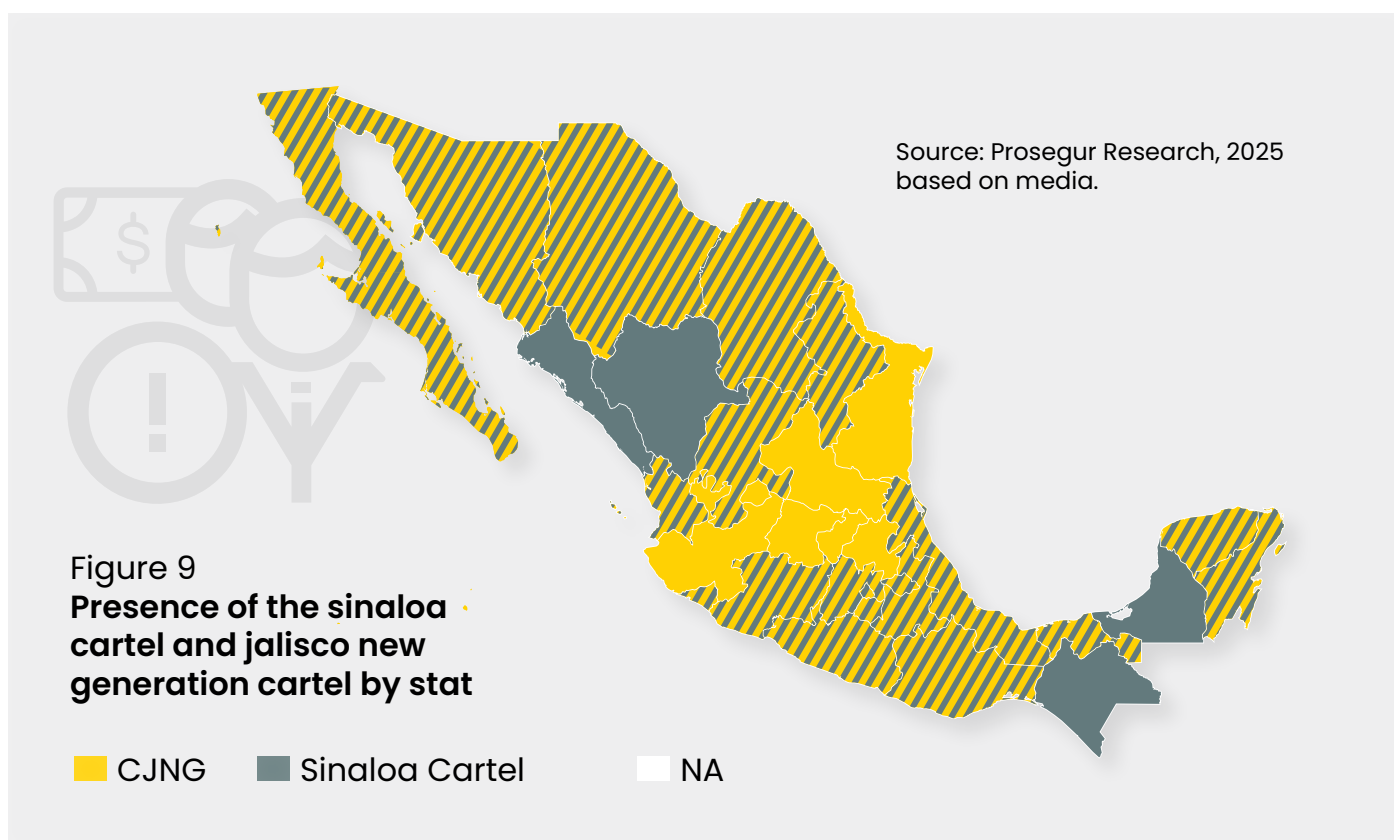


Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on American Chamber of Commerce of Mexico, A. C, 2024.

### 2.1.3. Criminal organizations in Mexico

Currently, **two criminal organizations operate in Mexico with transnational capabilities: the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG)**. These cartels are considered the most

dangerous due to their control over clandestine drug production sites, trafficking routes within and beyond Mexico’s borders, and their extensive involvement in other illegal economies besides narcotics.



Both cartels control almost all illicit drug trafficking to the United States, with a particular dominance in the synthetic drug trade, while also expanding their operations to Europe, Asia, and Oceania.

**The presence of the Sinaloa Cartel has been identified in 47 countries worldwide, while the CJNG is reportedly connected to 40 countries through links and operators.**

Beyond these two cartels, **between 150 and 175 criminal groups of various sizes** operate within Mexico. These subgroups, some of which are allied with major cartels, range from large paramilitary forces to small street gangs.

According to a recent academic estimate, organized crime in Mexico consists of approximately 175,000 members, making it the fifth-largest employer in the country, even surpassing companies like OXXO and PEMEX. Additionally, cartels offer “salaries” of up to MXN 30,000 (approximately USD 1,600) to recruit hitmen, compared to Mexico’s average salary of MXN 13,000.

### *Reconfiguration of the criminal landscape in Mexico*

**The main criminal organizations in Mexico have been undergoing a generational shift** in recent years. Leadership is being transferred to younger, inexperienced figures with little aversion to risk, **which has contributed to an increase in violence in certain areas of the country.**

Additionally, the capture of Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada—a historic leader of the Sinaloa Cartel—by U.S. authorities in late July 2024 could accelerate the reconfiguration process. This event leaves the Sinaloa Cartel vulnerable to an internal power struggle. The lack of **strong leadership could fuel greater violence among factions** fighting for control of key territories. Moreover, the internal weakness of the Sinaloa Cartel could be exploited by the CJNG, seeking to gain an advantage over its main rival.

### 2.1.4. Situation in the Caribbean Region

**The main security threats in the Caribbean region include drug and arms trafficking and smuggling, illegal fishing, illegal extraction of natural resources, piracy, terrorism, and cybercrime affecting maritime infrastructure.** Additionally, the region faces challenges related to illegal immigration.

**In the Dominican Republic,** a total of 43 homicide victims were reported in 2023. Human trafficking is also a significant issue, with 83 reported cases, while human smuggling involves routes of Haitian migrants transiting towards South America.

The country experiences **considerable arms and cocaine trafficking, serving as a major regional transit hub.** With its six container ports and active airports, it is a crucial distribution point, from which shipments destined for Spain have also been detected.



- ▲ The Bahamas remains a key route for cocaine trade and continues to be considered a tax haven, making it vulnerable to tax evasion and other forms of financial crimes, such as Ponzi schemes conducted by organized crime groups.
- ▲ Haiti has high rates of human trafficking and smuggling, exacerbated by the country's economic and political situation. Arms trafficking and the cocaine trade are closely linked to insecurity and violence.

### *Drug trafficking routes in the Caribbean*

The Caribbean region hosts one of the most frequently used drug trafficking routes in the Americas. The "island-hopping" route originates in Venezuela, where cocaine is transported north via speed boats and fishing vessels, making stops at several islands in the region before reaching Puerto Rico and Florida. The Dominican Republic plays a crucial role as a transit country, using maritime containers to send cocaine to ports in the United States.

The second most exploited route runs through European overseas territories in the Caribbean. The islands of Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten, along with Bonaire, Saint Eustatius, and Saba, form a complex transshipment system. The British Virgin Islands maintain direct connections to the United Kingdom, facilitating the flow of drugs into Europe.

## 2.1.5. Conclusion

**Across the region, criminal organizations have expanded their activities beyond drug trafficking, engaging in arms smuggling, extortion, kidnapping, and other crimes, sustaining high levels of violence.** The capture of criminal leaders has had limited impact in reducing crime.

In Mexico, the recent capture of Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, by U.S. authorities, has triggered an internal power struggle within the cartel, potentially increasing violence. There are indications that this situation is being exploited by the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) to expand its influence, further escalating conflicts between criminal organizations.

Mexican criminal groups are undergoing a restructuring process, which could intensify in the early months of 2025. More unilateral actions by the United States, similar to those seen in July, cannot be ruled out, especially considering the trafficking of fentanyl, border control, and migration management, which remain major concerns in U.S. policy.

The Caribbean region is expected to remain a prominent drug trafficking route in the mid-term, with no strong evidence suggesting that local governments or the international community will take decisive actions to change this trend.





# Central America

# 2.2 Central America

## Puerto González Díez

### 2.2.1. Introduction

Central America consists of seven countries: Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. Despite its cultural diversity and natural wealth, **the region faces a chronic security crisis fueled by historical structural problems.**

The first definition of the Central American Federation in 1823 proposed that Central America should not only be seen as a bridge between two regions but also as the axis of the relationship between the two Americas (North and South). This idea was later expanded to emphasize its key role in interoceanic connectivity, as Granados already asserted in his 1986 work. This strategic position has **had its ups and downs—bringing multiple economic benefits while also making the region a strategic hub for criminal organizations and gangs.**

Since gaining political identity, the region has been perceived as a strategic area with a clear geopolitical

destiny: global exchange. However, these geopolitical lines have largely been drawn externally. Some decades ago, foreign powers were the dominant force. Today, from the perspective of critical geopolitics, influence comes from many more sources, with criminal and violent groups occupying much of this space.

This analysis is framed within Foucault’s theory of power and “microspaces.” In Central America, territorial, business, and criminal structures have led to the formation of microspaces of power. These are highly prevalent in the region, driven by numerous criminal organizations such as the Mara Salvatrucha and Mexican cartels, which, surpassing local boundaries, have evolved into large conglomerates that operate like multinational corporations—establishing mechanisms of both control and resistance against institutions and the traditional state apparatus.



## 2.2.2.

### Underlying dynamics of insecurity and violence

The security situation in Central America has undergone significant changes in recent decades. However, to understand the origins of the current situation, one must look at the 1980s and 1990s, within the framework of globalization and the consequences of subregional peace processes. After prolonged periods of internal armed conflicts, the peace achieved was very short-lived, and political violence was replaced by criminal violence. **Organized crime groups, gangs, and maras effectively filled the power and security vacuum created by the demilitarization measures outlined in the peace agreements.**

The seven countries serve as a natural bridge between cocaine-producing nations in the south of the continent and the world's largest consumer, the United States. However, they also function as routes for various types of trafficking heading north, including weapons, people, and counterfeit goods. **Transnational organized crime, gangs, and maras have transformed the region into one of the most violent areas in the world.** This shift was made possible by a unique backdrop: weak and young institutions, economic precariousness, underdeveloped economies, and either nonexistent or ineffective prison system reforms.

Although the causes are multifaceted, and no single factor explains the situation, there are clear, direct, and significant contributors to insecurity and violence in the region:

#### *Maras and gangs*

**Maras are key actors in insecurity in Central America, especially in the Northern Triangle** (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador), with Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 as the main representatives. Their activities have made this area one of the most violent places in the world. They are predatory criminal organizations with deep-rooted social structures based on violence (InsightCrime, 2024). Among their main activities is extortion.

MS-13 is the largest gang in the region and was also the first street gang to be designated by the United States as a transnational criminal organization, with some of its leaders in El Salvador being categorized as terrorists. Currently, MS-13 maintains its stronghold in El Salvador, with more than 60% of its 30,000 members in the country's prisons as a result of President Bukele's

security strategy, MS-13's stronghold in El Salvador has been significantly weakened.

The impact of maras is not only evident in high homicide rates (for example, 38 per 100,000 inhabitants in El Salvador in 2022) but also in the economy. Extortion, locally known as "renta", "vacunas" or "piso" affects small businesses and large companies, limiting economic development and increasing poverty. Moreover, the forced recruitment of young people perpetuates the cycle of violence and social exclusion.

#### *Organized crime and drug trafficking*

According to the U.S. Department of State, **80% of the cocaine that enters the United States annually passes through Central America.** Panama and Costa Rica are the most prolific transit points for cocaine heading north and to Europe within the region. Although both countries saw a decline in seizures in 2023, Panama remains the third Latin American country, after Colombia and Ecuador, with the highest volumes. **The Costa Rican case is particularly striking since, despite the decrease in seizures, drug trafficking is directly linked to the increase in violence and homicides (+41%).**

**Drug trafficking in the region is closely tied to organized crime**, which includes both transnational and local networks. Mexican cartels, such as the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, have formed alliances with Central American organizations to secure trafficking routes. The then Minister of Public Security and Governance of Costa Rica, Luis Gustavo Mata, stated back in 2016 that Mexican cartels had displaced Colombian organizations.

#### *Collusion and institutional weakness*

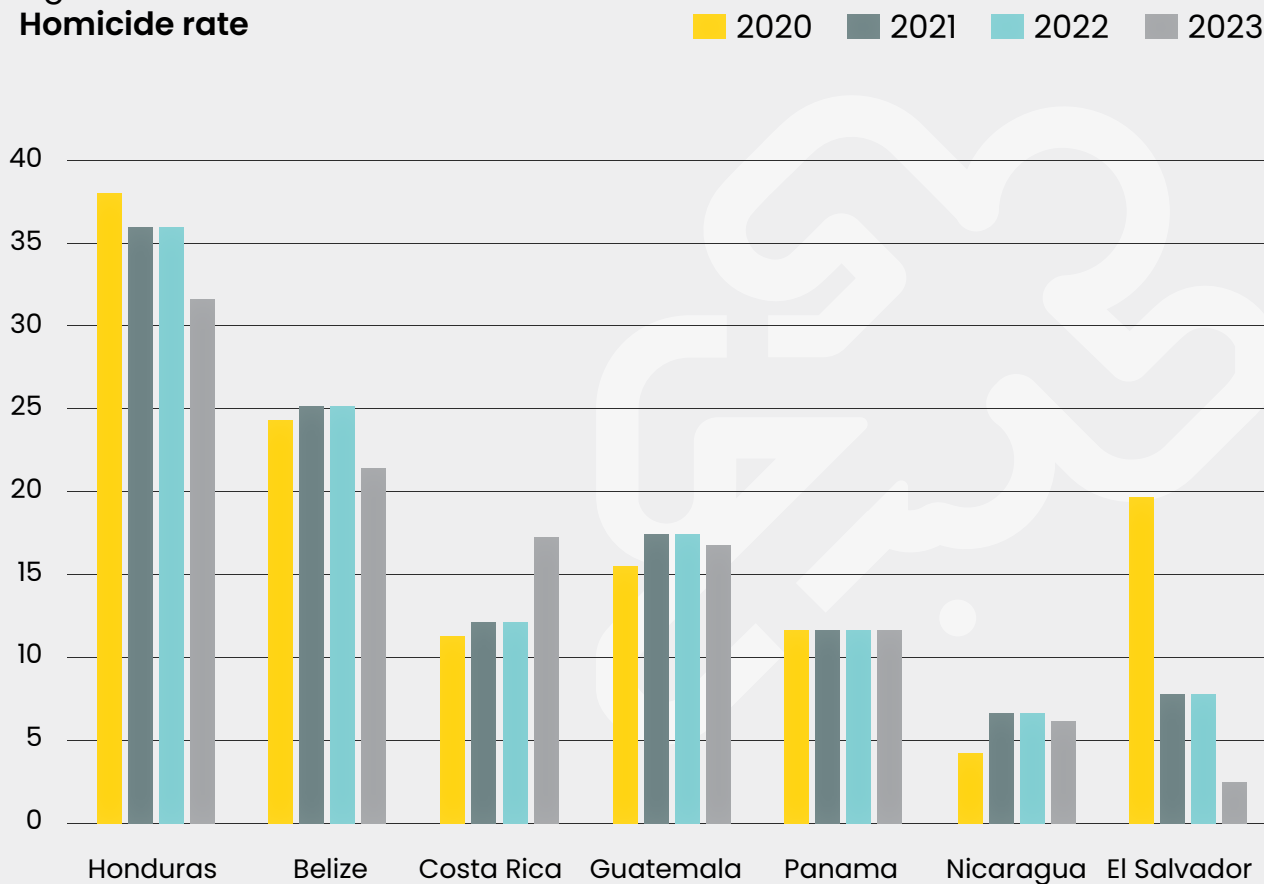
Collusion at all levels of government weakens the state's ability to combat organized crime, contributing to the security crisis in Central America. According to Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perception Index, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala rank among the most corrupt countries in the world, with corruption perception scores of 17, 23, and 23 out of 100, respectively.

2.2.3. **The geography of violence in data**

The security situation in Central America is characterized by ongoing efforts in regional cooperation and innovation in security strategies, particularly in cyber and border security. However, more traditional challenges such as organized crime and violence persist in some countries of the region. Some authors describe the situation as a “hybrid war.” The 2024 Central American Security Conference (CENTSEC), held in Guatemala, has highlighted regional efforts to address current security challenges.

Nevertheless, significant differences remain in security levels across the region. While Costa Rica and Panama maintain relatively favorable security indicators, countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras continue to face high levels of violence and criminal activity.

Figure 10  
Homicide rate



Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on InsightCrime data.



## HONDURAS

Honduras presents a complex security landscape. The homicide rate decreased by 13% in 2023, and data from the first quarter of 2024 show a similar trend, with a significant 18.1% reduction in homicides compared to the same period in 2023. **However, the country remains a violent environment, with a homicide rate of 31.1, compared to the regional average of 20.1. Despite progress, Honduras continues to face significant challenges, particularly regarding the presence of criminal organizations and elevated levels of impunity—for instance, the homicide impunity rate reached 87% in 2022.**

In recent years, the Honduran government has implemented various measures to tackle these challenges. One of the most controversial actions was the state of emergency activated in 2023, inspired by El Salvador's experience. While these strategies have proven effective in the short term, they have also drawn criticism from international

organizations such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), warning of potential risks to human rights.

However, security challenges extend beyond high-impact crimes. According to data from the Regional Infosegura Project, extortion reports rose by 153% in 2022, reaching 1,824 complaints, a number very close to the historical peak of 1,929 in 2013. The municipalities of Distrito Central and San Pedro Sula account for 62% of these reports, revealing an uneven geographical distribution of crime. Meanwhile, robbery and theft remain major concerns, though they declined by 23.5% in 2022. Coca leaf cultivation in the country has also increased, accompanied by significantly higher levels of violence in departments where drug cultivation and trafficking zones—such as Colón—are concentrated.



## BELIZE

**The security context in Belize faces significant challenges, although overall, it has shown some improvements compared to previous years.** The homicide rate in 2023 stood at 21.5 per 100,000 inhabitants, marking a 14% decrease compared to 2018, one of the most critical points in recent decades. This downward trend has continued at least since 2020. However, comparisons are difficult due to limited data provided by the country. Nevertheless, Belize has improved its criminal data collection and analysis systems, as evidenced by the collaboration between the Belize Crime Observatory and the Police Department.

**The main causes of violence in the country stem from local gangs, primarily operating in Belize City,** engaging in activities such as drug trafficking, smuggling, and robberies. These

groups participate in local drug trade and theft, but the country's **growing role in the illicit trade of drugs and weapons** has led to an increasing presence of gangs, maras, and Mexican drug trafficking organizations, complicating the security landscape and likely driving long-term violence.

According to [UNDP](#) data, violent crimes increased by 5% in 2023, including homicide, sexual assault, illicit sexual relations, violent robbery, theft, and burglary. Among these crimes, the most frequent was burglary or illegal entry for criminal purposes, with 628 reported cases.

## COSTA RICA

The Costa Rican case is one of the most concerning at the regional level. **The homicide rate increased by around 40% in 2023**, reaching its historic high at 17.2 per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to 12.6 in 2022. This escalation has drastically altered perceptions of the country, which was widely considered one of the safest in Central America and is now increasingly compared to Ecuador.

A large part of this violence is directly linked to the growing presence of gangs fighting for control of ports and trafficking routes. The Limón province stands out as the epicenter of violence, particularly Moín port, one of the key hubs for drug shipments to Europe. However, police operations in the province have led to the increased use of corridors along the Pacific coastal provinces, such as Puntarenas and Guanacaste.

In response to this crisis, in November 2023, President Rodrigo Chaves announced a new National Security Plan, which includes harsher sentences and an increased police presence. These

measures aim to counter drug trafficking and rising homicide rates. However, the current situation is causing great concern among the population and business sector, particularly regarding its potential impact on key industries like tourism.

Beyond homicides, data reveals a broader deterioration in various aspects of public security. **Costa Rica has been identified as a country of origin, transit, and destination for human trafficking for both labor and sexual exploitation**, with a 42% increase in sexual assault cases in 2023. Furthermore, **crimes related to counterfeiting and smuggling of goods, such as clothing, cosmetics, tech devices, and pharmaceuticals illegally brought in from Nicaragua and Panama, are on the rise**. The illicit trade of excise-taxed goods, like cigarettes and alcoholic beverages, is also increasing. On the cybersecurity front, the government declared a national emergency due to cyberattacks on public institutions.





## GUATEMALA

**Guatemala is currently facing a complex security crisis characterized by high levels of violence, organized crime, and institutional weakness.** The presence of transnational criminal organizations and local gangs remains the most significant threat, particularly in urban areas and border regions.

**Guatemala serves as a strategic transit point for illicit goods,** further exacerbating violence. Despite the continued reduction in the homicide rate—16.7 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2023—violence levels remain above the regional average. In response, the Guatemalan government has implemented various measures, including strengthening security forces and collaborating with international agencies.

Beyond violent crimes, **extortion poses a major challenge, carried out by gangs** like MS-13 and Barrio 18, as well as other groups imitating their tactics. Its economic impact is estimated at approximately \$61 million annually. According to data from the Public Ministry, 9,566 extortion complaints were filed in 2022, marking a 7% increase compared to the previous year. Alarming, 80% of these cases are believed to have originated inside penitentiaries. **The primary victims include small businesses and the public transportation sector,** where murders have occurred following refusals to pay so-called “rents”.



## PANAMA

Despite being considered one of the safest countries in Central America, **Panama still faces security challenges related to organized crime and violence, particularly in urban and border areas.** While the country's geographic position makes it a transit point for drug trafficking operations, its homicide rate remains relatively low compared to neighboring countries, registering 11.5 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2023. According to some think tanks, this stability in low homicide rates suggests that, although organized crime is present, groups operate without violent confrontations over control of territories and routes.

However, perception surveys conducted in Panama indicate that 80% of respondents believe that crime and delinquency have increased, reaching the highest perception level in recent years. According to data provided by the National

Criminal Statistics System, there has been a **rise in property crimes, mainly robberies and thefts, in urban areas such as Panama City and Colón,** with robberies increasing by 19% in early 2024 compared to the same period in 2023. Extortion, although less prevalent than in other countries in the region, has shown a slight increase. While official data remains inaccessible, prosecutor Emeldo Márquez, who specializes in organized crime, included extortion among the crimes that increased in 2023. Despite these concerns, **Panama maintains relatively low crime rates compared to the rest of Central America.**



## NICARAGUA

One of the main limitations in analyzing the country's security situation is the lack of transparency and publication of official data by institutions. **Nicaragua presents a complex and controversial security landscape.** According to various interviews and statements, the homicide rate stands at 6.2 per 100,000 inhabitants, showing a slight downward trend, making it the lowest in Central America. However, assessing organized crime trends remains challenging due to government restrictions on media outlets and NGOs.

Based on sources outside the region and on-the-ground reports, the 2023 Global Peace Index ranks Nicaragua 123rd out of 163 countries, reflecting a slight improvement. The government has implemented various security measures, including the deployment of police forces nationwide. However, these actions have raised concerns among international human rights and civil liberties organizations, particularly regarding the potential criminalization of social and religious leaders.



## EL SALVADOR

In light of the data, **El Salvador is the country that has improved its security figures the most in the entire region.** The homicide rate decreased by almost 70% in the last year, closing 2023 with the lowest rate in the Americas, at 2.4 per 100,000 inhabitants. This reduction contrasts with the situation in 2015, when the country was among the most violent not only on the continent but also in the world. In any case, it is worth noting that a large number of experts question this figure; the Human Rights Observatory of the Central American University argues that the figures are grossly underestimated, and that they do not include deaths of gang members and/or those during security force operations.

The measures implemented by Nayib Bukele's government have fueled debate about strategies to address the challenge of insecurity in Latin America. While data show **substantial improvement in safety data. At all levels, the model is heavily criticized in terms of human rights and the rule of law. One of the areas that is generating the most criticism is the implementation of the state of emergency,** in force since March 2022, which has resulted in one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, at 2,303 per 100,000 adults. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has repeatedly expressed concern about the excessive duration of the state of emergency and the mass arrests within it.





# Colombia and Venezuela

# 2.3 Colombia and Venezuela

## Jerónimo Ríos Sierra

For decades there have been **shared elements in a good part of the criminal dynamics and (in) security shared by Colombia and Venezuela, especially in relation to the border corridor**. Although it exceeds 2,000 kilometers, it particularly affects the Colombian departments of Arauca and Norte de Santander, and the Venezuelan states of Zulia, Táchira, and Apure. However, despite the above, each state is experiencing specific circumstances that, while allowing for shared perspectives, are also anchored in specific realities, as will be seen below.

**In the case of Colombia, a turning point has been marked by the Peace Agreement with the guerrillas of the FARC-EP**, signed in November 2016, and which has largely defined part of the security policy of the last three Executives (Ríos, 2024), since it has transformed a large part of the board of political violence and organized crime (Ríos, 2022). This is because the internal armed conflict with the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas remains unresolved (in force since 1964), and dozens of structures inherited from paramilitarism (formally demobilized in 2006) operate in the country, along with a multitude of small - and not so small - armed organizations very indirectly related to the extinct FARC-EP.

By July 2024, a total of 420 former guerrillas were counted as murdered, in addition to another 1,500 social leaders, counted since November 2016, when the signing of the Agreement with the FARC-EP was taken as a reference point (Indepaz, 2024). Even though more than 7,000 guerrilla fighters have laid down their weapons, and another 7,000 have availed themselves of the benefits of the Agreement, the **dynamics and trends of violence in Colombia are far from being overcome** (Colombian National Police, 2024). Since late 2016, more than thirty so-called dissident FARC-EP structures have proliferated, while 94% of the former combatants maintain their firm intention to reintegrate into civilian life (Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization, 2024). That is to say, **such armed structures operate mostly at the local level, closely associated with the drug trafficking and illicit mining business** in scenarios where, traditionally, the defunct FARC-EP were hegemonic. Thus, even though most of the structures do not exceed 500 members, two

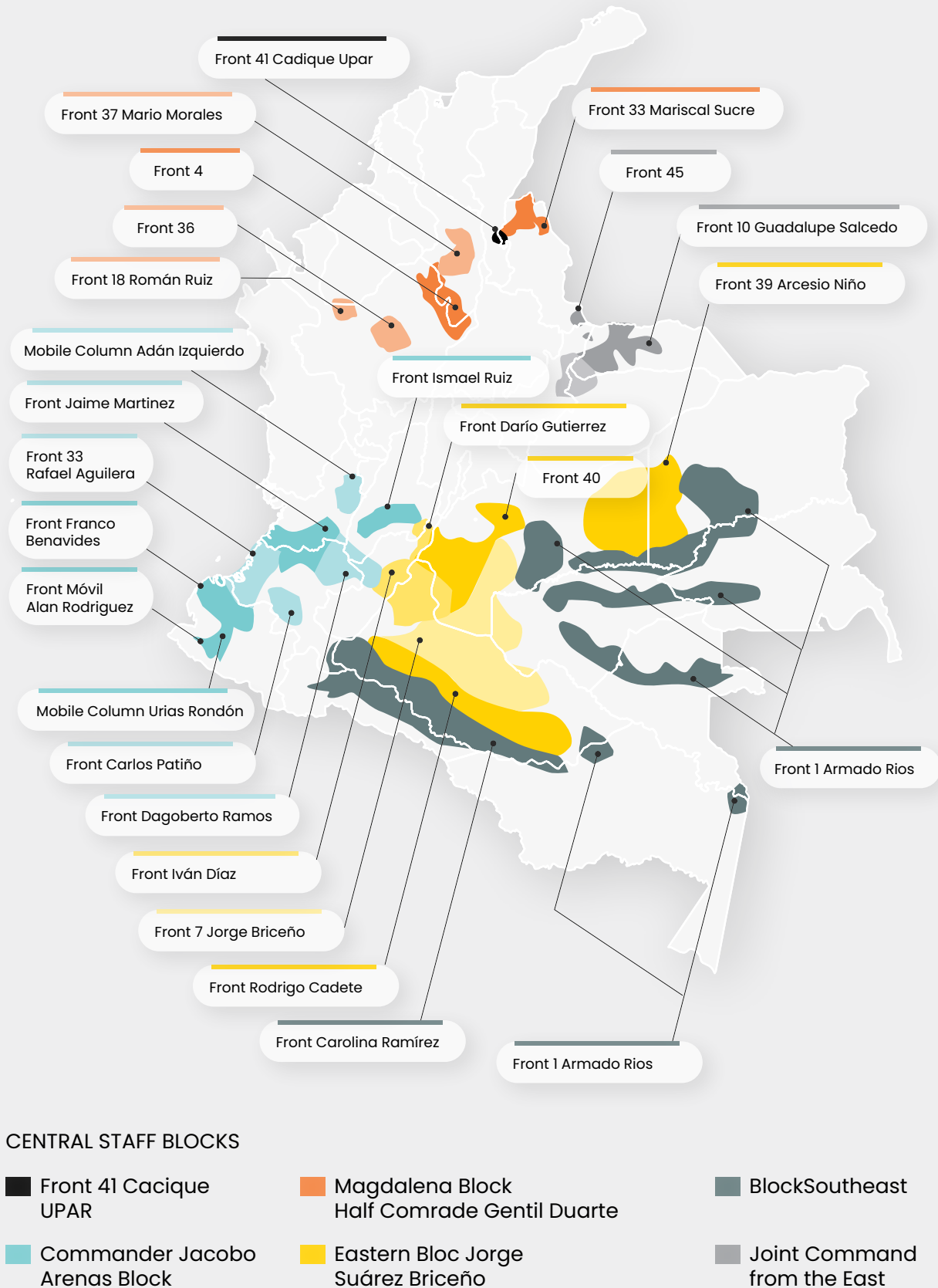
of them, namely, the Central General Staff (EMC) and, to a lesser extent, the Second Marquetalia (SM), have managed to involve thousands of troops in their cause, directly or indirectly opposing each other.

As if that were not enough, the **Gulf Clan, the most important heir to paramilitarism in Colombia, has consolidated its position, especially in the region. Caribbean, entering into dispute with smaller groups of this same imprint, but also with structures armed insurgent groups**. The result has been none other than the agitation of confrontational and contentious frameworks, especially in northeastern Colombia, in the department of Norte del Santander, but also in other locations such as Antioquia or Pacific coast scenarios, as is the case in the departments of Chocó, Cauca, and Nariño—and without losing sight of other transnational evocations, due to their business dealings in some twenty countries, even outside Latin America (Badillo and Trejos, 2023).



Figure 11  
**Territoriality of the EMC violence,  
 the major dissent of the FARC-EP**

Source: Prosegur Research, 2025  
 based on Ideas para la Paz (2023).



Likewise, a third actor cannot be overlooked. Key to this dispute, in and against the State, is the aforementioned ELN guerrilla group, currently made up of more than 4,000 troops and a consolidated position in the areas with the highest density of coca growing in the country. -such as the northeast and southwest-. This is true even though its position in the geography of violence has brought with it various regional difficulties and tensions with several of its war fronts, given its decentralized nature (González, 2021), and to the point that in 2024 it experienced a process of fracture with respect to its Comunerios del Sur Bloc, operating in the department of Nariño.

Currently, for example, **Colombias violent homicide rate is 25.7 per 100,000 inhabitants**, not far from the 26.04 deaths recorded in 2016, for example. However, according to the annual report on homicidal violence published by the Citizen Council for Public Security and Criminal Justice (2024), **eight of its cities are among the most violent in the world - Barranquilla, Buenaventura, Cali, Cartagena, Cúcuta, Palmira, Santa Marta, and Sincelejo. There are also signs of chronicization, which is related to the drug trade.** While in 2016 the area under coca cultivation was 146,000 hectares, by 2024 it will exceed 230,000 hectares (UNODC, 2024). Thus, despite the country's progress in some political and judicial reforms associated with the end of the conflict with the FARC-EP, it is possible to note that the geography of violence in Colombia remains unchanged, with significant challenges in mitigating it.

To this end, nine departments - two in the south (Caquetá and Putumayo), four on the Pacific coast (Chocó, Cauca, Nariño and Valle), two in the northeast (Arauca

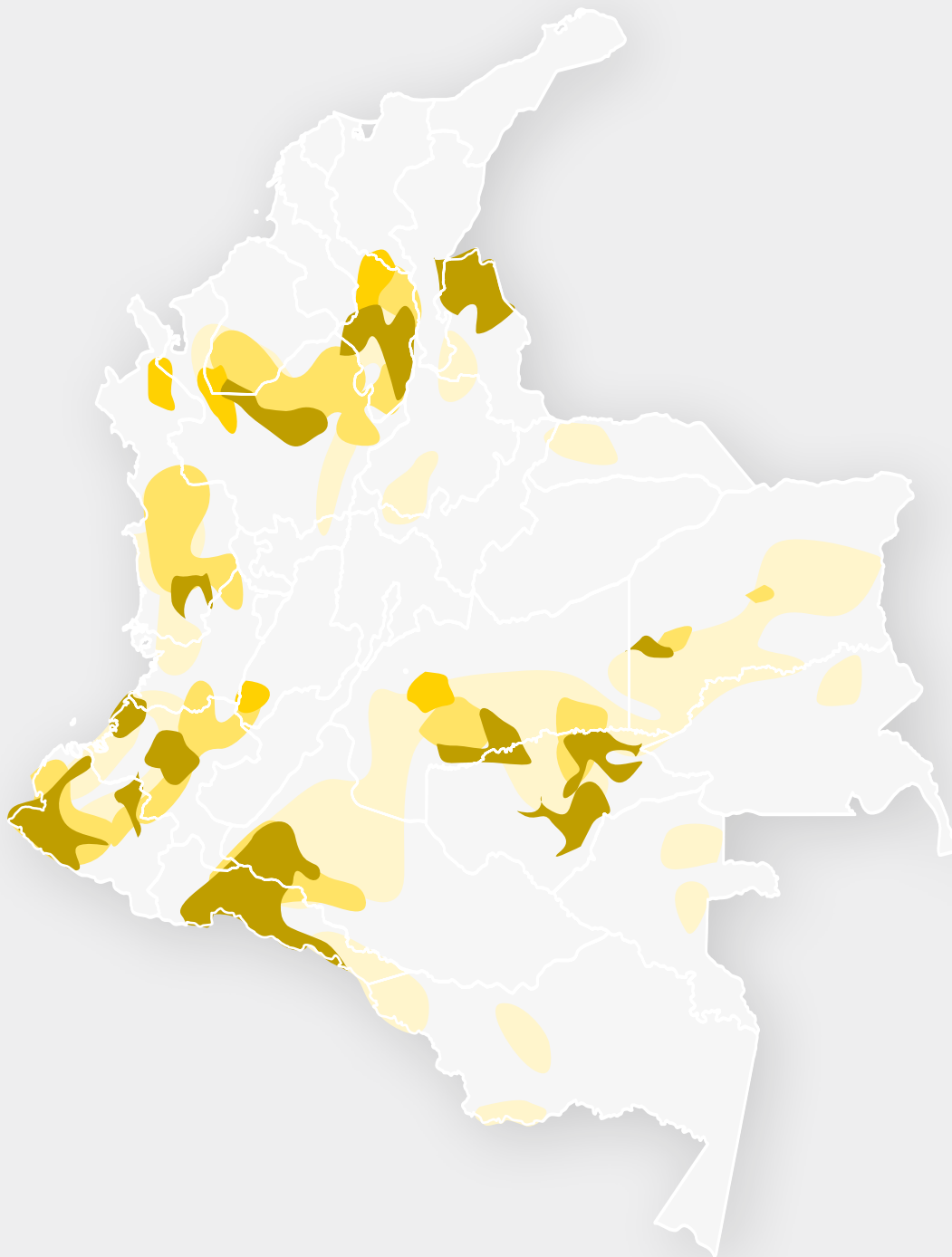
and Norte de Santander), together with Antioquia, account for three out of four violent deaths against former combatants of the FARC-EP or social leaders. These groups concentrate more than 85% of the total coca cultivated in Colombia in the last five years and are where the largest number of violent organizations fighting over resources and processing and distribution routes can be observed, given that these are the areas where the proliferation of criminal organizations has been greatest.

Of all the scenarios presented, perhaps the one with the greatest impact at a transnational level is the one that takes place in. The **Colombian-Venezuelan** border. For decades, **this border has been at the service of criminal governance**, involving mostly Colombian but also Venezuelan structures (García Pinzón and Trejos, 2021). Thus, depending on the point of the border, the dynamics of illicit economies and their protagonist's change. That is, while drug trafficking, food and medicine smuggling, and extortion are widespread practices throughout all the municipalities that make up the border, those responsible vary. For example, to the north, in La Guajira or Cesar, the former 33rd Front of the FARC-EP and the ELN predominate, in dispute with the Gulf Clan, which also control much of the criminal activity already taking place on Venezuelan soil. However, from the Colombian region of Catatumbo, the ELN, Colombia's most important player, with a significant presence in the Venezuelan states of Táchira and Apure, maintains a complex three-way relationship.



Figure 12  
**Regional distribution  
of coca cultivation 2013–2022**

Source: Prosegur Research,  
2025 based on (UNODC, 2023: 58)



TYPE OF TERRITORY ACCORDING TO THE PRESENCE OF COCA CULTIVATION

Permanently affected  
(during the last 10 years)

Recently affected  
(last 3 years)

Intermittently affected  
(2013 - 2022)

Abandoned  
(last 3 years)






The state of Táchira is one of the bastions of the so-called Aragua Train, perhaps, Venezuela’s most important criminal organization, conceived from the Tócoron prison, also has illicit activities in other countries in the region such as Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru, in addition to the United States. Although there is a significant distortion in its numbers, scope, and magnitude, there is certainty about the importance of the prison to its operations, and also with respect to the dispute over the drug trade with various criminal organizations, not only on the border but also on Colombian soil. In this regard, it is important not to overlook events such as the hitmen carried out in Bogotá and Medellín in 2023 and 2024, which have led to statements and cross-accountability with criminal organizations such as Los Paisas, the Clan del Golfo, and La Oficina de Envigado. A separate issue is its criminal activism in other settings such as Lima (Peru), La Paz, El Alto, and Cochabamba (Bolivia), or in the Taracapá and Arica regions (Chile).

Likewise, in the state of Apure (and on the other side, in the Colombian department of Arauca), the prevailing condition of the ELN is strengthened thanks, in Venezuela, to its relationship with the still present for some media, such as InSight Crime (2023), Bolivarian Liberation Forces. This group has reportedly collaborated in recent years with both the ELN and the FARC-EP dissidents of SM, while also carrying out operations against, above all, the EMC. However, there are many questions about its validity and activism in the area, which seems to be subsumed within the ELN’s very structure. Activism that, in any case, with regard to the department of Amazonas, is once again controlled, above all, by Colombian armed structures. There, the aforementioned ELN guerrilla finds greater rivalries, a few years ago with formations such as Los Puntilleros, and currently, with some structures of the EMC (Gómez and Ríos, 2022), with historical roots in the region, due to the presence and influence of the former FARC-EP Front “Acacio Medina”, created in 2007, within the framework of the IX Guerrilla Conference, and its high value in illicit mining in addition to the rest of the criminal economies.

Figure 13  
Presence of illicit economies and criminal actors on the border between Colombia and Venezuela

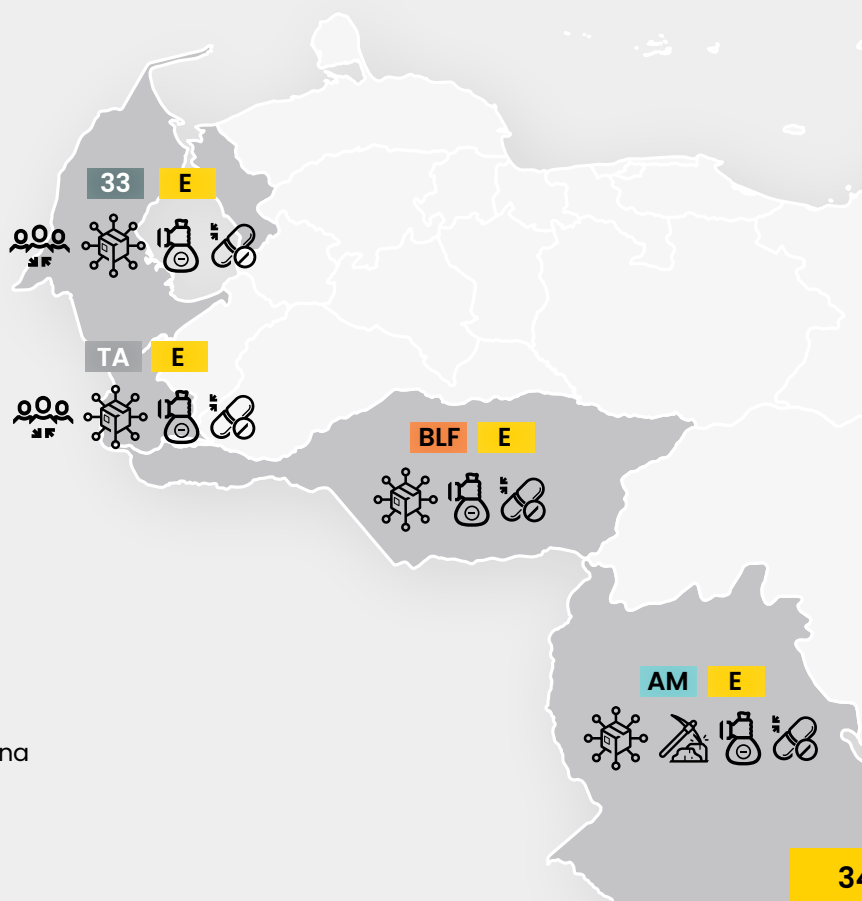
Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on Insight Crime.

**ECONOMIES CRIMINALS**

-  Drug trafficking
-  Extortion
-  Illegal mining
-  Smuggling
-  Immigrant trafficking

**CRIMINAL ACTORS**

- E** ELN (National Liberation Army)
- 33** Ex - FARC Mafia Front 33
- AM** Ex - FARC Mafia Front Acacio Medina
- TA** Aragua Train
- BLF** BLF (Bolivian Liberation Forces)

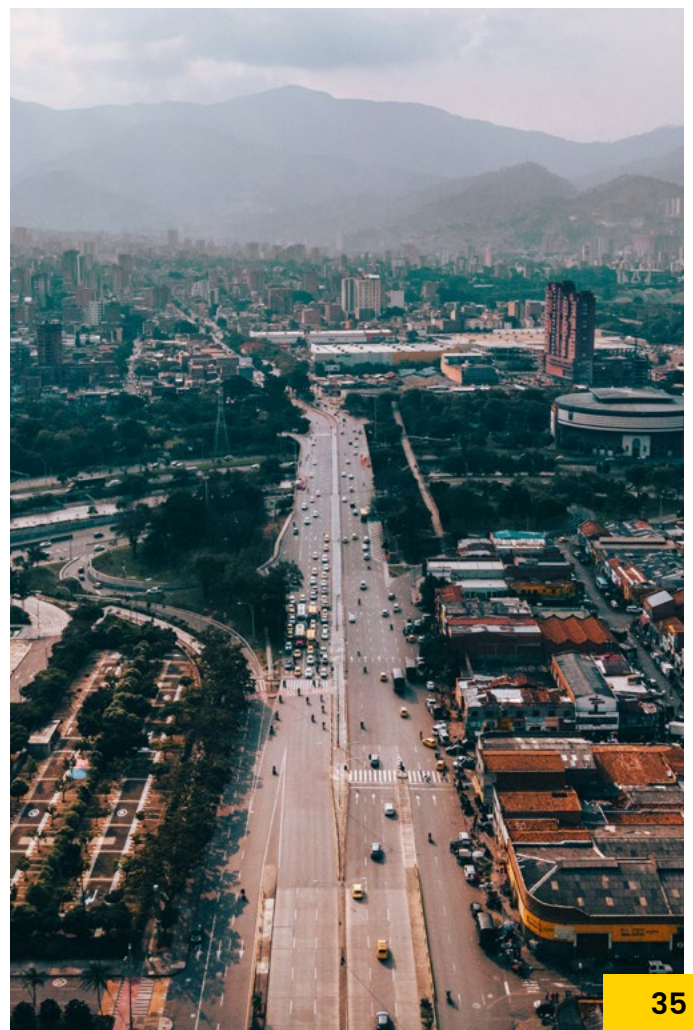


Unlike what happened in Colombia this past year, where the governments policy of negotiation has been preeminent, in Venezuela, since 2023, attempts have been made to develop large-scale police and military operations to weaken the organized crime that is rife in the country. However, the country's difficult economic situation, even more than in Colombia, favors the co-optation of part of the state's response to the criminal case, which hinders and limits the effectiveness of the measures to dismantle this crime. This is regardless of the fact that in recent months there have been operations and demonstrations of a "heavy hand" against urban gangs, drug trafficking networks, and criminal organizations based in prisons.

Be that as it may, most of the data and trends collected acknowledge a significant **reduction in homicidal behavior**, such that while in 2016 the rate of violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants was 56.62, by 2024 it will have fallen by half, according to the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (2023), although government sources even go so far as to reduce this indicator to a single digit. However, this trend of constant normalization and stabilization in recent years has also reached Caracas. Thus, the capital presents unreliable records, given the opacity of the government, which would be less than 10 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, which is ten times less, for example, than the estimates of World Population Review for 2024.

At this point, we see more similar dynamics than differences in the scenarios of violence and (in)security in Colombia and Venezuela. **Both countries have stabilized in terms of national levels of organized crime and homicidal violence.** Colombia shows signs of stagnation, which raises questions about the peace dividend with the FARC-EP, while Venezuela, despite its questionable data, appears to have moderated in some cases, in part due to the attenuation of its dramatic social and economic situation. From a more purely subnational perspective, the complexity of the scenarios reveals certain enclaves that warrant concern. In the case of Colombia, many of the enclaves with the highest levels of organized crime have remained the same for the last decade. In fact, it is there that some specific forms of violence are concentrated, such as those associated with the demobilized ex-combatant population, social leaders, or extortion and smuggling. This peripheral violence also coexists with other expressions of urban violence, mostly organized around drug trafficking, which calls into question the real scope of the transformation that the last three government peace initiatives have brought about - territorial peace, peace with legality, and total peace.

As a result, a significant focus of transnational impact lies in the Colombian-Venezuelan border region, where Colombian armed and criminal organizations, many of them stemming from recycled forms of violence strengthened by the Peace Agreement and the pandemic, are joining forces with other Venezuelan organizations, such as the Aragua Train. The entire border corridor, which specifically encompasses the Colombian departments of La Guajira, Cesar, Norte de Santander, and Arauca, and the states of Zulia, Táchira, Apure, and Amazonas, ultimately emerges as a criminal governance system, with a crossroads of shared and/or juxtaposed sovereignties. Institutional neglect, structural precariousness, and the consolidation of illicit economies fuel a unique nexus of violence and insecurity, with consequences that also impact and affect other parts of the continent.



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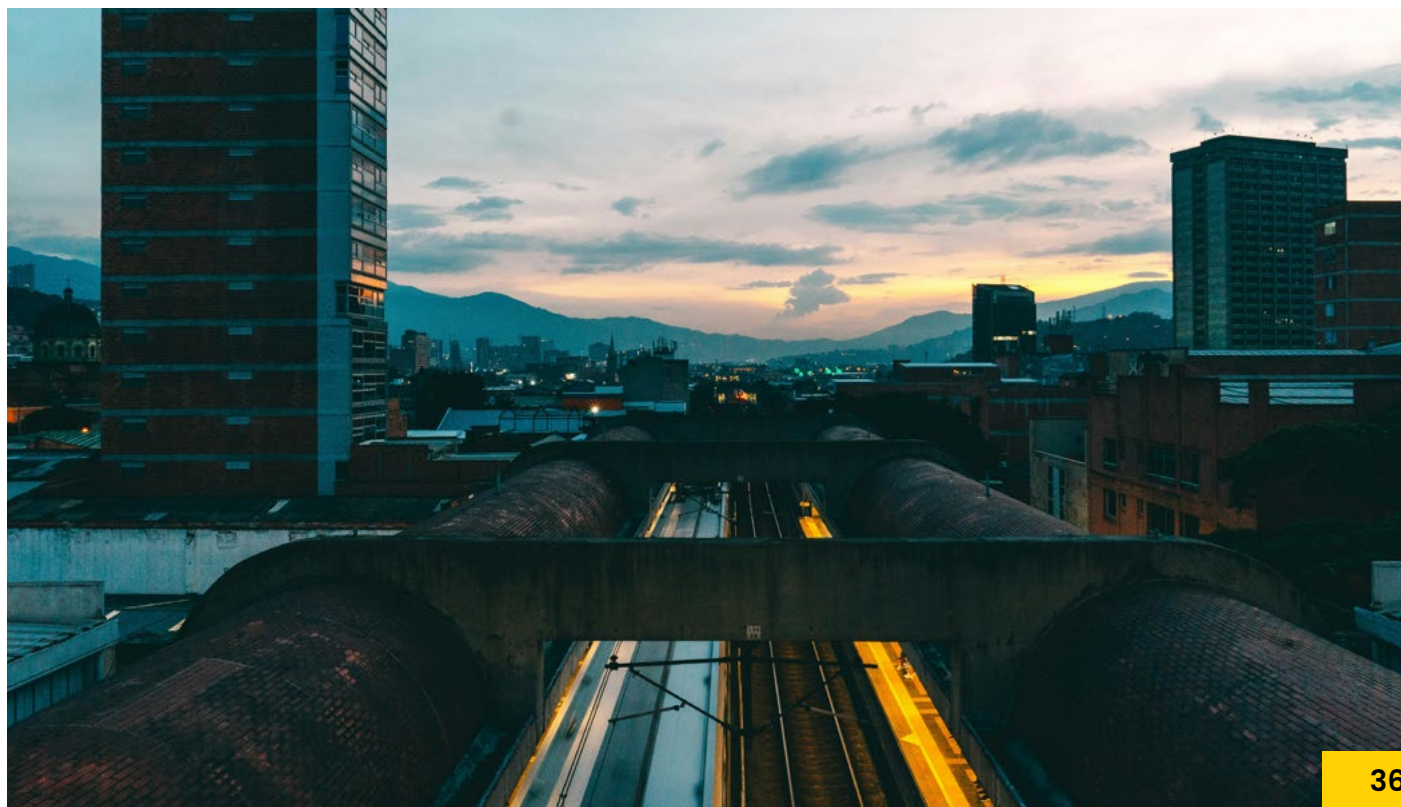
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# Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia

# 2.4 Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia

## Institute of Criminology and Studies on Violence

### 2.4.1.

#### General political situation

**The Andean region has undergone significant changes in crime and criminal violence trends in recent years, with a notable increase in homicides and illegal economies.** This is occurring within a context of political instability in the countries, migratory

processes that have altered the composition of social structures, and an economic readjustment following the COVID-19 pandemic.



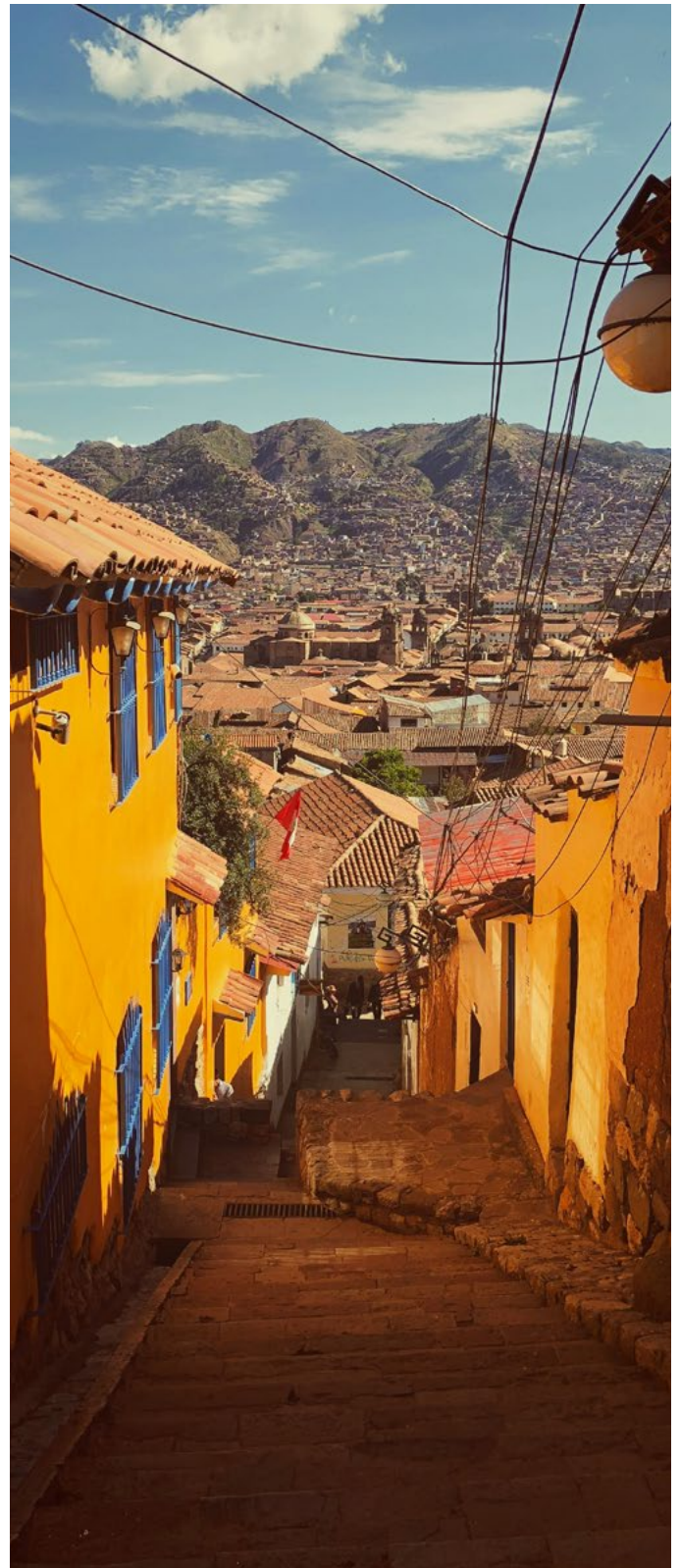
## 2.4.2. Homicides

### *The data*

The International Classification of Crimes for Statistical Purposes by the United Nations defines intentional homicide as “the unlawful death inflicted upon a person with the intent to cause death or serious injury” (UNODC, 2015, p.17). The United Nations collects official homicide figures globally through the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS) (UNODC, n.d. a), which are systematized in the publicly accessible dashboard ‘dataUNODC - Intentional Homicides’ (UNODC, 2024a).

The study covers the period 2013-2023. Data available on the UNODC portal (2024a) originates from each country’s official sources. However, outdated or incomplete data production, as well as insufficient or unavailable information, remains a common issue across the three countries. In some cases, multiple official state sources report differing homicide figures.

- ▲ Bolivia: Homicide data was reported by the Ministry of Government for the period 2015-2023 (Ministry of Government of Bolivia, 2023, p.135).
- ▲ Ecuador: Data was initially reported by the Ministry of the Interior until 2022, and completed with 2023 figures from both the Ministry of the Interior and the Ecuadorian Police, as described by the Ecuadorian Observatory of Organized Crime (2023) in its analysis of homicides in Ecuador. However, inconsistencies were found between the figures from the Ministry and the Police, which, although minor, highlight the need to standardize crime records—including intentional homicides—under a single system and methodology (OECD, 2024, p.7).
- ▲ Peru: Data was collected by the Interinstitutional Statistical Committee on Crime (CEIC) and managed by the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics until 2021 (INEI, 2023). However, updated police records from 2023 show a differing trend in intentional homicides compared to the CEIC figures (PNP, 2024).



Trends

Based on the data available for the period 2013-2023, three warheads are described. **The warheads for Ecuador and Peru show absolute and rate increases, and in the case of Bolivia, a decrease is shown.**

- ▲ Bolivia reports an increase in its homicide count through 2017 (a year in which its homicide rate per 100 000 inhabitants was 6.53). For the period 2018-2023, the rate has remained stable between 3.46 and 4.95 homicides per 100 000 inhabitants (or 418 to 574 annual homicide victims).
- ▲ Ecuador reports a decreasing trend until 2016 (with a rate of 5.83 homicides per 100 000 inhabitants), year from which an upward trend has been maintained, which radicalized from 2020; since then, the Ecuadorian homicide rate per 100 000 inhabitants has jumped from 7.8 to 14.02, to 26.99 to 47.25 in 2023.
- ▲ Peru has shown an increasing trend from 2013 (with a rate of 6.7 per 100 000 inhabitants) to 2021 (with a rate of 8.46 per 100 000 inhabitants) that was interrupted by a decline starting in 2017 and ending in 2020.

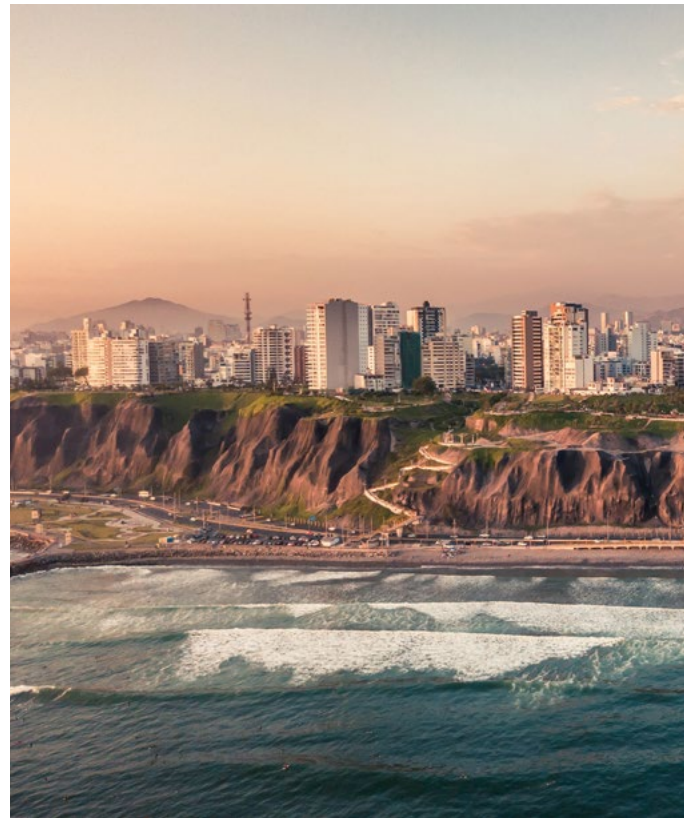
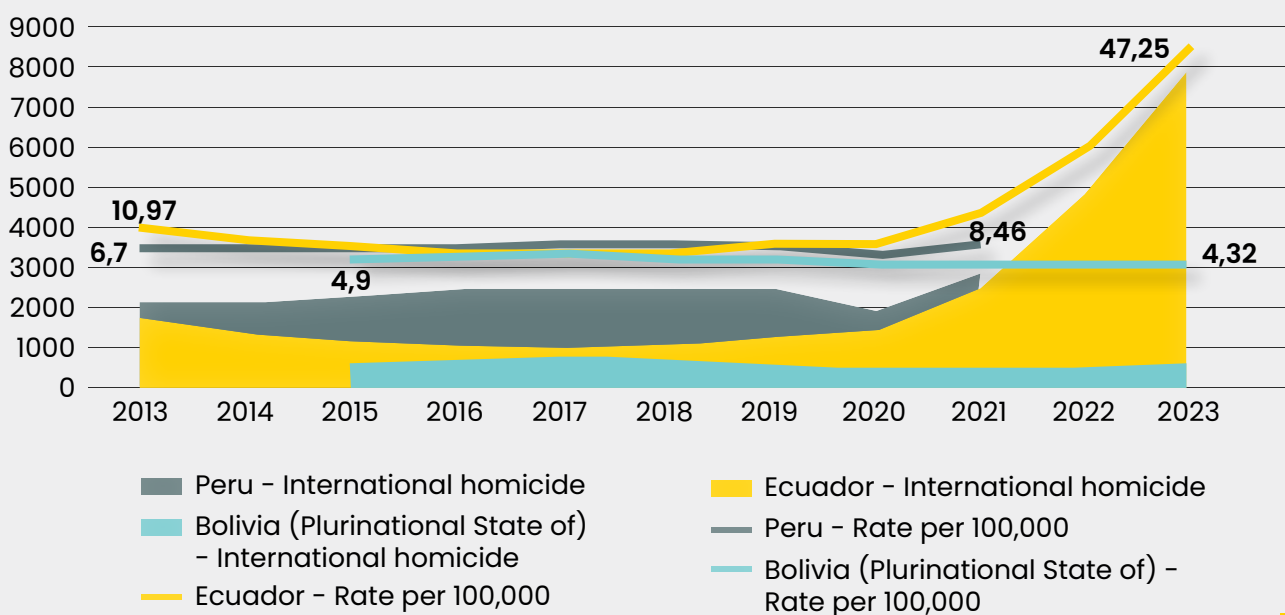


Figure 14  
**Absolute homicide counts and rates per 100,000 inhabitants for Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru**

Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on UNODC (2024a), OECS (2024).



## Analysis

**There has been a sharp increase in homicide rates in Ecuador reported since the end of the last decade.** Although to a lesser extent, data from CEIC in **Peru also indicate a rising trend in homicide rates**, even though official information for 2022 and 2023 is unavailable and police records suggest a significant increase.

This clear **rise along the Pacific coast has been observed since 2020, coinciding with the post-pandemic period, the reopening of commercial activities, and the growing influence of illegal economies in the region.**

While this issue requires in-depth studies, there is a need to explore the hypothesis of a connection between Venezuelan migration and the movement of certain criminal organizations, which could be a

factor in rising homicide rates. To properly assess this, it is necessary to analyze total homicide counts, disaggregate data by nationality, and study trends dating back to the early 2010s.

- ▲ A potential **correlation can be considered between the increase in homicides and their concentration in Pacific coast cities and areas where illegal economies**—particularly illegal mining—are prevalent.
- ▲ This is particularly significant as it suggests a **link between rising homicide rates and the expansion of organized crime in the region.** These elements and variables do not appear to be diminishing, nor are there clear indications of control, which suggests that this trend may persist in the coming years.



### 2.4.3. Cocaine production and illicit trade

#### The data

The United Nations collects official state data as part of the World Drug Report, covering drug supply and demand aspects such as prevalence, seizures, laboratories, purity levels, and prices (UNODC, n.d. b). This data is systematized in the publicly accessible interactive dashboard 'dataUNODC - Drug Trafficking & Cultivation' (UNODC, 2024b).

The analysis prioritizes the 2015-2023 period. Available data from UNODC (2024b) on Bolivia has been structured within the framework of Coca Crop Monitoring Reports (UNODC, n.d. c). Meanwhile, Peruvian data from the Drug Control Information System (DEVIDA, n.d.) is reported by the National Commission for Development and a Drug-Free Life in its drug policy monitoring reports.



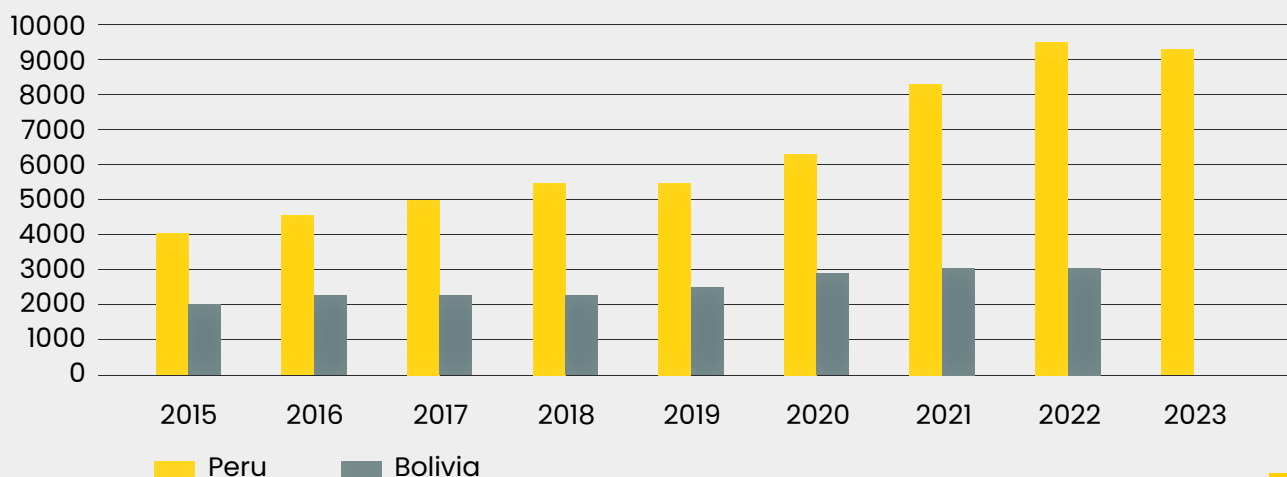
#### Trends

**Bolivia and Peru are two of the world's and region's leading coca leaf producers, and both have exhibited a growing trend between 2015 and 2023.**

- ▲ Bolivia has shown stable growth of nearly 50% in cultivated surface area, increasing from 20,200 hectares in 2015 to 29,900 hectares in 2022, with a slight decline in 2018. No official data is available for 2023.
- ▲ Ecuador, while considered a minor producer, has not had its coca cultivation officially monitored by the United Nations for nearly a decade. However, between January 2019 and December 2022, the National Directorate of Anti-Drug Investigations recorded the eradication of 546,184 coca plants (OECD, 2023, p.46).
- ▲ Peru has seen a dramatic increase in cultivated coca areas, from 40,000 hectares in 2015 to over 90,000 hectares in 2023, effectively doubling both the surface area and production capacity, with most of the yield destined for the illicit cocaine market.

Figure 15  
Hectares cultivated with coca leaf in production in Bolivia and Peru (2015–2023)

Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on UNODC (2024a), OECD (2024).



Analysis

During the analyzed period, more than 1,200 tons of cocaine were seized across the three countries: “The seizure of a substance is a legal action carried out by a law enforcement agency, in which it takes legal control of a controlled substance” (UNODC 2024b, p.1).

When comparing the first and last years of the analyzed period, Bolivia shows a slightly declining trend with a total seizure of 170 tons (170,782 kg). Meanwhile, **Peru and Ecuador exhibit increasing trends**, with 301,868 kg (300 tons) seized in Peru and 813,257 kg (813 tons) in Ecuador.

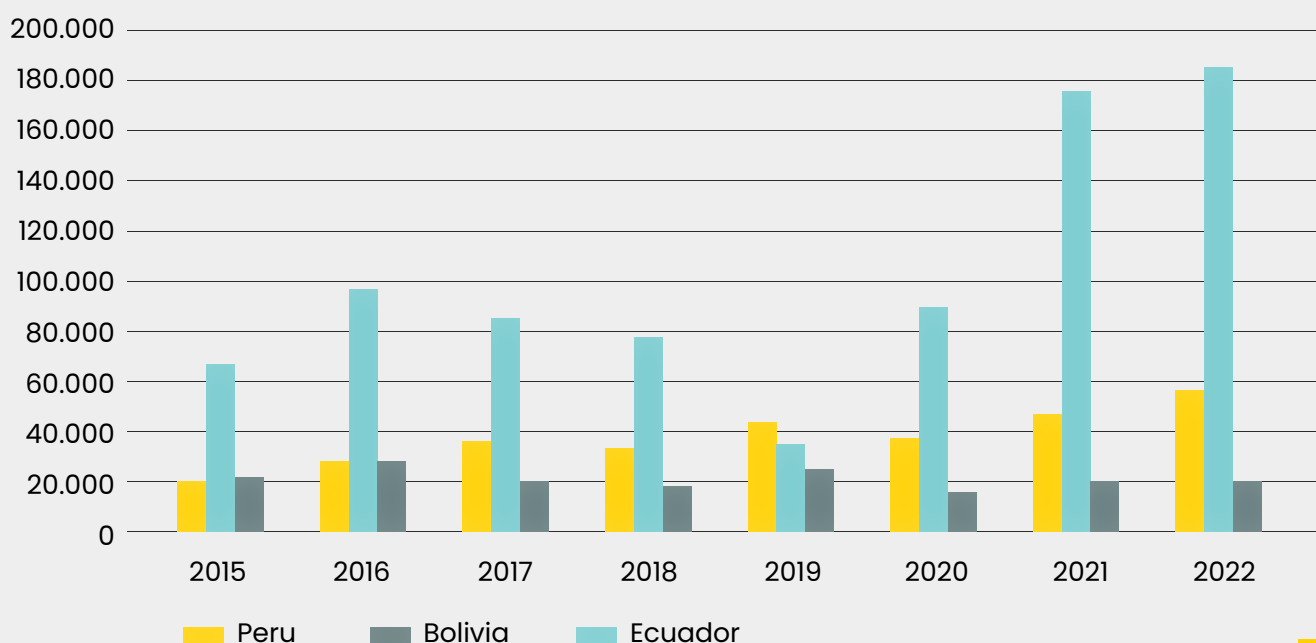
On average, Bolivia seized 21 tons annually **Peru seized 37 tons annually Ecuador seized 101 tons annually Except for 2019, when Peru led in cocaine seizures, Ecuador consistently reported the highest seizure volumes, significantly surpassing both Peru and Bolivia.** Although Bolivia recorded higher seizures than Peru in 2015 and 2016, this trend did not continue throughout the rest of the analyzed period.

**The rising trend of coca leaf cultivation and cocaine production in the region** is evident when comparing the last decade with recent years. This is particularly clear in coca-producing countries like Peru and Bolivia (in addition to Colombia), suggesting a sustained and expanding cocaine economy.

In contrast, **Ecuador**, despite having a low primary production, **plays a key role as a transit point in drug routes toward the Northern Hemisphere.** “Ecuador’s main challenge in relation to the geopolitics of drug trafficking is its territorial proximity to Colombia and Peru—two of the world’s largest cocaine producers—as well as weaknesses in integrated border controls” (OECD, 2023, p.27). This has led to a surge in lethal violence, linked to local and transnational criminal groups, resulting in a fivefold increase in cocaine seizures and homicide rates between 2019 and 2022 (UNODC, 2024c, p.13). **Moreover, Ecuador’s ports and trafficking routes remain crucial exit points for Peruvian cocaine shipments (UNODC, 2023).**

Figure 16  
**Kilograms of cocaine seized in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru (2015–2022)**

Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on UNODC (2024b).



## 2.4.4. Illicit timber trafficking

### *The data*

Illegal logging is a criminal activity that involves the collection, processing, transportation, purchase, or sale of timber in violation of national and international laws (European Union Forest Law Enforcement, Governance, and Trade Mechanism, 2019). Examples include illegal logging in protected areas and the trade of illegally sourced timber, as well as other associated criminal activities such as money laundering, drug trafficking, government corruption, and tax evasion, which can result in significant fiscal losses for governments (FAO, n.d.).

However, “detailed data and analysis on illegal logging [...] have not been systematically tracked or reported at a global level” (World Bank, 2019, p.10). The Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House, UK) provides global estimates on illegal timber logging and trade. Its latest report presents alarming data from 2018, suggesting that between 8% and 29% of total global timber extraction and trade is illegal (Hoare & Kanashiro Uehara, 2022). Similarly, Chatham House’s

higher-end estimate aligns with that of the Basel Institute of Governance (2021, p.3), which states that up to 30% of global timber extraction is illegal, valued at approximately \$150 billion per year.

Bolivia (INE, 2024) and Peru (SERFOR, 2021; 2022; 2023; 2024) officially report extracted timber data for the studied period, making it possible to estimate illegal timber volumes. Peru has an updated index for illegal logging and trade (OSINFOR, 2024).

To estimate the percentage of illegal timber extraction in Bolivia, the 29% rate proposed by Chatham House (Hoare et al., 2022, p.20) will be used. For Peru, the rate will be based on three official updates from OSINFOR: 2017: 37.1%. 2019: 31.5%. 2021: 20.7%. These percentages correspond to the respective years in Peru’s records (OSINFOR, 2024, p.33). However, for Ecuador, there is no official data available on the total volume (in cubic meters) of extracted roundwood for the 2015-2023 period.

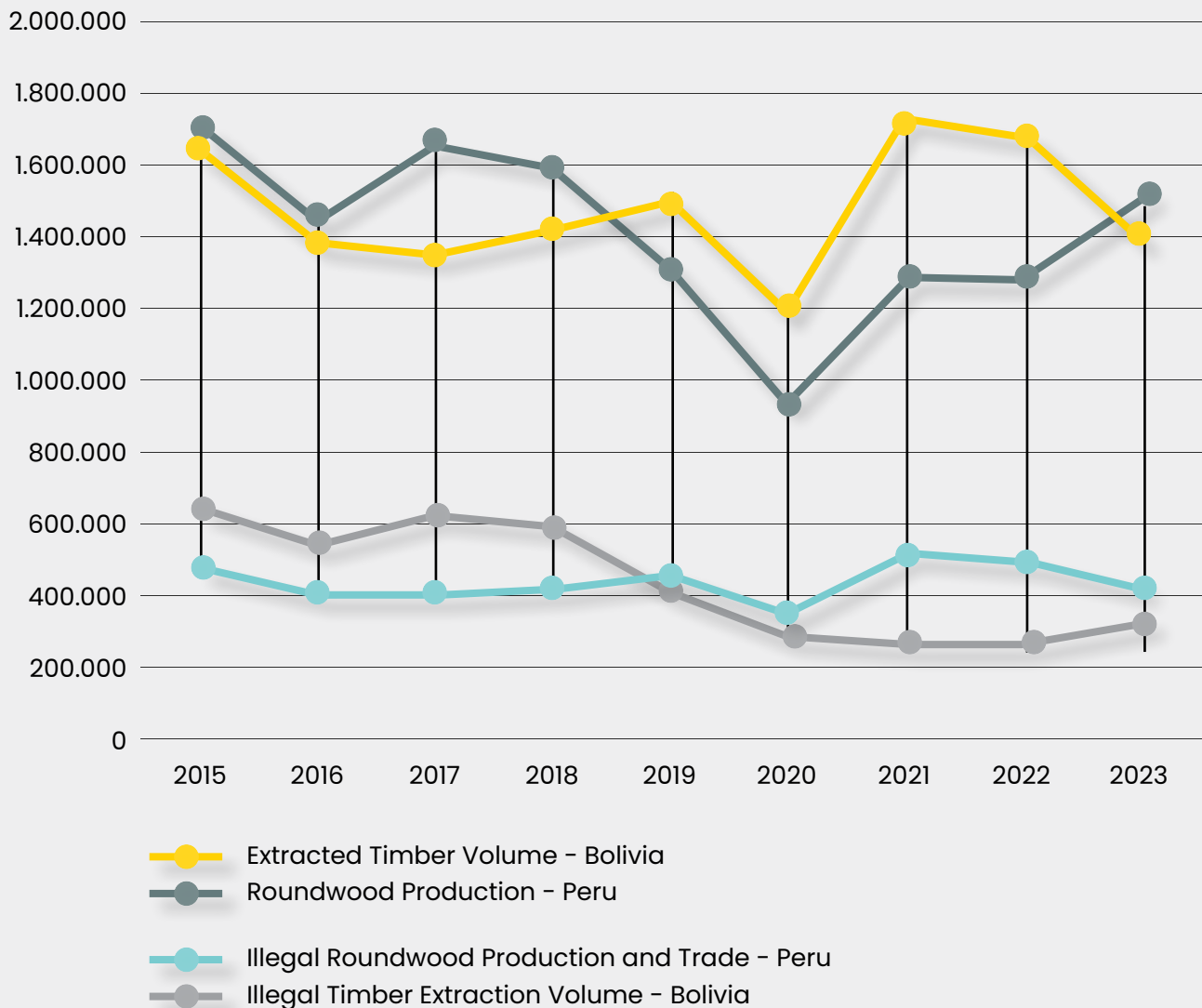


Trends

Official reports indicate that Peru and Bolivia recorded timber extraction volumes of 12,721,128 m<sup>3</sup> and 13,284,933 m<sup>3</sup>, respectively. Although Bolivia's total timber extraction volume is higher, Peru reported 3,923,753 m<sup>3</sup> of illegally extracted timber, while Bolivia recorded 3,852,630 m<sup>3</sup> of illegal timber.

For both countries, extraction trends declined by 10.2% and 14.7% over the full period analyzed. However, they exhibited similar patterns, with declining extraction volumes from 2015 to 2020, followed by an increase from 2020 to 2023. The year 2020 marked the lowest production year in both cases.

Figure 17  
**Evolution of the estimated total and illegal timber extraction in Bolivia and Peru**



Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on SERFOR (2021; 2022; 2023; 2024), OSINFOR (2024), INE (2024), y Hoare, et al. (2024).

## 2.4.5. Illegal gold mining

### *The data*

While official information on **Ecuador is unavailable, reports indicate that various regions have a high concentration of illegal logging.** A WWF-Ecuador study highlights illegal extraction of 207,996 cubic meters in two zones: Zone 1 (**Puerto Soldado Monge**) in Morona Santiago province with 134,145 cubic meters, and Zone 2, comprising Waorani indigenous communities between Napo and Pastaza, with 20,165 cubic meters (WWF-Ecuador, 2022, p. 58). Furthermore, “According to the Ministry of Environment, 1,973 cubic meters of balsa wood were seized last year—186% more than in 2019, when 689 cubic meters of this wood type were confiscated.” (Coba, November 2023).

Additionally, WWF’s study—along with other reports—indicates that large quantities of balsa wood enter Zones 1 and 2 from Peru and Colombia (WWF-Ecuador, 2022, p. 58). Other analyses suggest that “regardless of whether it is extracted from Colombia or Ecuador, the wood is transported via river or land to neighboring Peru, where it may be mixed with legal shipments.” (Jones & Ramírez, June 2021).

### *Analysis*

- ▲ Despite the **percentage reduction in estimates of illegal logging in Peru and Bolivia**, no precise official data exist to determine the scale of this market and activity. However, even with this decline, **illegal timber extraction remains at approximately 20%, a significantly high proportion.**
- ▲ Illegal logging should be analyzed comparatively between countries, not only due to the balloon effect (where pressure in one country pushes criminal activity into another) but also because of the routes timber follows in international trade. Qualitative data suggest that **Peru is becoming a hub for laundering illegally sourced timber from Ecuador.**
- ▲ Additionally, it is essential to study the relationship between illegal logging routes and economies associated with illicit cocaine production and illegal mining.

Illegal gold mining is a widespread phenomenon in Amazonian and Andean countries. While measuring its extent is challenging, one empirical approach compares official records of gold production (measured in troy ounces, kilograms, or Metric Fine Tons of refined/concentrated gold) with export data.

Since this information derives from the administrative registration of actors interacting with formal mining systems, extraction and export volumes only reflect activity within the legal framework. According to a model developed by the Organization of American States (OEA, 2021a; 2021b), a wide gap between production and exports can indicate illegal mining activity, whereas a negative gap suggests that extracted gold is illegally exported outside the formal mining circuit (OEA, 2021a). To estimate the scale of illegal gold mining, official data on gold extraction and exports from Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru were processed:

- ▲ **Gold Extraction:** Official sources provided extraction figures in troy ounces and grams for Peru (BCRPData, n.d.; MINEM, 2024a). Bolivia’s extraction data was recorded in kilograms (MMM, 2021; 2022; 2023; 2024). Ecuador only formally reports the “Contribution of Gold to GDP Growth Rate” (Central Bank of Ecuador, 2024) and formal mining tax revenue (Ministry of Energy and Mines, Ecuador, 2022). No official, systematized data were found for Ecuador’s gold extraction volumes, so secondary sources (Ojo Público website) were used, reporting figures in Metric Fine Tons.
- ▲ **Gold Exports:** The United Nations COMTRADE database tracks over 99% of global merchandise trade, detailing exports by product and trading partner across nearly 200 countries (United Nations, 2022). Comparing COMTRADE category 7108 (Gold, including platinum-gold, raw, semi-processed, or powder) with official country records, it was found that Bolivia and Ecuador report differing export volumes, while Peru’s reported export figures show a substantial disparity compared to official records.

“In the table below, the available open-source data can be visualized. It is not difficult to notice that COMTRADE data increasingly diverges from official reports. While Ecuador produced 91,910 kilograms of gold throughout the period, Bolivia produced 293,100

kilograms, and Peru, 1,102,656 kilograms. Similarly, Ecuador exported 104,908 kilograms of gold during the period, Bolivia exported 296,630 kilograms, and Peru exported 1,480,264 kilograms.”

Table 1  
Gold production and export data  
in three countries of the region

	Font	Category and unit of measure	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Bolivia	United Nations - COMTRADE	Gold Exports (kg)	20,702	19,932	28,745	31,855	38,982	22,605	44,404	64,434	44,626
	National Institute of Statistics	Gold Exports (kg)	20,04	19,32	26,57	29,45	39,09	23,51	47,57	52,25	40,83
	Ministry of Mining and Metallurgy	Gold Production (kg)	-	21,9	28,7	31,6	42	23,2	45,7	53,4	46,6
	<b>MMM-INE Estimate</b>	<b>Unexplained Exported Gold Volume (kg)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-2,58</b>	<b>-2,13</b>	<b>-2,15</b>	<b>-2,91</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>1,87</b>	<b>-1,15</b>	<b>-5,77</b>
Ecuador	United Nations - COMTRADE	Gold Exports (kg)	20,801	7,54	5,093	6,511	7,913	8,092	11,718	19,216	-
	Central Bank of Ecuador	Gold Exports (kg)	20,801	7,54	5,094	5,616	7,913	8,093	11,719	17,707	20,425
	OJO PUBLICO	Gold Production (kg)	20,76	7,68	4,37	4,07	4,46	7,38	10,97	14,99	17,23
	<b>BCE-OJO Público Estimate</b>	<b>Unexplained Exported Gold Volume (kg)</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>-140</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>1,546</b>	<b>3,453</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>2,717</b>	<b>3,195</b>
Peru	United Nations - COMTRADE	Gold Exports (kg)	323,516	457,216	504,101	548,821	395,438	348,421	423,52	405,128	-
	Central Reserve Bank	Gold Exports (kg)	162,84	168,302	186,086	184,646	174,06	126,065	159,534	160,009	158,722
	Ministry of Energy and Mines	Gold Production (kg)	146,823	153,006	151,964	140,211	128,413	88,054	97,493	96,966	99,726
	<b>MINEM-BCR Estimate</b>	<b>Unexplained Exported Gold Volume (kg)</b>	<b>16,017</b>	<b>15,297</b>	<b>34,122</b>	<b>44,435</b>	<b>45,647</b>	<b>38,011</b>	<b>62,041</b>	<b>63,043</b>	<b>58,996</b>

Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on MINEM (2024a), BCRPData (s/f), Ojo público (), BCE (2024), MMM (2021; 2022; 2023; 2024), INE (s/f).

### Trends

The graphs illustrate the gap between extracted and exported gold for each country studied, based on the data provided. The results show three evolutionary lines: one with higher accumulation (Peru) and two with smaller quantities (Ecuador and Bolivia).

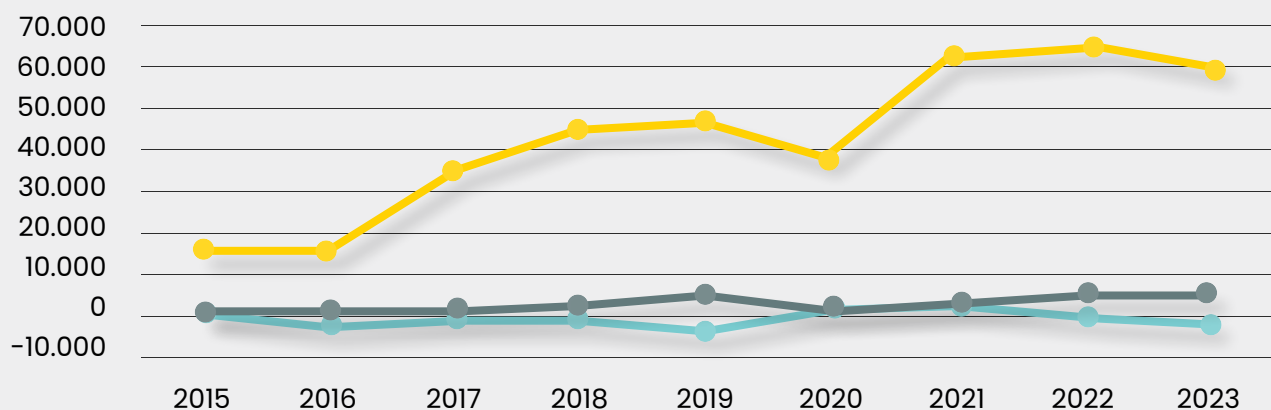
- ▲ In Bolivia, only in 2020 and 2021, 2,180 kilograms of exported gold were not reported as extracted. In all other years analyzed, Bolivia recorded up to 16,690 kilograms of extracted gold that were not exported through official channels. Until 2022, no more than 3,000 kilograms of gold per year were classified as extracted but not exported. However, in 2023 alone, Bolivia registered 5,770 kilograms of extracted gold that were not legally exported.
- ▲ Except for 2016, Ecuador reported the export of 13,138 kilograms of gold whose mining extraction was not officially recorded. The trend over the period is increasing, though in two distinct phases: Growth from 2017 to 2019, Decline in 2020, followed by continuous expansion.
- ▲ Peru's trend line reflects the large amount of exported gold that was not officially reported as extracted within the country (377,609 kilograms in total over the study period). The clearly upward trend was briefly interrupted in 2020 but resumed its momentum until the present.

### Analysis

- ▲ **There is a general trend of increasing illegal gold mining (and other minerals)**, especially when comparing data from 2015 to 2023. This rise is especially evident in Ecuador and Peru, and it is likely that the figures presented here are significantly underestimated compared to reality.
- ▲ There is clear evidence of armed groups and **organized crime involvement in gold extraction and the mineral supply chain across countries in the region**. These activities are concentrated in areas with high organized crime presence and a severe absence of state control, leading to homicides, extortion, and major property-related crimes.
- ▲ The expansion of **illegal mining follows a similar pattern to the growth of other illegal economies**, such as cocaine production and smuggling, which appear to operate along overlapping routes and involve similar actors throughout the supply chain.

Figure 18  
**Annual estimate of the gap between exported and extracted gold (2015-2023) in three countries under study**

Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on MINEM (2024a), BCR-PData (s/f), Ojo Público (2024) BCE (2024), MMM (2021; 2022; 2023; 2024), INE (s/f).



## 2.4.6. Trends and alerts

### General growth of illegal economies

Despite information limitations, there is sufficient data to suggest an **increase in both the size and influence of illegal economies—cocaine production and trade, illegal timber extraction and trade, illegal mining, and other illicit activities such as smuggling**—when comparing 2015 to 2023. This regional growth can be linked to at least three key factors that significantly changed conditions during this period: 1) the economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected illegal economies and forced them to intensify operations in subsequent years. 2) a large influx of economically vulnerable populations due to crises—particularly millions of Venezuelan migrants who settled in the studied countries

### Presence of criminal organizations

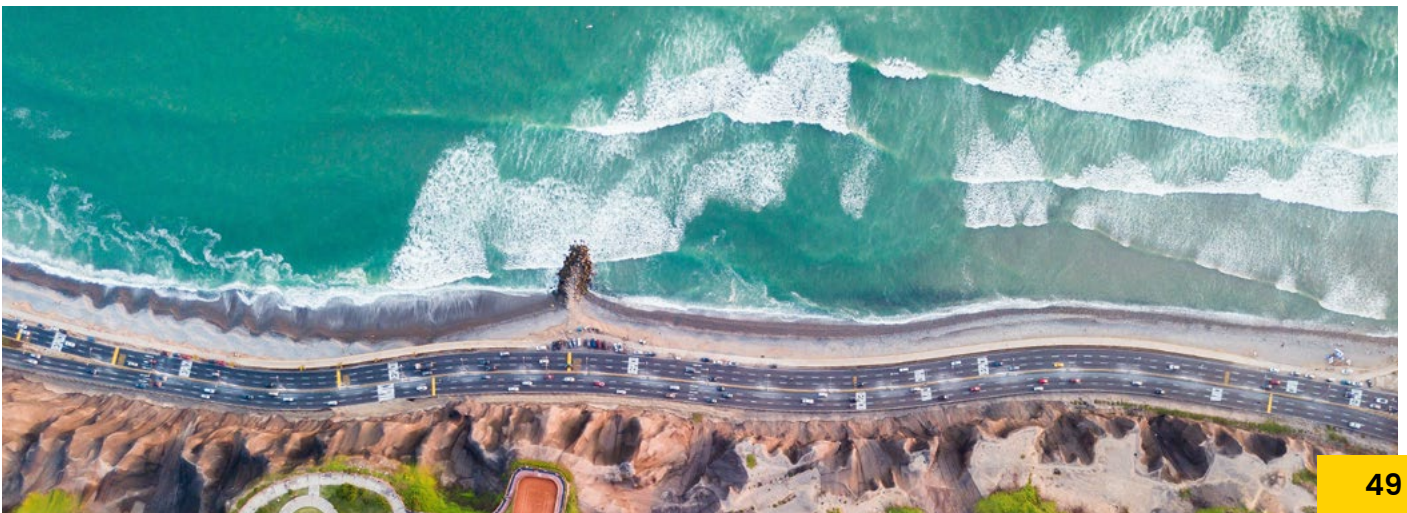
This trend is evident through police reports, qualitative research, and actor analysis, showing a growing **presence of criminal organizations across various stages of the illegal economy's value chain, particularly in Peru and Ecuador**. These groups include local networks, international organizations, and multi-national criminal entities, with high-profile media coverage of groups involving Venezuelan nationals. A plausible hypothesis emerges—suggesting that criminal migration accompanies economic migration. However, it is reasonable to assume that such organizations are not the root cause but rather a symptom of an expanding illegal market, growing international demand, and weakened state control.

### Formation of a regional landscape

The available data suggests the development of a regional framework, characterized by illegal extraction and production hubs, as well as trafficking routes. **Bolivia continues to be a production-intensive country, but due to its geography, it must export these goods, primarily to Peru, though in some cases, it serves as a receiver and transporter** of goods toward Brazil. Peru, while producing illegal raw materials, also operates key ports for international trafficking, making it a critical hub for organized crime. Ecuador, though not a major primary producer like Peru or Bolivia, has become a zone of significant tension due to its strategic location near the Venezuela-Colombia trafficking route. This has led to criminal organization activity and conflicts over illicit transit trade, imports, and exports.

### Rising homicide rates

**All of these factors contribute to rising homicide rates, particularly in Ecuador, which serves as a clear indicator of organized crime expansion**. This is a critical issue, marking a growing and uncontrolled surge in violence. However, it is essential to recognize that homicide rates are a consequence—not a cause—of evolving violence and economic structures. Immediate state intervention is required, as all signs indicate that this trend will persist. A comprehensive understanding of violence concentration areas, their connection to illegal supply chains, and organized crime presence will be crucial for addressing this escalating crisis.



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# 2.5 Brazil

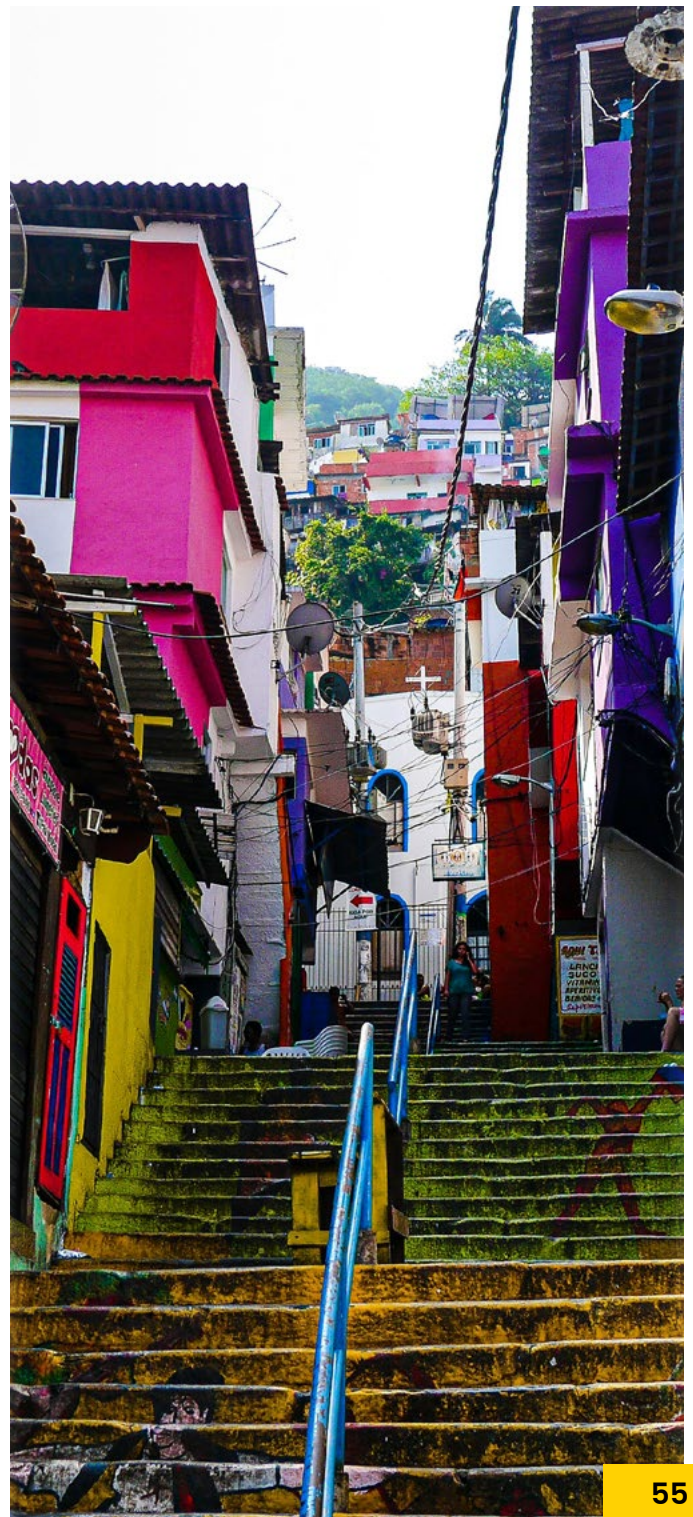
## Jose María Blanco Navarro

Brazil, Latin America's largest nation, faces profound and persistent challenges in public security. Throughout 2024, crime and violence **dynamics have continued to evolve, with some progress in reducing homicides, but also with the resurgence of other forms of criminality**, such as cybercrime and organized crime. The current state of security in Brazil is examined in depth in this paper while making use of the most recent data from the "Anuario Brasileño de Seguridad Pública 2024" and the "Atlas de la Violencia 2024", as well as other relevant studies. It also analyzes the state responses and the emerging trends that are shaping the future of security in the country.

### 2.5.1. General security context

Several studies and reports provide context for to have a view, always relative, of the security context in Brazil. The 2024 Global Peace Index ranks Brazil 131st out of 163 countries (ranked from most to least safe). Among the most negative aspects, **highlights the high rates of homicides and violent crime, the overcrowding of prisons and violent demonstrations.**

On the other hand, in terms of organized crime, the Global Organized Crime Index (2023) reveals that several Latin American countries occupy the first places worldwide, highlighting the presence of transnational criminal networks that include trafficking of drugs, arms, extortion, kidnapping and money laundering. Brazil appears in 22nd place out of a total of 193 countries analyzed, being the fourth in Latin America (after Colombia, Mexico and Paraguay). According to Word Population Review, 17 of the 50 most dangerous cities in the world are Brazilian. These data show an environment of chronic insecurity that affects both the population and the business fabric.



## 2.5.2. Criminality: typologies and trends

### Violence against people

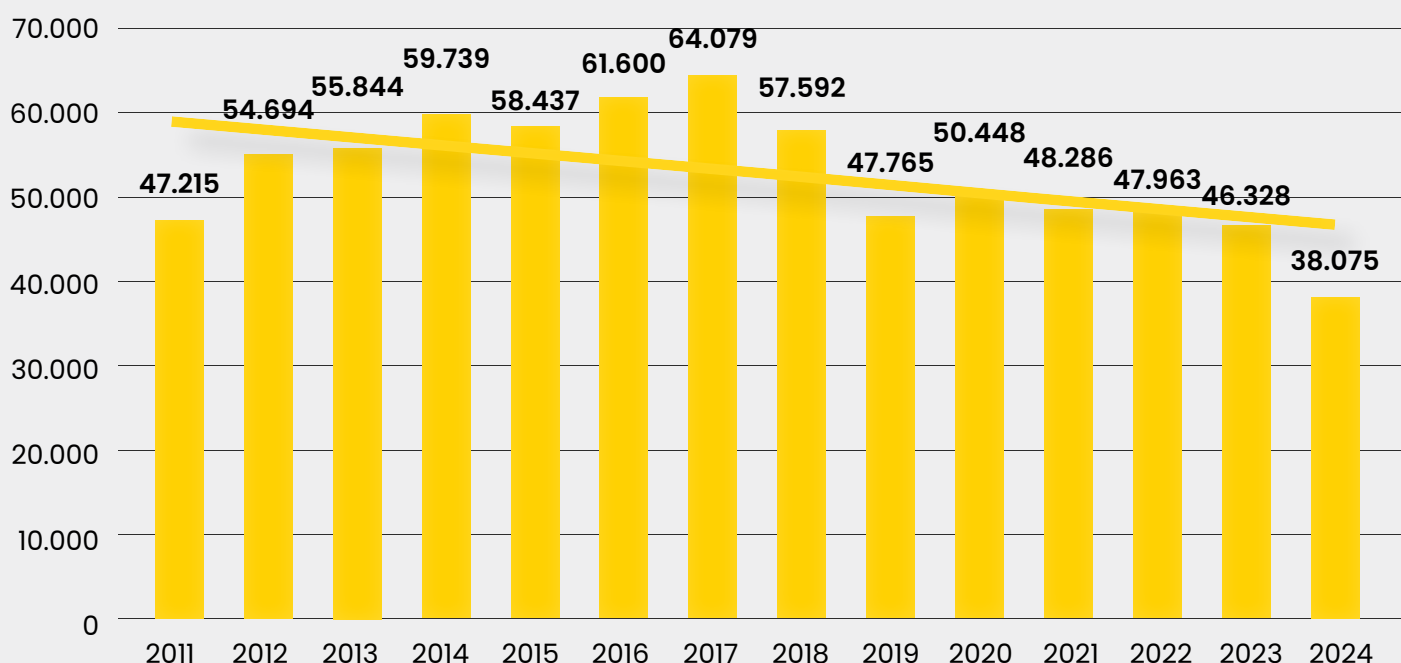
In 2024, Brazil continues to grapple with a complex and multifaceted public security situation. The decline in homicides is part of a broader trend observed in recent years, which shows a steady reduction in homicides in several regions of the country. However, **regional disparities remain significant, with areas such as the north and northeast registering rates well above the national average.**

Brazil recorded 38,075 homicides in 2024, a 6% drop from the 40,768 violent deaths counted in 2023, the Ministry of Justice said, following the decline observed in previous years. This **positions 2024 as one of the safest years in terms of homicides since at least 2011.**

The Atlas of Violence 2024 noted, over the previous year, that homicide rates vary drastically between different regions and cities. For example, in the state of São Paulo, the homicide rate is remarkably low, at 12 per 100,000 inhabitants, which contrasts with Northeastern states such as Bahia and Ceará, where rates exceed 45 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. These disparities reflect the different strategies and capacities of state governments to address violence and crime. **The concentration of homicides in these regions is closely linked to the presence of criminal factions such as the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and the Comando Vermelho (CV), which operate with relative impunity in areas where the state has a limited presence.**

Figure 19  
Homicide

Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on Government of Brazil.



Property crime

In contrast, states such as São Paulo have managed to implement more effective security policies, which have led to a sustained reduction in homicides. These policies include the use of advanced surveillance technology, better coordination among security forces, and social programs that address the underlying causes of violence, such as poverty and lack of educational and employment opportunities.

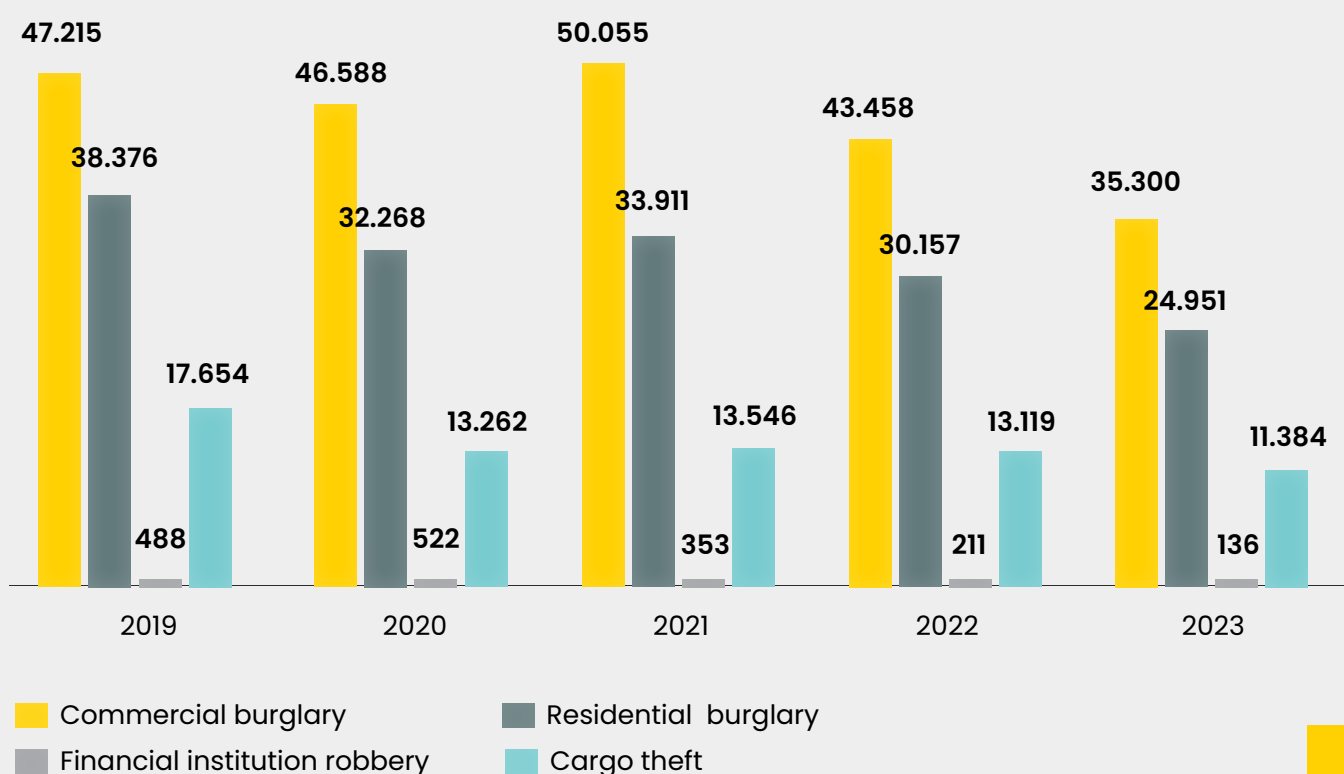
Another worrying aspect is the increase in police lethality. While homicides have decreased overall, deaths caused by police interventions have increased, suggesting a ‘mano dura’ approach.

The reduction in homicides, and in crimes against property in recent years, has not changed the perception of insecurity among the population. Despite the decrease in homicide figures, **more than a third of Brazilians believe that violence has increased since the last change of government.** This feeling is exacerbated by the prevalence of other types of crime, such as street robberies, and the constant media coverage of violent incidents, including clashes between police and organized crime.

Property crime, including robberies and assaults, remains a serious problem in Brazil’s major cities. In the first half of 2024, there has been a slight decrease in robbery cases compared to the same period in 2023. Despite this improvement, **crime rates in cities such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo remain high, especially in terms of car theft and armed robbery.**

Figure 20  
Thefts

Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on Government of Brazil.



## Cybercrime

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant reconfiguration of property crime in Brazil has been observed. The increase in electronic fraud and online scams has surpassed pre-pandemic levels, while robberies and assaults have migrated, in part, to the digital environment. **This shift reflects an adjustment in criminal tactics, with a decrease in certain physical crimes and an increase in virtual crimes.**

Cybercrime has emerged as one of the main security concerns in Brazil in 2024. During the first six months of the year, more than 600,000 cybercrime incidents have been reported, a 15% increase compared to the same period in 2023. This increase reflects the country's growing reliance on digital technologies and the vulnerabilities inherent in its cybersecurity infrastructure.

The rise in cybercrime, with a projected 40% growth by 2024, highlights the urgent need to improve the country's cybersecurity infrastructure to protect businesses and citizens from increasingly sophisticated digital threats.

Phishing attacks, financial fraud and ransomware attacks are some of the most common forms of cybercrime in Brazil, as in the rest of the world. As businesses and individuals increasingly adopt digital services, protection against these threats has become a priority for government and financial institutions. However, the response so far has been insufficient, with large gaps in protection and threat detection.

## 2.5.3. Organized crime

**Organized crime is one of the biggest security challenges in Brazil.** Major criminal organizations, such as the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and the Comando Vermelho (CV), continue to expand their influence both domestically and internationally. In 2024, these organizations not only control drug and arms trafficking in Brazil but have also diversified their illicit activities to include human trafficking, illegal mining and any opportunity that can be turned into profitable business.

The PCC has evolved since its founding in 1993 in the São Paulo prison system into a criminal organization that operates as a parallel state. The PCC not only controls the drug trade but also establishes its own system of laws and governance in the areas under its influence, challenging the authority of the state.

### *Drug trafficking and corruption*

**Drug trafficking remains the main source of income for criminal organizations in Brazil.** In the first half of 2024, the Federal Police seized 10% more cocaine than in the same period in 2023, reflecting both increased trafficking operations and intensified efforts by security forces to combat these activities.

**Drug trafficking remains the main driver of violence in Brazil,** with criminal factions such as the PCC and the CV vying for control of both domestic and international drug routes. It is estimated **that drug trafficking is responsible for approximately 75% of homicides in the country.**



Brazil plays a crucial role in the global drug trade, especially cocaine. Cocaine transiting Brazil comes mainly from Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, the three largest producers of the drug in the world. Cocaine trafficking routes cross mainly through the Amazon, using river networks and remote areas for transport. The port of Manaus is an important transit point, as are the ports of Belém, Itajaí, Santos in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. These drugs are mainly destined for **Europe, Africa and, to a lesser extent, Asia. Europe is the main destination for cocaine leaving Brazil**, with ports in Spain, Portugal and Belgium serving as key entry points. There is also a growing flow to West Africa, from where the drugs are then transported to Europe and other destinations.

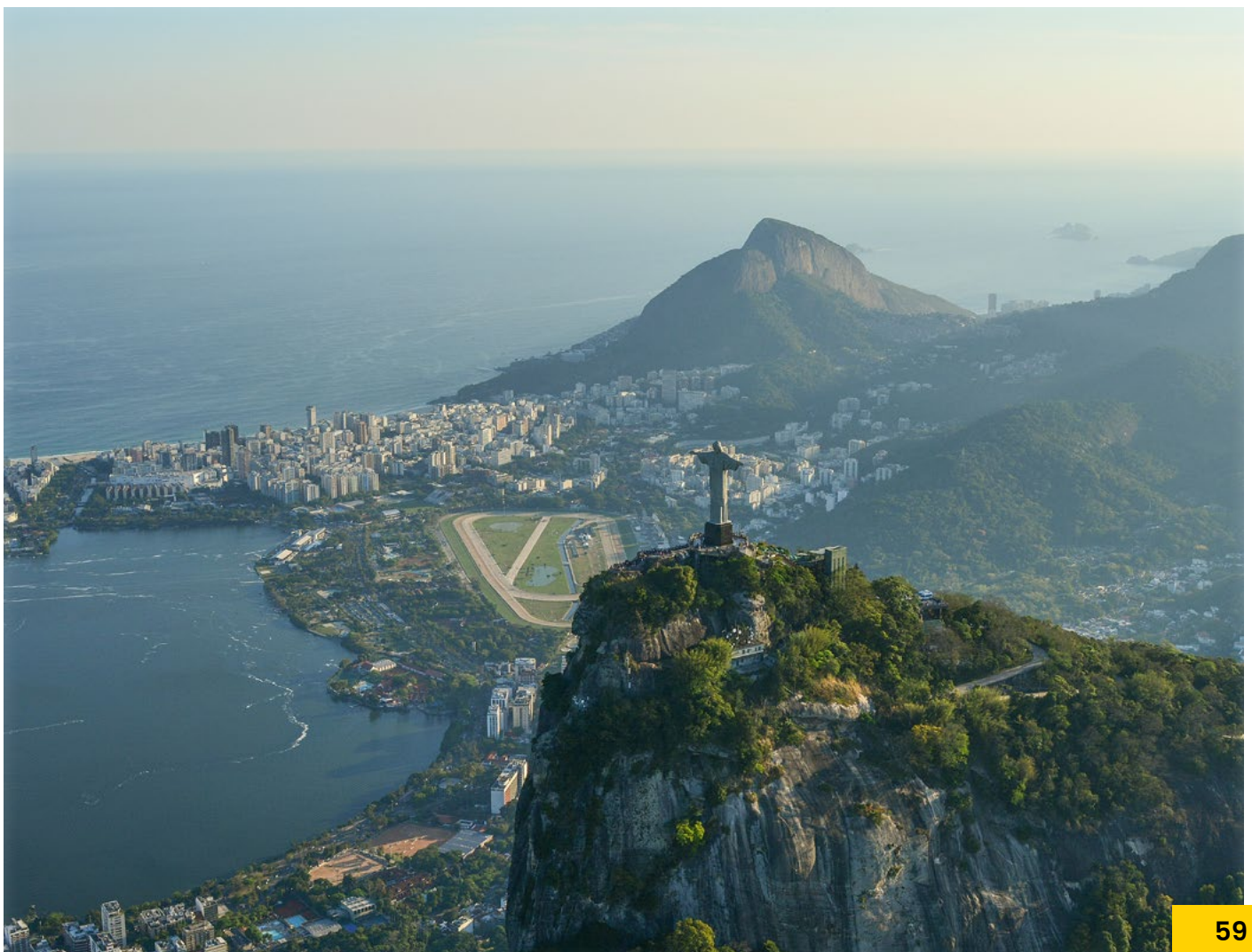
Brazilian criminal factions collaborate with Mexican cartels and European mafias to transport cocaine from Brazil to other markets. They have perfected various strategies to concealing cocaine in legal shipments, using containers of agricultural products, chemicals and other goods exported from Brazil. Security forces

have increased inspections and the use of advanced technology to detect these shipments, although the scale of the trade makes full control difficult.

### *The role of the prison system*

The Brazilian prison system remains a hotbed of criminality. It is not only a place where criminal organizations recruit new members, but also where they plan and coordinate their operations. The deplorable conditions, overcrowding and lack of effective control in Brazilian prisons have allowed these organizations to strengthen their power and influence both inside and outside prisons.

Throughout 2024, efforts to reform the prison system have intensified, including separating criminal leaders from the general population and improving internal security. However, these measures have had limited success.



## Regional diversity

Brazil's northern region, which includes the vast and remote Amazon, faces unique challenges in terms of public security, exacerbated by its geography, isolation

and the presence of international borders. Key issues in this region include: ↓ ↓ ↓

### Drug trafficking and international routes

Northern Brazil, especially the states of Amazonas and Pará, is on the transit route of cocaine from the coca producing countries in the Andes (Colombia, Peru and Bolivia) to global markets. River routes through the Amazon and ports in Manaus are used to transport drugs.

### Presence of criminal groups and guerrillas

In border areas, such as the triple frontier with Colombia and Peru, there is a growing presence of criminal groups and guerrillas operating in drug trafficking and other illicit activities. These areas are particularly difficult to control due to their inaccessibility and lack of effective state presence. Brazil and Colombia share a border extension of 1,645 kilometers, Peru and Colombia of 1,626 kilometers, while Brazil and Peru of 2,822 kilometers.

### Deforestation and illegal mining

Often controlled by criminal organizations, there are serious problems in the Amazon, amplifying the criminal ecosystem, beyond the impacts on the environment and local communities.

### Institutional weakness

The northern region suffers from chronic institutional weakness, with very limited public security infrastructure and a high rate of corruption, allowing illicit activities to flourish with relative impunity.

## 2.5.4.

### State responses: law enforcement and public policies

The Brazilian government has implemented several strategies to improve public security by 2024. The militarization of public security has been one of the most prominent responses, especially in states such as Rio de Janeiro. These operations have **involved the armed forces in the fight against organized crime in favelas and other conflict areas.**

#### *Militarization and security operations*

The militarization of public security in Brazil, as in other Central and South American countries, has generated intense debate. On the one hand, it has allowed security forces to carry out large-scale operations against criminal factions in areas where local police do not have sufficient capacity to act. On the other hand, these operations have been criticized for their repressive approach and human rights violations.

In 2024, the government continued with this strategy but has also begun to explore alternative approaches that include investing in violence prevention programs and improving coordination between police and community forces. Despite these efforts, **public perceptions of insecurity remain high, reflecting widespread distrust of the state's ability to provide security.**

#### *Reform of the prison system*

Brazil faces a deficit of 174,436 places in its prison system, according to a report by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. The country's prison population stands at 663,906 people, while the capacity of the facilities is only 488,951 places. These figures make Brazil the third largest prison community in the world.

Various initiatives have been aimed at addressing prison overcrowding, poor conditions in detention centers and violations of fundamental rights. A notable achievement of the Brazilian prison system, according to the director of Prison Intelligence at Brazil's National Secretariat of Penal Policies, is its **ability to anticipate and control disturbances and riots.** Prison intelligence plays a crucial role in identifying possible rebellions and intervening quickly to prevent major disorders. This proactive approach has enabled greater control and stability to be maintained within prisons.

International collaboration and the use of technologies show some positive results in prison management in Brazil. Electronic tracking and the collection of detailed data on prisoners has improved the security and efficiency of the system.

Reforms, such as separating criminal leaders from the general population, improving internal security and strengthening rehabilitation, have been difficult to implement effectively due to the complexities of the system.



### *Integration and coordination of security forces*

One of the most effective strategies adopted by the Brazilian state in 2024 has been **the improved integration and coordination of security forces at the federal and state levels**. The implementation of advanced geo-intelligence systems and increased inter-agency cooperation have enabled faster and more effective responses to security threats, especially regarding organized crime and violent crime.

These improvements have been particularly notable in states that have managed to significantly reduce their crime rates, such as São Paulo. The key to their success has been a combination of advanced technology, efficient management of police resources and greater involvement of local communities in security efforts.



## 2.5.5. Emerging trends and prospects

As Brazil moves into 2024, several emerging trends are shaping the country's security landscape. These trends reflect not only changing crime patterns, which respond to regional and even global trends, but also state responses and evolving public perceptions of security.

### *Advancing cybercrime*

**Cybercrime continues to expand**, with a projected 40% increase in cyber-attacks by the end of 2024. This increase is largely due to the growing digitization of the economy and everyday life in Brazil, which has created new opportunities for cybercriminals. Gaps in the country's cybersecurity infrastructure represent a significant challenge.

### *Expansion of organized crime*

**Brazilian criminal organizations are expected to continue expanding their operations both domestically and internationally**. These organizations are diversifying their illicit activities, engaging in human trafficking, illegal mining and other highly lucrative businesses. International cooperation will be essential to address these emerging threats, as the activities of these organizations transcend Brazil's borders.

### *Perception of insecurity and reality*

Despite declining homicide and other crime rates, the perception of insecurity among the population remains high. This **dissonance between objective reality and public perception** is due to several factors, including sensationalist media coverage, the prevalence of petty crime and persistent distrust in security institutions. Addressing this gap between perception and reality will be crucial to improving public trust and strengthening social cohesion.

## 2.5.6. Conclusion

Brazil faces a complex and evolving security landscape in 2025. Although homicide rates have shown a downward trend and some progress has been made in the fight against organized crime, significant challenges remain. Corruption, inequality and public perceptions of insecurity remain major barriers to improving public security in the country.

Security policies must continue to evolve to address these challenges in a comprehensive manner. This includes not only the repression of crime, but also the implementation of comprehensive and cost-effective policies that address the root causes of crime. In addition, international cooperation and the

integration of new technologies will be essential to address emerging threats, such as cybercrime and the expansion of organized crime. The progress made in 2024 is encouraging but will need to be sustained and scaled up to have a lasting impact on reducing violence and strengthening security across the country.

Another major challenge is to reinforce state presence in the most affected areas and improve coordination between security forces and intelligence agencies to limit the ability of large groups to create criminal fiefdoms. In addition, it is crucial to implement socio-economic development programs in these regions to reduce the influence of these groups.



An aerial night photograph of a town nestled in a valley. The town is illuminated by warm streetlights and house lights, creating a glowing effect against the dark landscape. In the background, rugged mountains rise under a dramatic, cloudy sky with some light breaking through. A wide, dry riverbed or valley floor is visible in the foreground. A large, semi-transparent yellow rectangle is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the title text.

# Argentina and Chile

# 2.6 Argentina and Chile

## Carolina Sampó

### 2.6.1. Argentina

For years, public security issues have been among the top concerns of Argentine citizens, alongside rising living costs (inflation) and unemployment. In this regard, **security-related proposals have become one of the central themes of the main political parties' electoral platforms.**

In this context, recent months have shown some improvement in the national security landscape, as indicated by certain quantitative data. One key aspect of this improvement concerns intentional homicides, meaning willful killings (unless otherwise stated, all references will be to this type of homicide and not negligent ones). According to figures from the National Criminal Information System (SNIC), **under the Ministry of Security, during the first half of 2024, these crimes decreased nationwide by 10.6% compared to the same period in 2023.**

This decline, which in absolute terms meant over a hundred lives spared, led the Ministry of Security to project an annual rate of four homicides per 100,000 inhabitants for the year 2024. If this projection materializes, the figure would represent a noticeable improvement compared to the previous year when the rate stood at 4.4 (with 2,046 homicides), marking a

3.6% increase from 2022. Additionally, it would be the lowest homicide rate of the current century, given that between 2001 and 2021, the rate fluctuated between five and six homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, according to a global report on these two decades compiled by the Center for Latin American Studies on Insecurity and Violence (CELIV) of the National University of Tres de Febrero (UNTREF).

From a geographical perspective, **in 2023, 90% of homicides occurred in just 10% of the territory, covering 193 municipalities** that house 70% of the country's population. Among these municipalities are the **Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (AMBA), Rosario, Santa Fe, and Mar del Plata** (SNIC, 2024).

Additionally, during that period, 57.4% of homicides were committed using firearms, while 25.5% were carried out with bladed weapons. Furthermore, 82% of the victims were male, compared to 17.6% female. In 88% of cases, the victims were adults. Another significant finding: 57.6% of homicides took place in public spaces, while 29.1% occurred in private residences, mainly as a result of domestic violence (SNIC, 2024).



Identifying the factors behind the significant decline in intentional homicides during the first semester of this year, the Ministry of Security has not provided many details but has highlighted three key elements:

- ▲ A drastic year-over-year reduction (-60%) in homicides in the city of Rosario during the first semester, one of the epicenters of organized crime primarily linked to drug trafficking and illegal drug sales.
- ▲ An inter-institutional collaboration between the national government and provincial jurisdictions to cooperate and coordinate efforts in specific areas identified through various means.
- ▲ As a result, the deployment of federal forces in high-crime zones, working in coordination with local police.

Regarding the city of Rosario, located about 300 km north of the country's capital in the province of Santa Fe, its high violence rates translated into 260 intentional homicides in 2023, over 80% of them committed with firearms. This figure represented 65% of all homicides in the province and equated to 19.8 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants—almost five times the national average.

In light of this situation, on December 18, the national and provincial governments jointly announced Operation Flag, which included the deployment of federal personnel. Three months after the start of the operation, in response to a new wave of violence, the government announced that members of the armed forces would be added to the effort against violence, though they would carry out logistical tasks in accordance with existing legislation.

Another significant improvement in security was observed in the field of **extortion kidnappings**, which had proliferated in the past decade, including the so-called “express” kidnappings—where victims were forced to withdraw money from ATMs during a car theft or pressured to have their families pay a ransom. These crimes **hit a historic low in 2023** (just a dozen cases in the first nine months), leading to the closure of the Specialized Prosecutor's Unit for Extortion Kidnappings (UFESE) in October of that year. This unit had been created in 2016 by the public prosecutor's office to investigate such crimes. Although overall security in Argentina has improved this year, this trend has not been consistent across all areas. For example, robberies (which involve violence against the victim) and thefts (without violence) remain an issue.

These crimes are most common on streets, in public transportation, and in densely crowded urban areas.

**Robberies and thefts do not seem to have decreased nationwide.** One of the most significant sectors affected has been vehicle theft, according to the Integrated Sofia System, a database managed by insurance companies. Considering both armed robberies and thefts of parked vehicles, incidents increased by 28% in 2023, rising from 158 to 201 cases per 100,000 inhabitants.

According to their geographical distribution: 9% of these crimes occurred in Buenos Aires city, 58% in Greater Buenos Aires (GBA), 33% in the rest of the country. In the suburban area, Lanús was the most affected district, followed by Morón and Tres de Febrero. In year-over-year terms, the number of cases increased by: 42% in Buenos Aires city, 32% in Greater Buenos Aires (32% in the northern zone, 33% in the western zone, and 30% in the southern zone), 17% in the interior of the country.

Although motivations for car theft vary, most stolen vehicles end up in illegal scrapyards for parts resale, are used to commit other crimes, or are sold under false identities in less regulated markets outside of Argentina.



The persistent socio-economic crisis is not unrelated to the **increasing involvement of minors in criminal activities**. The General Database of Children and Adolescents (BGD), under the Supreme Court of Justice, released its annual statistical report, which reflects an extremely concerning situation:

- ▲ In 2023, 1,767 children and adolescents had at least one criminal case initiated before a National Juvenile Court, a 7.5% increase compared to 2022. 71% had no prior criminal records, a slightly lower percentage than the 74% recorded the previous year.
- ▲ Of that total, 9 out of 10 were boys, mainly aged 16 and 17 (54.5%), mostly Argentinian nationals (94.8%) residing in Buenos Aires Province (55.8%) and Buenos Aires City (45.2%).
- ▲ A total of 2,197 cases were registered, a 7.9% increase compared to 2022. Crimes against property predominated (83%), primarily various forms of robbery.
- ▲ 92.3% of cases were reported at police departments in Buenos Aires City.

The mention of Buenos Aires City adds context: in 2023, robberies and thefts increased by 15%. According to the crime map prepared by the local security ministry, firearm-related robberies saw a 6.8% increase year-over-year. Conversely, a significant drop (12%) was observed in “motochorros”, a term referring to robberies committed using motorcycles. Regarding thefts—the stealing of goods without violence—it is estimated that at least part of the increase compared

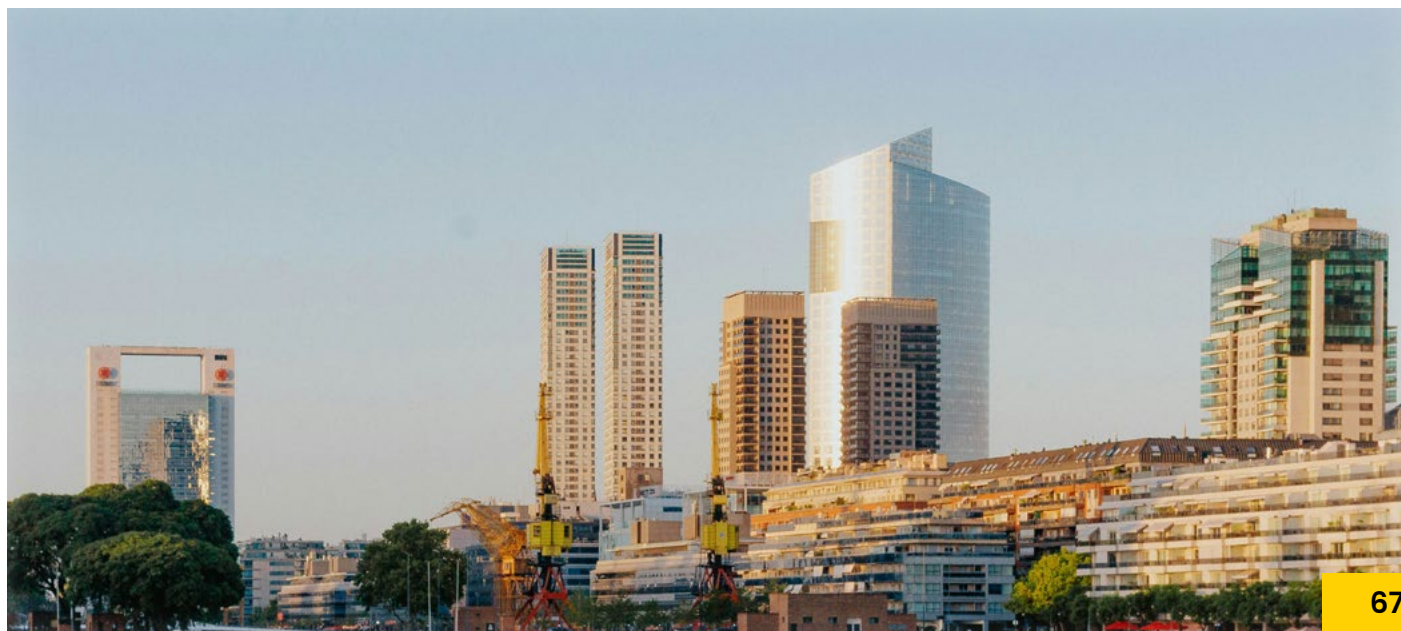
to 2022 might be linked to an active government campaign to facilitate reporting.

Additionally, femicides increased nationwide: according to the National Registry of Femicides of the Argentine Judiciary (RNFJA), in 2023, 250 direct victims of femicide were recorded (245 cis women and 5 trans/travesty women), a 10.6% increase compared to 226 cases in 2022. Furthermore, this figure surpasses the average femicides per year recorded in the decade 2014–2023 (since the establishment of RIMJA), which was just under 245 killings annually.

The registry, under the Supreme Court of Justice of Argentina, reports a current rate of 1.05 direct femicide victims per 100,000 women. On average, in 2023, there was one direct femicide victim every 35 hours and one victim of lethal gender violence every 32 hours (including linked femicides).

From an age perspective, in 2023, the average age of direct femicide victims was 38.3 years. 26% of victims were between 25 and 34 years old. 24% were between 35 and 44 years old. 22 victims were girls and adolescents under 18. 28 victims were elderly women aged 60 and above.

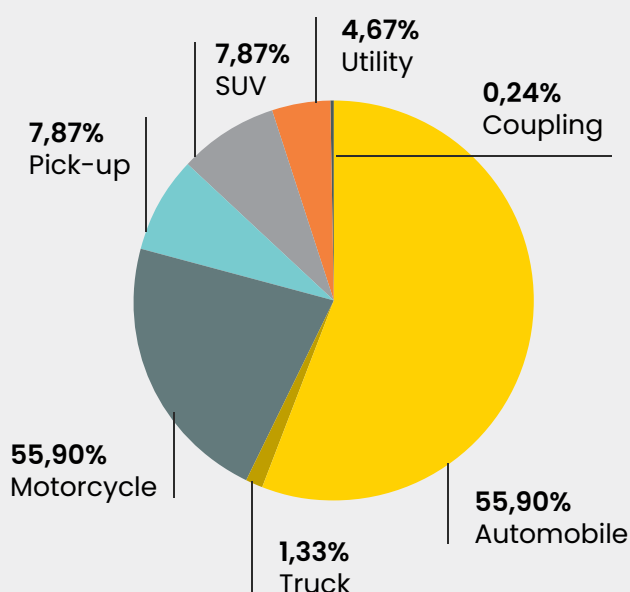
Regarding nationality, 93% of femicide victims were Argentinian, and only 15 were international migrants. Only 7 of the murdered women were in prostitution. 6 were homeless. 3 belonged to Indigenous communities. 2 were detained in police facilities at the time of their killing. Another crucial statistic: in 44% of cases, the victim lived with the perpetrator, linking these cases to domestic violence, as mentioned in previous sections.



In the short and medium term, the Executive Branch aims to significantly improve the existing public security situation nationwide. The strategy to achieve this objective includes cooperation between the national government and the provinces and the coordinated deployment of federal and local security forces. It also involves both a quantitative increase and a qualitative improvement in the resources available to the country's five federal security forces. To this end, a 19% increase in the budget for the Ministry of Security has been planned for 2025.

At the same time, the government aims to establish a more efficient regulatory framework, particularly concerning organized crime and its various manifestations—drug trafficking, money laundering, organ trafficking, human trafficking, and others. To address this, the government drafted the so-called Anti-Mafia Law, which was approved by Congress at the beginning of October. According to this new legislation, mere membership in a criminal organization will be punishable by prison sentences ranging from 8 to 20 years. Additionally, any member of the organization will receive the same penalty as the most severe crime committed by any of its members, as all individuals in the group are considered necessary participants in the criminal act.

Figure 21  
**Robbery participation by vehicle category, 2023**



Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on CESVI.

Figure 22  
**Plan Bandera (Rosario locality) SINC – 2023**

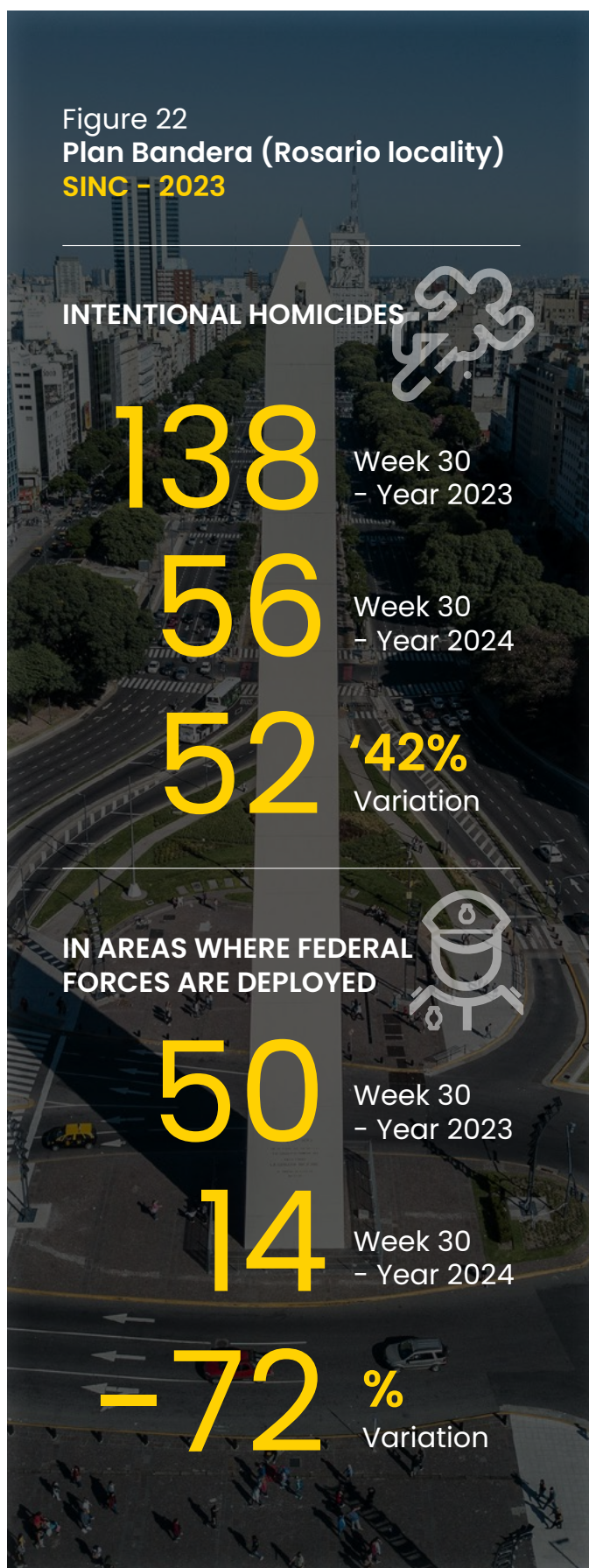
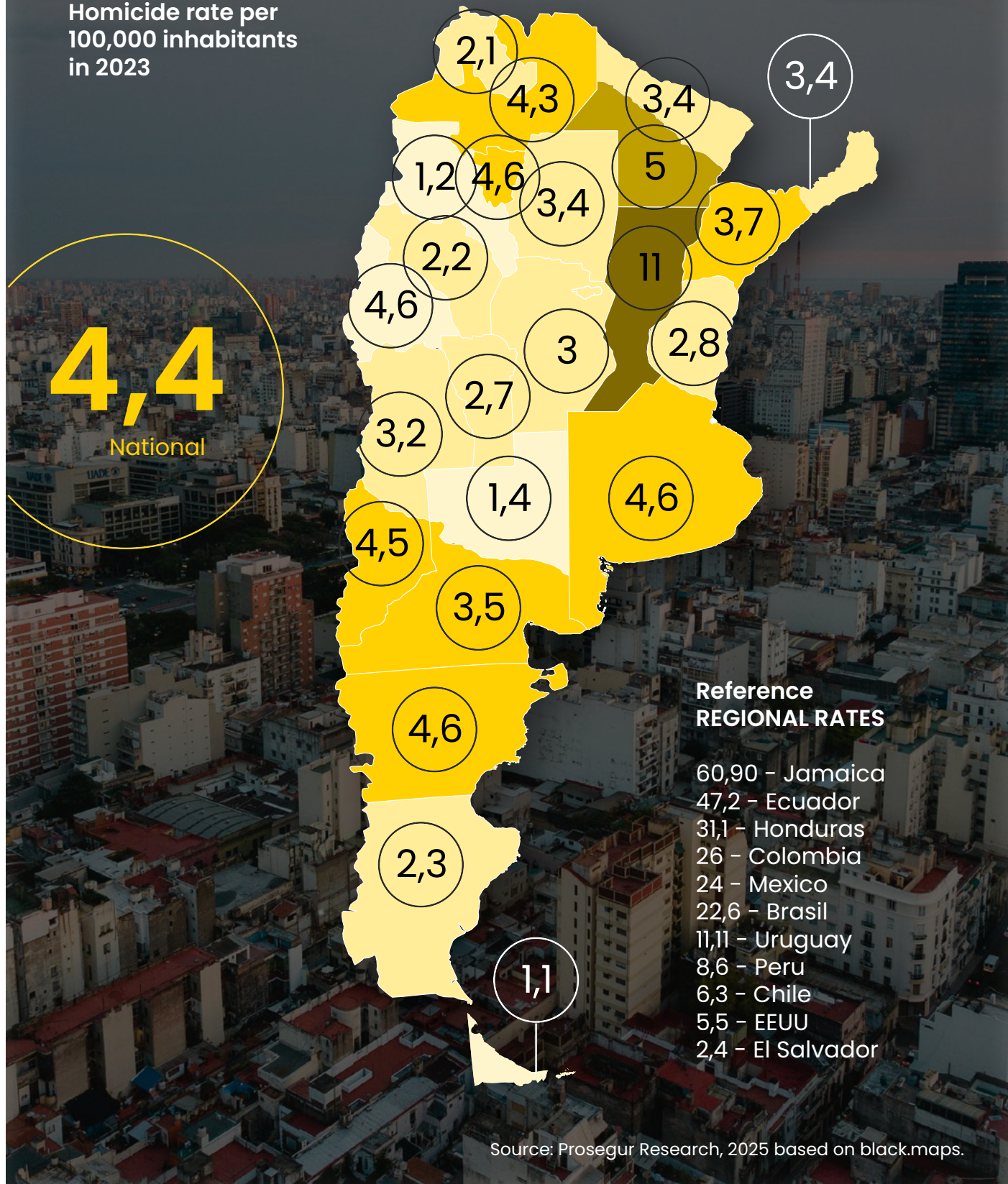


Figure 23  
Homicide rate per  
100,000 inhabitants  
in 2023



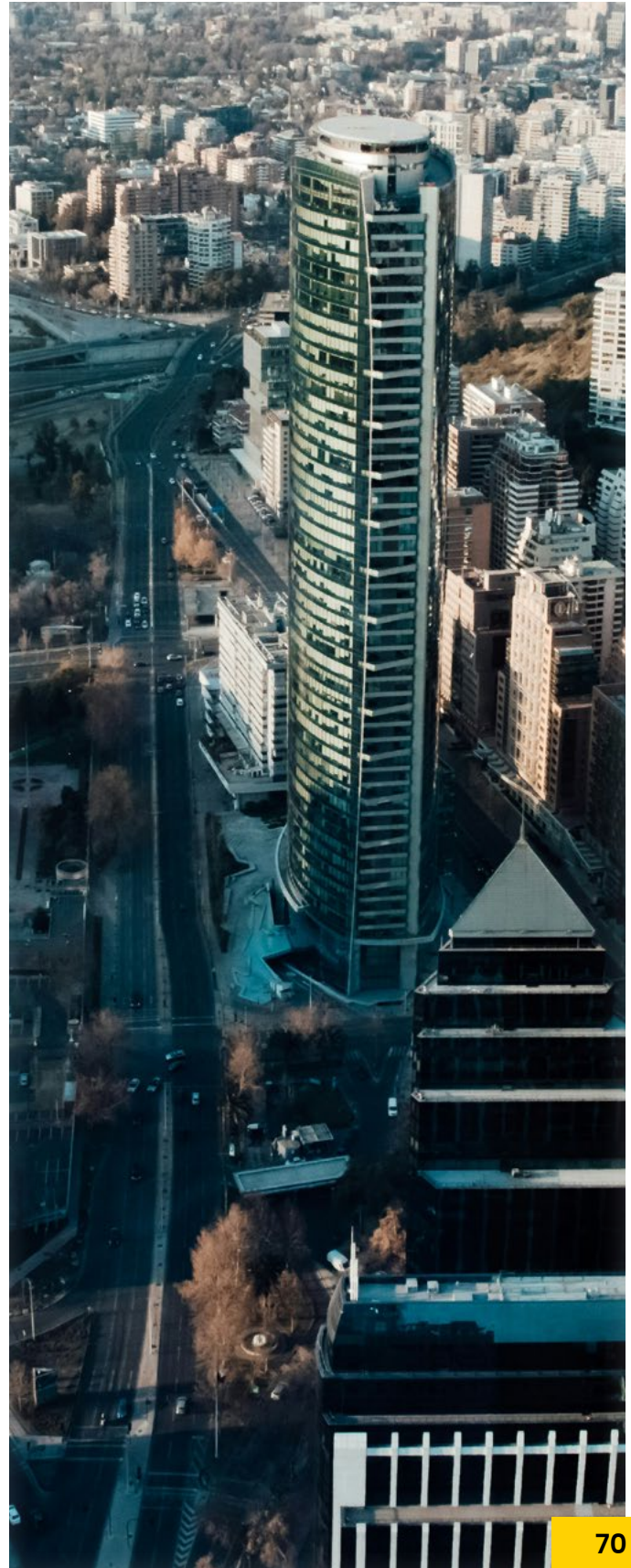
## 2.6.2. Chile

Judging by its numerical data, both in absolute terms and in comparison with previous years, as well as by public perception, **Chile is experiencing a significant security crisis**. Regarding intentional homicides (i.e., willful killings), the 2023 Completed Homicides Report indicates a rate of 6.7 murders per 100,000 inhabitants—a rate higher than that of its three neighboring countries: Argentina, Peru, and Bolivia.

However, **this figure represents a 6% improvement compared to 2022** results and marks a break in the upward trend that had been observed since 2016. According to data from the Ministry of Interior and Public Security, the year-over-year decline in intentional homicide victims was from 1,330 to 1,248. Cases decreased in 11 of the country's 16 regions, although they remained stable in the Metropolitan Region.

- ▲ 89% of victims of these crimes were men, and 82.5% were Chilean nationals.
- ▲ Of the total deceased, 54.3% had criminal convictions, five percentage points higher than in 2022, when 48.3% of victims had prior records.
- ▲ Regarding the methods used to commit homicides, firearms ranked first at 52.3%, followed by bladed weapons at 31%.
- ▲ 41.3% of homicides occurred in an interpersonal context, such as domestic violence, while 36.9% were linked to organized crime activities.
- ▲ The proportion of homicides with an identified suspect is below 60%. A possible explanation is that in many murder cases, the perpetrators and victims are not acquaintances, as these killings stem from organized crime activity.

Security experts in Chile seem to agree that a significant portion of homicides is due **to the growing presence of criminal structures, particularly linked to drug trafficking, which are competing for territorial control both among themselves and against foreign groups**.



The analysis can go beyond intentional homicides to focus on the broader category of Crimes of Major Social Significance (DMCS). This designation also includes thefts, minor injuries, serious injuries, burglaries, robberies with violence or intimidation, thefts from/ in motor vehicles, thefts in inhabited and uninhabited places, and rapes. According to data published by the Crime Studies and Analysis Center (CEAD), in 2023, the situation regarding DMCS (excluding homicides) recorded a total of 2,581 incidents per 100,000 inhabitants, with the following key data:

- ▲ **The most frequent crimes were thefts**, with 647.5 cases per 100,000 inhabitants.
- ▲ Robberies with violence or intimidation were reported at 411.4 cases per 100,000 inhabitants.
- ▲ Both thefts and robberies increased slightly compared to the previous year.
- ▲ Most of these incidents occurred in the **Metropolitan Region and the northern regions of the country**.

Geographically, crime increases were most pronounced in the so-called Northern Macrozone, which includes the regions of Arica y Parinacota, Tarapacá, Antofagasta, Atacama, and Coquimbo. This vast territory sees significant illegal migration flows and drug trafficking. Additionally, high crime rates were recorded in central Chile, particularly in the Metropolitan Region (especially Santiago, Puente Alto, and Maipú) and Valparaíso (notably in Valparaíso city and Viña del Mar).

Beyond empirical data, at a subjective level, regarding the increase and shift toward more violent crimes, **Chilean citizens experienced a growing sense of insecurity**. In this regard, studies conducted by a renowned polling firm, analyzing data from 29 countries, indicated that Chile ranks first in the perception of increased neighborhood crime over the past year. According to this survey, two out of three Chileans (68%) believe crime has increased in their neighborhood, double the global average (34%).

Similarly, the Citizen Peace Index, compiled by the Ciudadana Foundation, measures victimization levels (households where a member was a victim of robbery or attempted robbery in the last six months) and the proportion of individuals with high fear of crime. It revealed victimization rates of 36.6% and high fear rates of 30.5%, respectively.

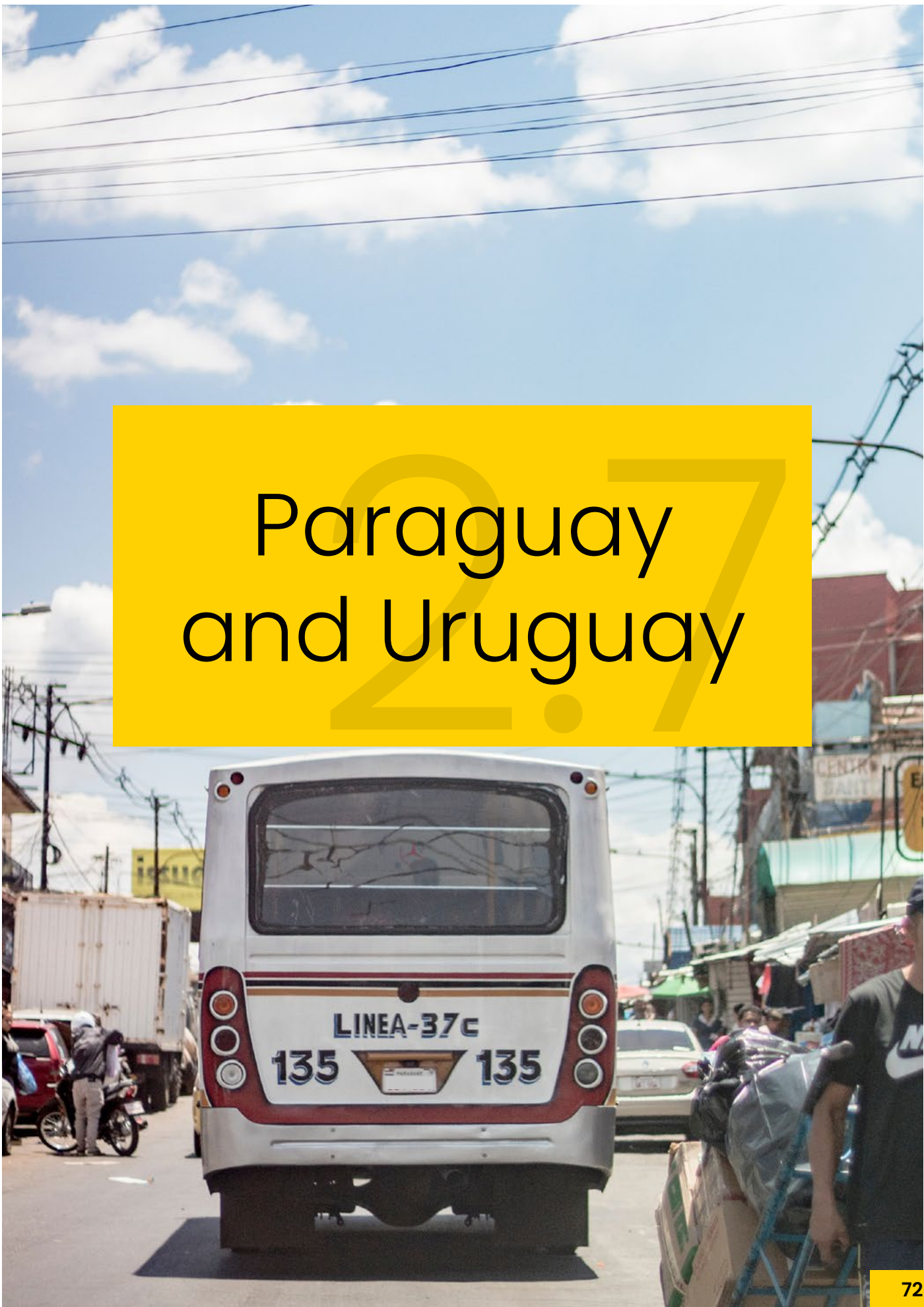
**Victimization was higher in Greater Santiago** than in other cities. It was more prevalent in middle- and lower-income households. The percentage of people with high fear of crime reached the highest level since record-keeping began 23 years ago.

Adding to this, the National Urban Citizen Security Survey (ENUSC), conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) and released at the end of 2023, showed an insecurity perception rate of 90.6%, nearly four percentage points higher than the previous year. This marks the highest perception of insecurity since Chile's return to democracy over three decades ago. Geographically, the highest fear-of-crime levels were observed in northern regions and the Metropolitan Region. According to ENUSC, Chileans perceived the following DMCS crimes as increasing the most between 2022 and 2023, in descending order: Theft of objects or auto parts, Thefts, Robberies with violence or intimidation, Robberies by surprise, Burglaries in homes, Vehicle theft.

The latest updates on Chile's public security situation indicate that by mid-2024, six out of ten citizens demanded that the government prioritize crime reduction over economic policies. Meanwhile, the Plaza Pública survey, conducted by CADEM, Chile's leading polling company, revealed that 75% of residents believe crime has increased over the past three months.

A notable finding is that nearly one-third of respondents associated rising crime with increased immigration. Various opinion polls suggest that over the past six to seven years, a large segment of the population links immigration and crime, believing that the growth of the migrant population has led to greater involvement in criminal activities. However, data from the Public Criminal Defense Office (DPP) contradicts this perception, indicating that foreigners are underrepresented among convicted criminals overall. Nonetheless, there has been a noticeable increase in foreign involvement in crimes related to drug trafficking and illegal drug sales.

# Paraguay and Uruguay



# 2.7 Paraguay and Uruguay

## Carlota López Bascuñana and Puerto González Díez

### 2.7.1.

#### Paraguay and Uruguay at the Latin American crossroads

Uruguay and Paraguay are not among the most violent or crime-ridden countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. In fact, both rank among the ten nations with the lowest homicide rates per 100,000 inhabitants in 2023. However, in recent years, both countries have experienced a **decline in security conditions, making insecurity one of their main challenges.**

Despite not being major seizure hubs for illicit drugs, Paraguay and Uruguay have become **key locations for international cocaine trade.** In 2023, they ranked sixth and fifth, respectively, among South American countries with the lowest drug confiscations. Their **proximity to drug-producing countries**—such as Bolivia for Paraguay—and their use by criminal groups for drug transportation to Europe and Africa—through Brazil—have favored their use as hubs for organized crime activities, including drug trafficking networks, **corruption, and money laundering.** Each country has distinct characteristics that explain their internal dynamics and regional importance. **Paraguay serves as a major distribution hub for illegal goods** due to its proximity to Bolivia, Brazil, and Argentina, fostering intense organized crime activity. **Uruguay's geographic position has turned Montevideo's port into a transit point for new illicit trade routes, increasing its criminal activity.**

**Paraguay ranked fourth globally for the highest levels of organized crime in 2023,** according to Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. Several factors fuel this situation: Criminal groups operating in Paraguay are heavily involved in drug trafficking and illicit markets, including marijuana, cigarettes, and weapons. Paraguay borders Brazil (1,367 km), Bolivia, and Argentina, making it a strategic gateway for criminal networks. High corruption levels

and criminal infiltration in state institutions exacerbate the problem. The country serves as a hub for the distribution of cocaine produced in Bolivia and Peru, particularly to Argentina and Brazil, which are large consumer markets. Additionally, Paraguay plays a dual role: Drugs are transported through its land borders and, via the **Paraguay-Paraná waterway,** reaching the ports of Montevideo and Buenos Aires for transatlantic shipment. Paraguay is also a global epicenter of **marijuana cultivation,** particularly in the **northern departments bordering Brazil,** its main market, followed by Argentina and Bolivia. In 2023, Paraguay's National Anti-Drug Secretariat seized around 6,000 tons of marijuana valued at \$180 million.

**Uruguay has emerged as a key logistics hub for trade in South America, including both legal and illicit markets.** Several factors contribute to its role: Proximity to Argentina and Brazil, Montevideo's port, located in the Río de la Plata Bay, which serves as Paraguay's maritime exit point and is critical for transatlantic drug routes. These conditions have led international criminal organizations to increase their operations via the port and Uruguayan coasts in recent years.

In 2023, 3.3 tons of cocaine were seized in the country, although in recent years, European port police operations have intercepted shipments that transited through this hub, far exceeding this amount. Another area where Uruguay has gained prominence is its role in **money laundering** linked to organized crime. Criminal groups have taken advantage of flexible fiscal policies and historically limited investment in crime prevention, detection, and prosecution to penetrate legal financial markets.

*Illicit routes in the region*

The “Southern Cone” routes are increasingly used for international illicit trade, driven by heightened port control measures and tightened security on traditional routes—especially in Colombia, Peru, and Brazil. This has led to the search for alternative and less historically utilized pathways, such as the Paraná-Paraguay waterway or the port of Montevideo. These routes employ land, air, and water transport—both river and maritime—to move a variety of illicit goods, including drugs, weapons, and cigarettes. In recent years, these pathways have been widely used for cocaine trafficking destined for Africa and Europe.

Paraguay serves as a hub for cocaine distribution routes from Bolivia to Brazil via land and air, as well as to Argentina and Uruguay through the Paraná-Paraguay waterway, with the northern and eastern departments being the most frequently used areas. Regarding Uruguay, in addition to arrivals via the waterway to the port of Montevideo and land transport through the Argentine-Uruguayan border crossing at Concordia-Salto, air transport is also common, either through clandestine airstrips or by dropping smaller shipments without landing the aircraft. The northern states of Artigas, Salto, and Paysandú are the most frequent entry points.

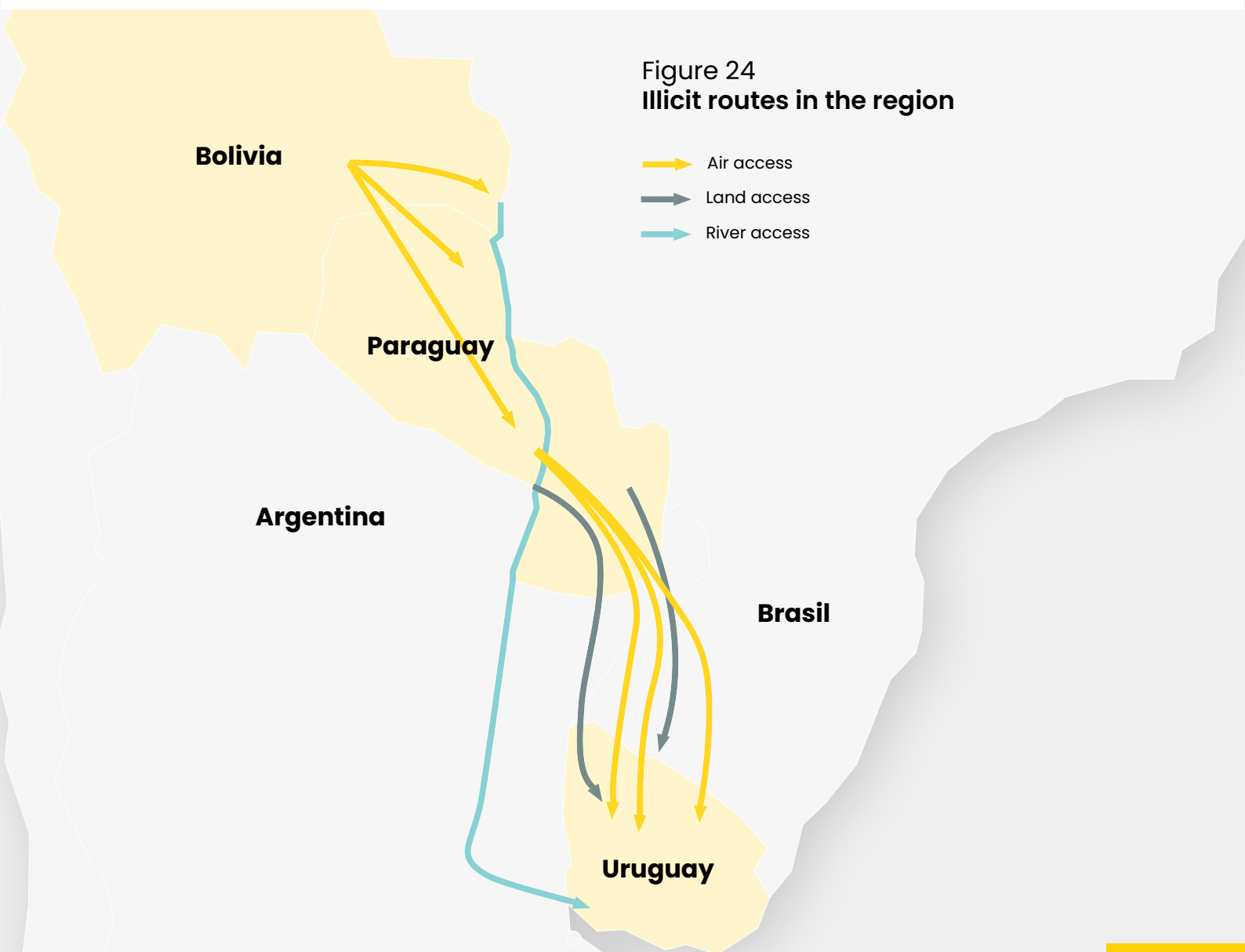


Figure 24  
Illicit routes in the region

Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on Ceres data.

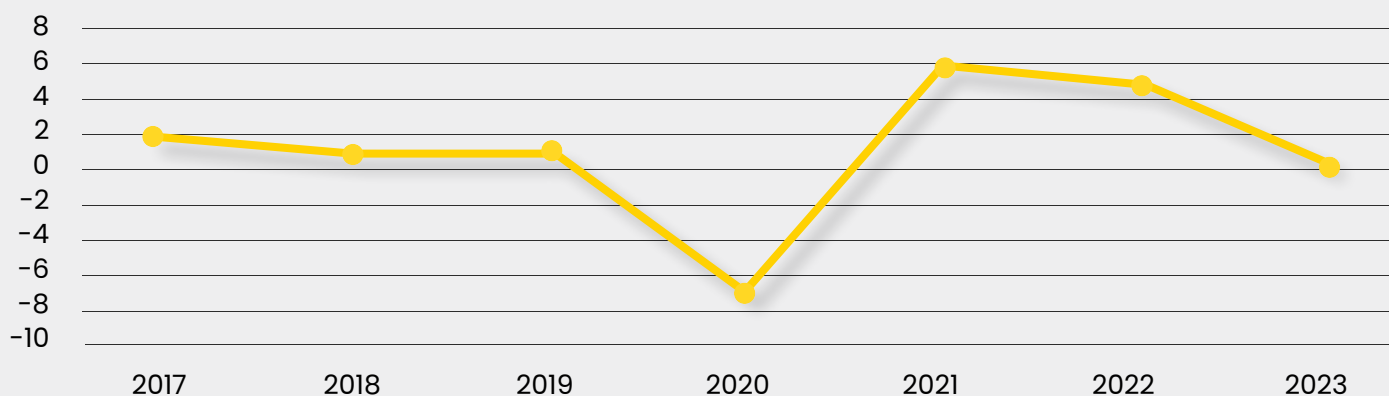
*Triple frontier as a strategic hub for organized crime*

The **Triple Frontier**, which includes **Puerto Iguazú (Argentina), Foz de Iguazú (Brazil), and Ciudad del Este (Paraguay)**, is a border region with extensive logistical infrastructure connecting to global markets, **regularly exploited by organized crime for activities** such as drug trafficking, money laundering, counterfeiting, smuggling, and human trafficking. This region has also been linked to radical Islamist actors, such as Hezbollah, who use it for fundraising and as training locations.

The epicenter of criminal activity is Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, which hosts **numerous criminal groups from various nationalities, particularly the Brazilian organizations Primer Comando Capital (PCC) and Comando Vermelho (CV)**. Factors such as corruption, porous borders, and weak institutional capacity to address the issue have allowed this area to become one of the key nerve centers for criminal operations and illicit markets in South America.



Figure 25  
Evolution of the % variation in GDP in Uruguay (2017–2023)



## 2.7.2. Uruguay

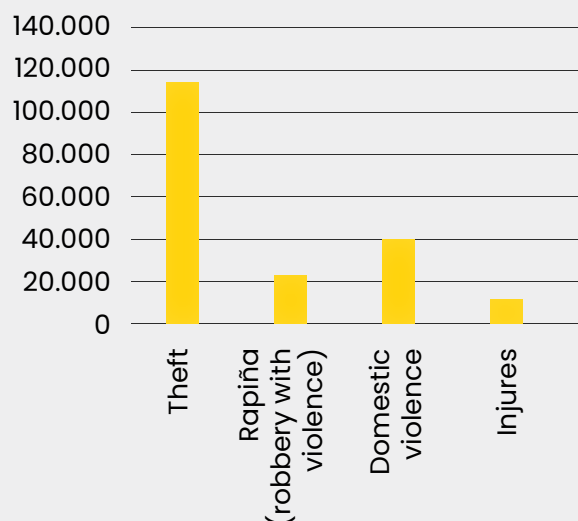
At the **political and social level**, Uruguay faces **two major challenges** in the coming years. First, the **insufficient economic growth rates** needed to converge with the GDP of developed countries. Second, the **widening inequality and increasing child poverty**. Social mobilization has been **increasing year by year, with social, labor, and political issues**—such as **corruption, the water crisis, insecurity, and government policies**—being the main reasons for most protests in the country.

### *Uruguay in the mirror of crime: recent data and trends*

**Uruguay remains one of the safest countries in Latin America.** The 2024 World Citizenship Report ranked Uruguay 32nd out of 157 countries, placing it as the highest-ranked Latin American nation. However, **common crime and small-scale criminal activity continue to be the main security challenges**, with theft, violent robberies (“rapiñas”), domestic violence, assaults, and homicides being the most frequent crimes. Although overall crime figures have remained stable in recent years, with slight increases, high-impact crimes, such as homicides, have risen in the last two years. In 2023, Uruguay’s homicide rate was 10.7 per 100,000 inhabitants (381 cases), lower than the regional average (20) but higher than Chile (4.5) or Peru (3.2).

**Montevideo** accounted for **55% of all homicides in 2023, making it the epicenter of both common crime and high-impact offenses in the country.** **Border states with Brazil, such as Rivera and Rocha,** along with Durazno (an inland department), also exhibit high crime rates, largely linked to smuggling and drug trafficking.

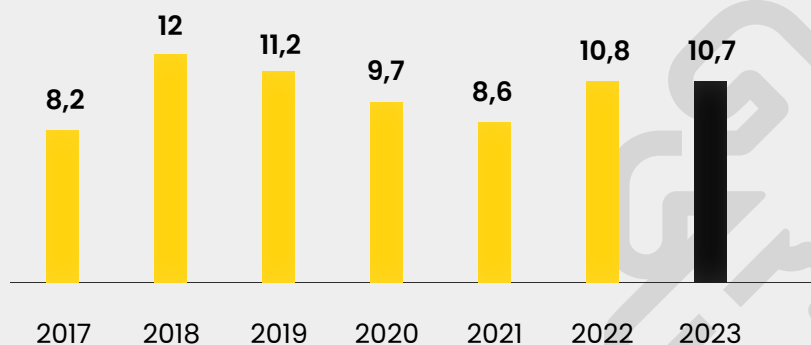
Figure 26  
**Crimes with the highest incidence in 2023**



Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on the Uruguayan Ministry of the Interior.

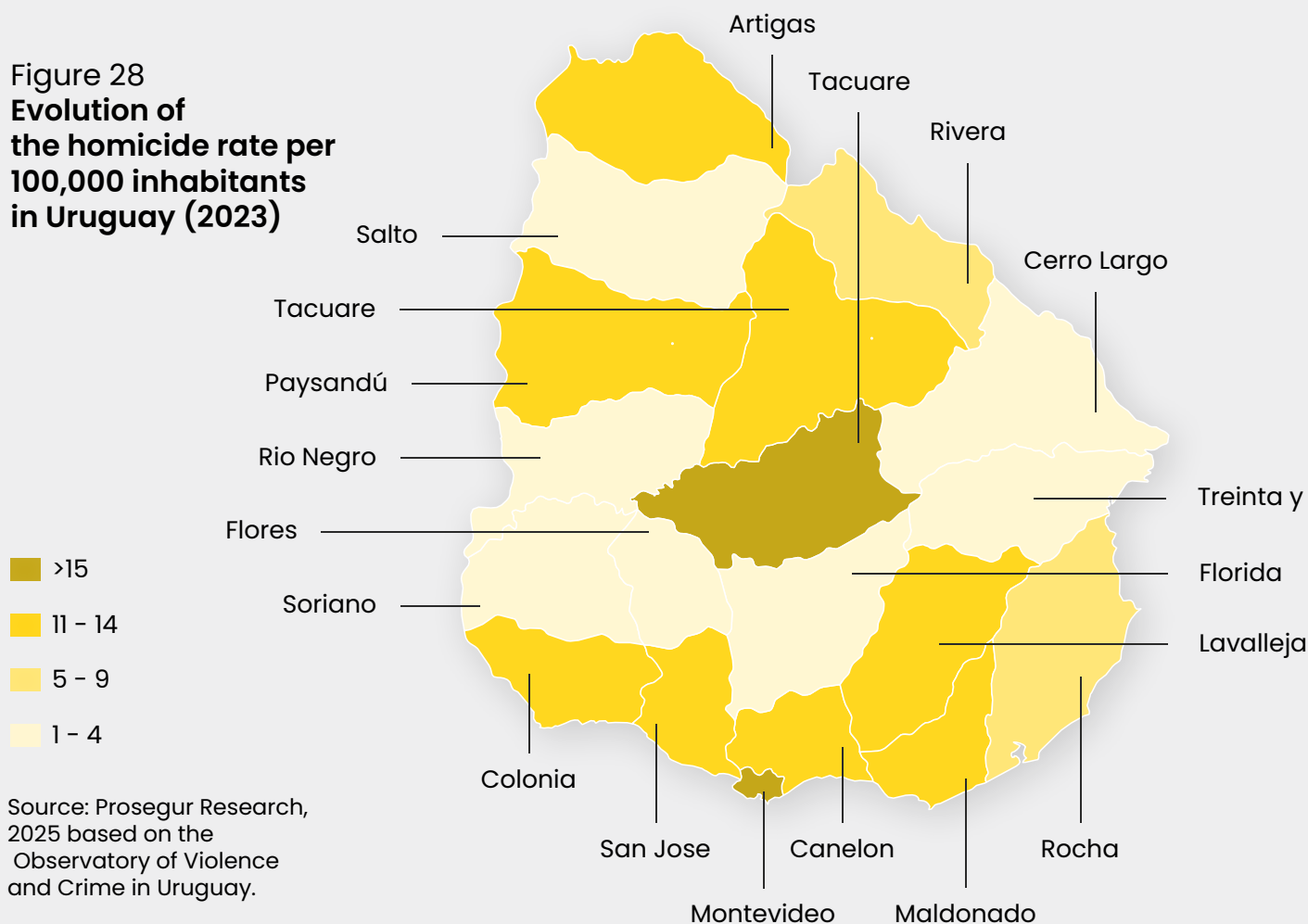
Businesses in Uruguay are often affected by crime, although petty crimes like theft and robbery pose the **biggest concerns.** **Cybercrime continues to rise across all sectors**, with threats such as intrusions, ransomware, malware, and cyber fraud becoming more frequent. In the first half of **2024, Uruguayan authorities detected 4,772 cybersecurity incidents, representing a 122% increase compared to the same period in 2023.** Additionally, a report by the **Uruguayan Chamber of Information Technology in April 2024 found that only 21% of surveyed businesses** (about 600) consider their cybersecurity measures sufficient to protect against such threats.

Figure 27  
**Evolution of the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in Uruguay**



Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on the Uruguayan Ministry of the Interior.

Figure 28  
**Evolution of the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in Uruguay (2023)**



*Organized crime and violence: hidden realities and emerging challenges*

The **increase in crime** in recent years, especially violent crime, is due to several factors, among which the **dispute between local groups—mainly family clans—for territory and control of small-scale drug trafficking stands out**. These groups operate primarily in Montevideo, Canelones, and San José, where score-settling and murders have increased. Experts point out that, at present, these groups lack sufficient capacity to confront the State directly on a larger scale, and there is no evidence so far that they have links to larger transnational organizations.

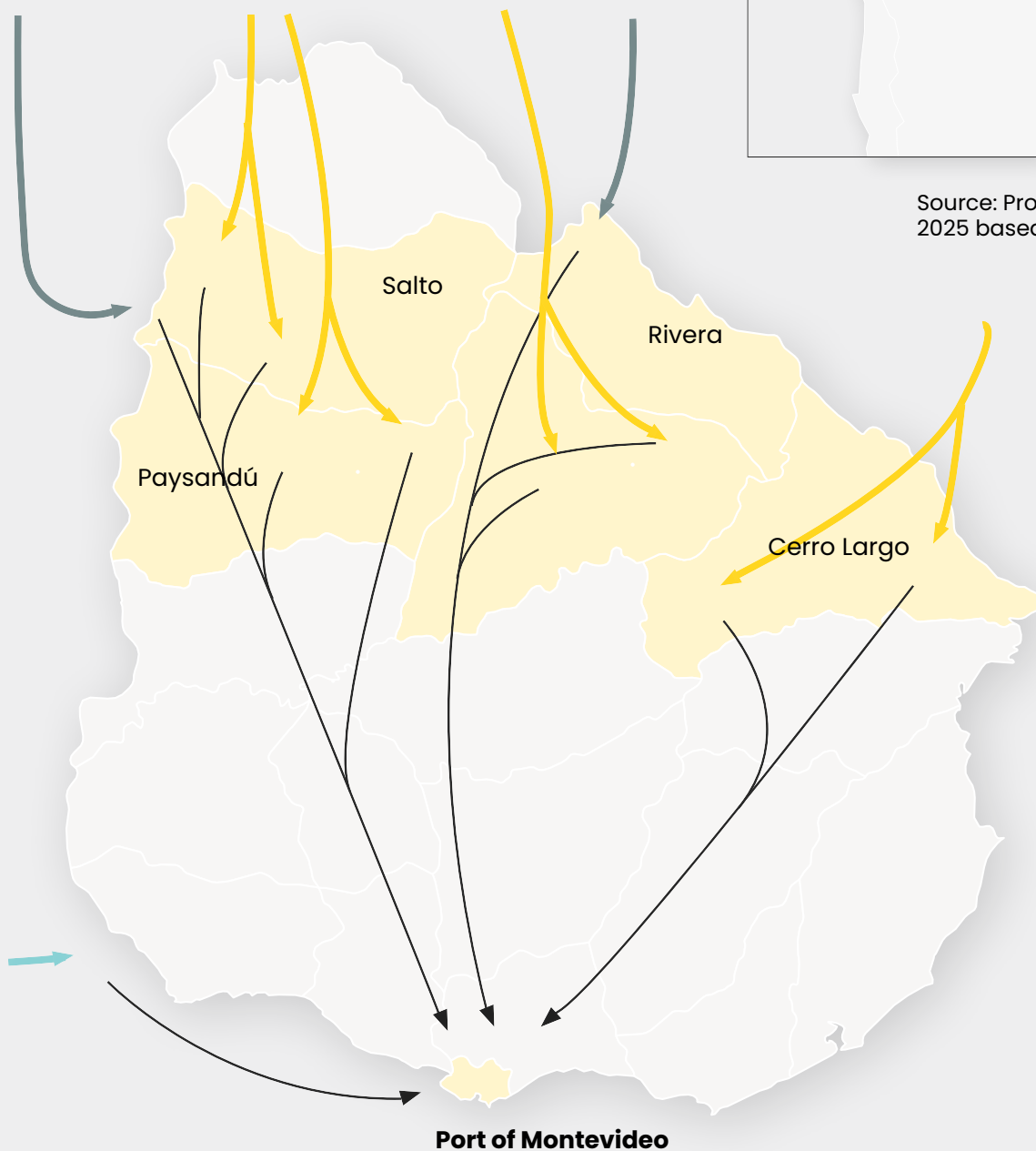


Regarding organized crime, the main player is the Brazilian group—Primer Comando da Capital (PCC)—which has increased its operations in Uruguayan border territories and the port of

Montevideo as a departure point for cocaine shipments to Europe and Africa. Between 2019 and 2023, Uruguay's National Customs Directorate seized 11.4 tons of cocaine, valued at over 700 million dollars.

Figure 29  
Drug trafficking routes in Uruguay

→ Air access    → Land access    → River access



Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on CERES.

On the other hand, **Uruguay has gained importance as a hub for money laundering linked to organized crime.** The National Secretariat for the Fight Against Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism published a report in September 2023 highlighting the steady annual increase in investigations related to money laundering from drug trafficking and associated crimes—rising from 1,597 cases in 2018 to 3,021 in 2022. The use of various economic sectors to launder drug-related profits and the growing role **of Uruguay's port in drug shipments have increased the likelihood of organized crime** expanding operations, fostering violence and crime as groups compete for territorial control and trafficking routes.

Uruguay is also a **significant hub for arms smuggling**, serving as an intermediary between Argentina and Brazil, with criminal organizations such as PCC (Primeiro Comando da Capital) and CV (Comando Vermelho) driving high demand. In 2023, Interpol conducted a large-scale operation across Latin America, seizing 100,000 rounds of ammunition in Uruguay—the largest such seizure in the country's history.

**Within Uruguay's business sector, there is growing concern over security, driven by rising crime rates. Business owners and executives have adopted preventive measures to counter robberies, extortion, and even kidnappings—**though the prevalence of kidnappings remains low. **Thefts and burglaries in businesses and offices** have surged, with 2024 recording a 112% increase in home burglaries compared to 2023, making it one of the biggest threats to the sector. While extortion is not widespread nationally, isolated cases do occur in areas with a high presence of criminal gangs. For instance, in Montevideo's most crime-ridden neighborhoods, family clans demand payments from residents and merchants. Lastly, as Uruguay strengthens its role as a money laundering hub for criminal organizations, the business sector has seen a rise in companies and enterprises connected to these illicit practices.

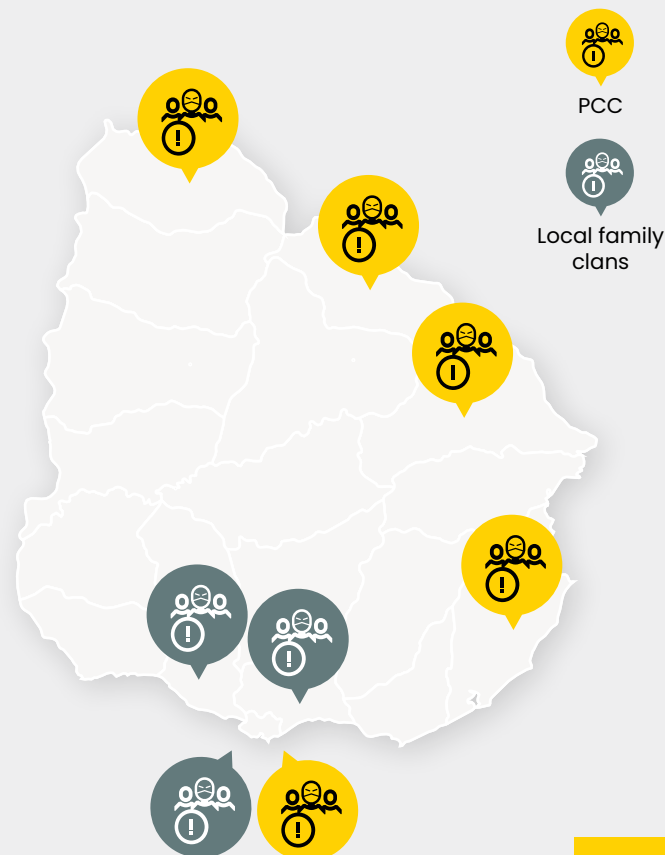
Figure 30  
**Presence and operations of major criminal groups in Uruguay**

**Local family clans**

These groups operate mainly in Montevideo, with a smaller presence in nearby departments such as Canelones and San José. They compete for territorial control in their areas of influence to carry out small-scale drug trafficking, occasionally engaging in extortion.

**Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC)**

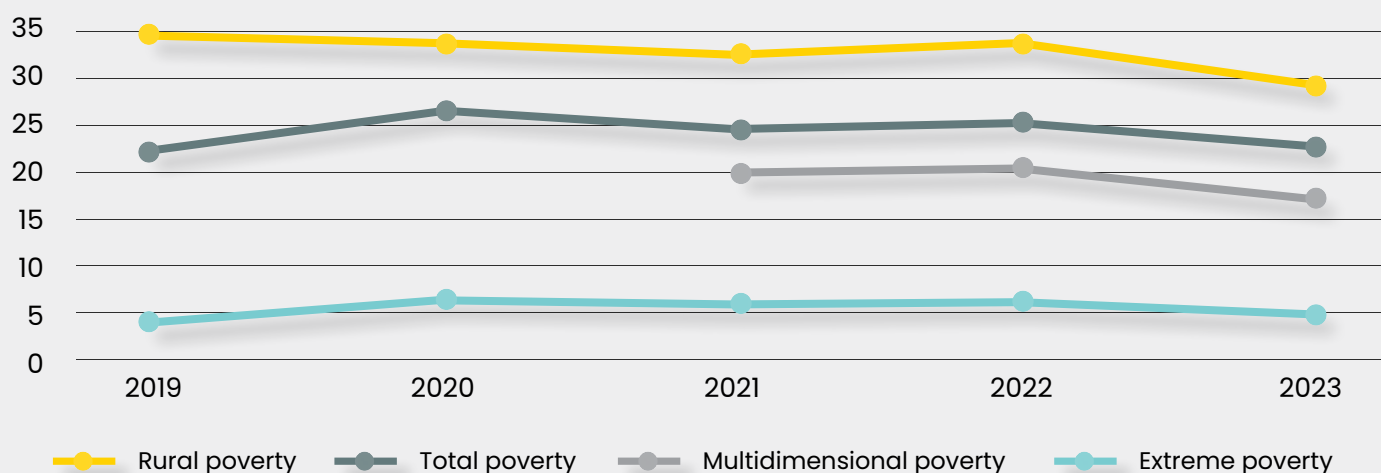
This is Brazil's largest criminal organization, with a presence in several countries, including Uruguay. Its main activity is large-scale drug trafficking, moving narcotics from Brazil and Paraguay to Africa and Europe. Currently, its presence has been reported in border departments such as Artigas, Rivera, Cerro Largo, and Rocha, as well as operations through Montevideo's port.



Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on media information.

Figure 31  
Evolution of poverty rates in Paraguay

Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on the National Institute of Statistics of Paraguay (INE).



\* Data on multidimensional poverty tend to be less frequent and specific for all years.

### 2.7.3. Paraguay

Paraguay maintains **relative political stability** despite growing public dissatisfaction with **high levels of corruption** and the **increasing activity of organized crime** in the country. High poverty and inequality rates, especially in rural areas, contrast with the sustained economic growth in recent years, driven by the recovery of the agricultural and livestock sectors and the expansion of hydroelectric production.

#### *The Paraguayan paradox: crime statistics*

**The security situation in Paraguay presents a paradox.** Common crime and homicide rates remain low—although increasing—compared to other Latin American countries. However, **Paraguay ranks as the fourth country in the world with the highest organized crime index.** The 2024 Global Peace Index, published by the Institute for Economics and Peace, places Paraguay 77th out of 163 countries (a

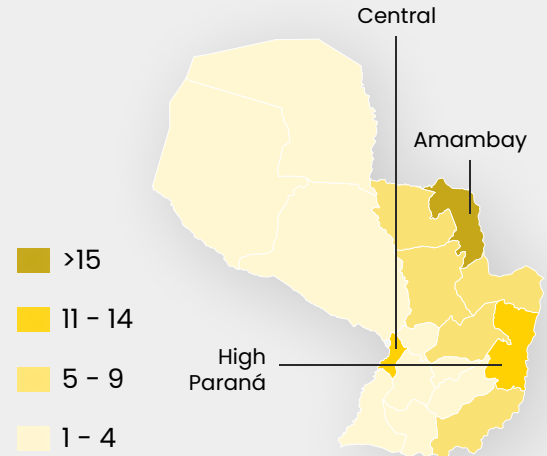
medium level of peace) and fifth in the region, ranking better than Peru, Brazil, and Colombia. Similarly, the 2024 World Citizenship Report ranks Paraguay 77th out of 157 countries. The 2023 Victimization Survey, published by the Institute of Comparative Studies in Criminal and Social Sciences of Paraguay, suggests that criminal organizations operate discreetly, largely avoiding direct engagement with the general population, focusing instead on drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and money laundering.

**The most reported crimes include domestic violence, theft, and robbery, with the highest incidence in Central Department** (where the capital Asunción is located), Alto Paraná, Itapúa, Caaguazú, and Cordillera. **These figures contrast with high-impact crimes in border areas**, particularly in the eastern regions, where organized crime is highly active. **While homicides in Paraguay remained relatively low compared to other countries in the region in 2023** with a rate of 5.3 per 100,000 inhabitants, homicide incidence in 2022 was significantly higher in border departments such as **Amambay (43.5), Concepción**

(20.5), Alto Paraguay (21.5), and Canindeyú (24.6), where violence and criminal groups linked to drug trafficking and other illicit activities like arms smuggling are highly active. Ciudad del Este, located in the Triple Frontier, and Pedro Juan Caballero are the cities with the highest insecurity rates, where crimes are mainly related to drug trafficking and smuggling.

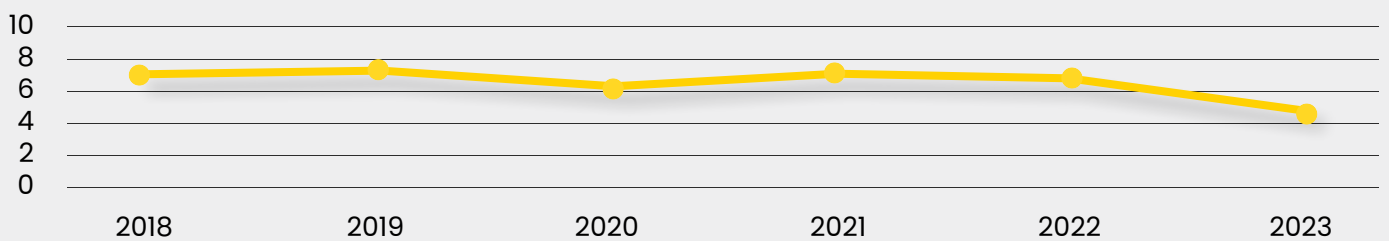
Meanwhile, businesses in Paraguay face growing challenges, particularly in cybersecurity. With the advance of digitalization, the country has seen a rise in cyberattacks and cybercrime. This has led the private sector to increase investments in security technology, yet the lack of adequate infrastructure and a solid regulatory framework remains a major concern. Additionally, businesses must navigate extortion risks posed by criminal groups.

Figure 32  
Percentage of intentional homicides by department in Paraguay (2019–2024)



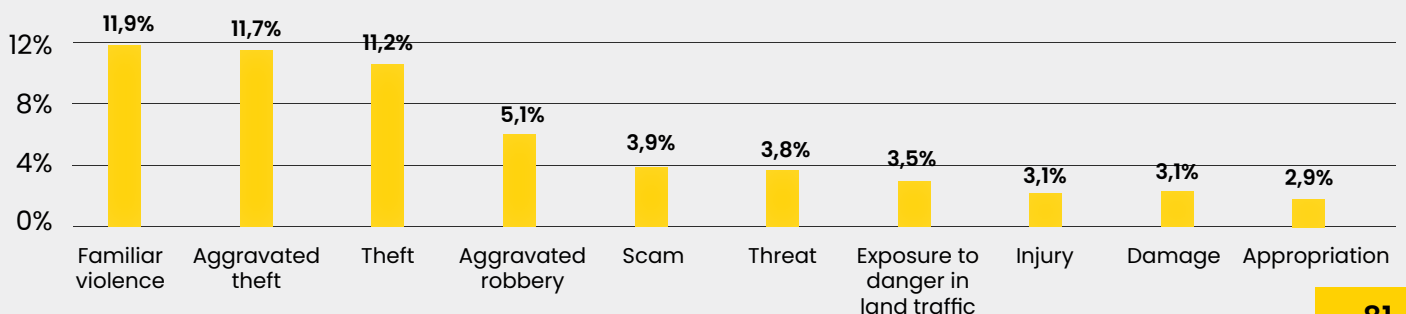
Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on Public Ministry of Paraguay.

Figure 33  
Evolution of the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants (2018–2023)



Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on Public Ministry of Paraguay.

Figure 34  
Percentage of most frequent crimes in Paraguay in 2023



Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on Public Ministry of Paraguay.

*Paraguay and organized crime: between borders and new challenges*

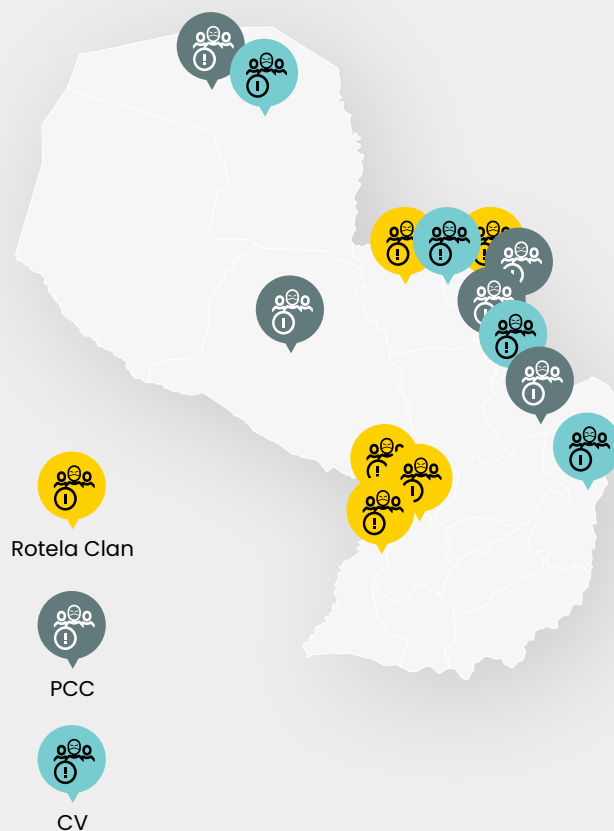
In 2023, the Organized Crime Index ranked Paraguay as the fourth country with the highest incidence of organized crime worldwide, behind Myanmar, Mexico, and Colombia. **Organized crime in Paraguay is closely linked to drug trafficking**, playing a key role in drug distribution across South America. The country serves as a major corridor for cocaine transit, moving shipments from producer nations like Bolivia into Brazil, then through the ports of Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Montevideo (Uruguay) on the way to other continents. Additionally, **Paraguay is one of the leading marijuana producers in the region**, with large plantations in remote rural areas, particularly in Amambay, Canindeyú, and Caaguazú. Other illicit activities in Paraguay include hitman-style killings (sicariato), arms trafficking, smuggling of cigarettes, counterfeit goods, and contraband, with Ciudad del Este, located in the Triple Frontier, serving as the main criminal hub.

**Organized crime is primarily concentrated in the eastern departments, such as Alto Paraná, bordering Brazil, and particularly Amambay**, which shares borders with Bolivia and Brazil. Transnational criminal groups like Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and Comando Vermelho (CV) operate with impunity, frequently clashing over territorial control and trafficking routes, taking advantage of corruption, limited security force resources, and weak state control. Beyond international criminal organizations, local Paraguayan groups also operate, including: Ejército del Pueblo Paraguayo (EPP): A relatively small organization known for kidnappings and violent attacks in northern Paraguay. Clan Rotela: Originally focused on small-scale drug dealing, but has expanded into controlling narcotics trafficking routes and prisons.

The surge in violence has directly impacted businesses, forcing many to increase security measures or even halt operations due to rising cases of robbery, extortion, and kidnappings. Rural areas and large cities have been affected, with **Asunción—Paraguay’s capital—being the most crime-affected city**, concentrating nearly one-third of all reported offenses nationwide. This criminal activity is influencing both the local economy and Paraguay’s international reputation, as the growth of the “parallel economy” linked to illicit markets

raises concerns. According to National Police reports, Paraguay witnesses four armed robberies every hour and one vehicle theft every four hours. In 2024, business associations such as the Chamber of Entrepreneurs and the Executive Club have increased demands for concrete security measures from authorities and political leaders.

Figure 35  
**Presence and operations of criminal groups by department in Paraguay**



Source: Prosegur Research, 2025 based on media information.

## Major criminal groups in Paraguay



### First Capital Command (FCC)

Brazilian Organization with the Most Presence in Paraguay This group operates primarily out of Pedro Juan Caballero (San Pedro) but has a strong presence in Amambay, Canindeyú, Alto Paraguay, Presidente Hayes, and Central. It engages in various illicit activities, including cocaine and marijuana trafficking, arms smuggling, and cigarette contraband.



### Comand Vermelho (CV)

Another Brazilian Organization with Extensive Presence in Paraguay Alongside PCC, this group controls the cocaine and marijuana trade in Paraguay. It operates along the Brazilian border, with its main base in Capital Bado.



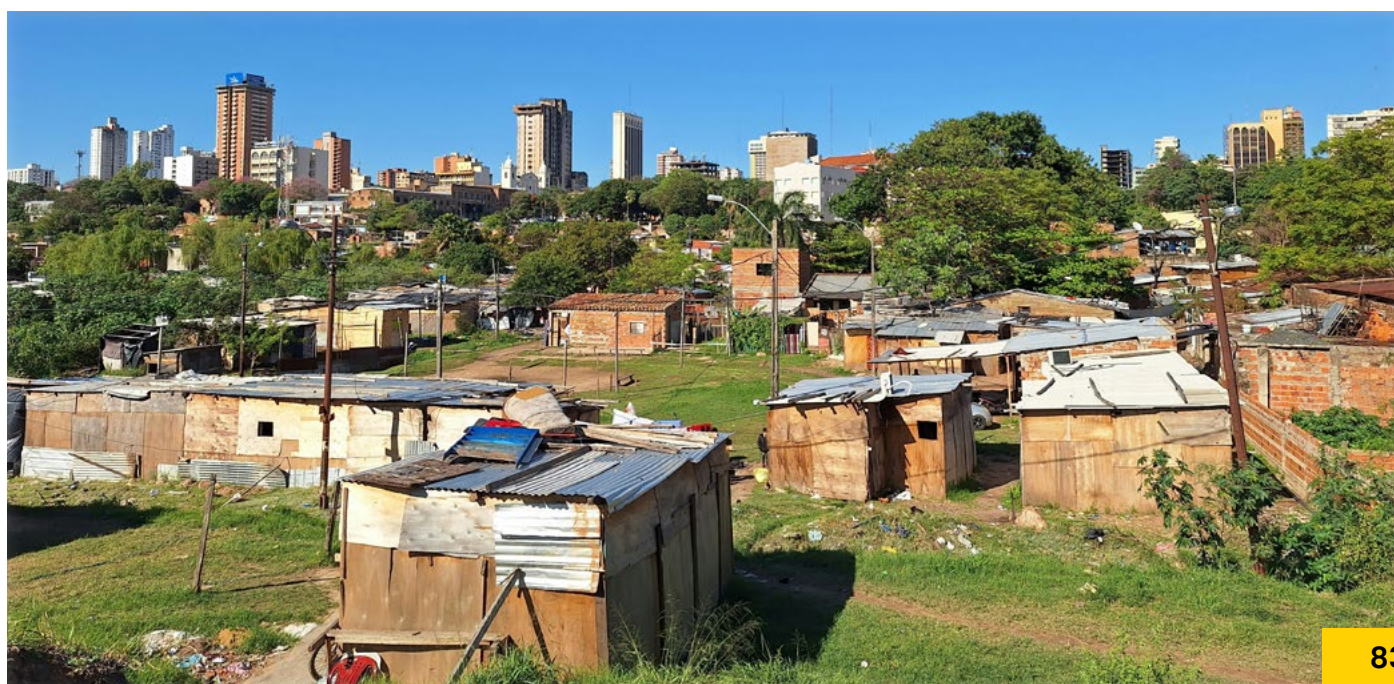
### Paraguayan People's Army (PPA)

Guerrilla Group in Eastern Paraguay According to media and government sources, this group protects drug crops and landing strips, carries out kidnappings, and collects "revolutionary taxes" from businesses and criminal organizations.



### Rotela Clan

Paraguayan Family-Based Organization Initially focused on small-scale drug trafficking in Asunción and Concepción, this group has expanded its power and territorial control, becoming one of the most influential criminal organizations in the country. It has permanent operations in Cordillera, Central, and Concepción, with intermittent activity in Pedro Juan Caballero. It controls part of the drug trade and prison system and is currently in conflict with PCC.





# Conclusions

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# 3. Conclusions

To address violence in Latin America, a multidimensional approach is necessary, incorporating both structural causes and the adaptation of institutional responses to control the expansion of criminal economies. **Strengthening international cooperation is also essential, as many of the criminal activities affecting the region are transnational in nature.**

Violence and crime in Latin America are complex and multifaceted phenomena that have evolved over decades, with deep implications at both local and global levels. This challenge involves a combination of

economic, social, political, cultural, and technological factors that have created an environment conducive to the development of extremely powerful and resilient criminal organizations. Despite numerous diagnoses, plans, and strategies developed by national governments and international organizations, the issue remains difficult to tackle, primarily due to the lack of an integrated approach and the ineffective implementation of security policies.

In this first edition of the “Latin America Security Yearbook,” ten key areas of focus are highlighted.



### 3.1.

## A complex and pervasive problem

**Violence and crime in Latin America are complex and pervasive issues, meaning they do not have clear or linear solutions, and interventions can sometimes lead to unforeseen consequences, even counteracting the intended goals.**

One of the characteristics of complex problems is that they cannot be solved with traditional approaches or simply by allocating more resources. These issues are deeply interconnected with other factors, reinforcing each other, creating a vicious cycle of violence, poverty, inequality, and institutional weakness. Additionally, crime has a systemic nature, where risks interact and amplify each other—as seen during the pandemic, which intensified certain types of criminal activities.

Moreover, **organized crime in the region has shown remarkable adaptability and resilience**, constantly evolving to exploit new economic and social opportunities and respond to government crackdowns. This adaptive and evolving nature makes the problem more complex, as each partial solution leads to new manifestations, such as the diversification of illicit activities, the internationalization of drug trafficking, or the expansion and displacement of criminal networks to other regions.

### 3.2.

## Diagnoses without execution or funding: a “toast to the sun”

There are numerous studies and analyses on security in Latin America, conducted by governments, international organizations, and security experts at both local and regional levels. However, the real problem is not a lack of understanding, but rather the **inability to turn these findings into effective action**. Security plans often lack clear execution strategies and the necessary funding for implementation, rendering them symbolic gestures rather than practical solutions. Latin American governments generally face a shortage of financial and human resources, as well as weak institutional capacity to effectively address the scale of the problem. In some cases, security policies are shaped by short-term political interests, leading to urgent measures rather than long-term sustainable solutions that tackle the root causes rather than just the symptoms. The lack of policy continuity further hinders progress.

### 3.3.

## Comprehensive measures: economic, social, and security approaches

Crime and violence in Latin America are not simply the result of insufficient police presence—they stem from deeply rooted social and economic factors such as the glorification of violence, extreme inequality, social exclusion, and the lack of employment and educational opportunities. To effectively address insecurity, **it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that goes beyond repressive or defensive measures, focusing on economic and social development in the most affected communities.**

The first pillar of a holistic strategy must be the promotion of legitimate economic opportunities. Sustainable economic growth requires adequate infrastructure to attract investment and generate jobs—including roads, transportation systems, energy, water and sanitation, internet, and digital connectivity. In some countries, local economies are poorly diversified, relying heavily on a single sector or industry, making them extremely vulnerable to economic crises or criminal exploitation. Economic diversification is key to building resilient local economies that offer a broader range of employment opportunities across different industries.

In addition to economic measures, any comprehensive approach to reducing crime must include a strong social component (education and healthcare being key) that addresses inequalities and provides communities with the tools they need to thrive. Social exclusion, lack of access to basic services and high school dropout rates contribute directly to the growth of organized crime, as they create an environment in which the state is absent and organized crime fills the void by providing employment and protection.



### 3.4. Differentiated policies based on criminal group typologies

One of the main mistakes in Latin American security strategies—which still persists in many contexts—is the **application of general policies to combat all types of crime and delinquency, without considering the structural, operational, and geographical differences among various criminal organizations.** Organized crime is not homogeneous, and its composition, modus operandi, objectives, and tactics vary significantly depending on the type of organization, the environment in which it operates, and its international connections.

For this reason, security policies must be differentiated and adapted to the nature of each group. Combating Central American gangs (maras) requires different strategies than tackling Mexican drug cartels, Brazilian urban militias, or insurgent and paramilitary groups in Colombia and Venezuela. Each of these criminal organizations operates under distinct dynamics, requiring specific, targeted strategies to effectively address them.

### 3.5. The need to develop a national security culture and strengthen intelligence and police institutions in Latin America

One of the main challenges in some Latin American countries is institutional fragility and the lack of a security culture that enables an efficient and sustained response to the threat of organized crime. This structural weakness is evident not only in high crime levels but also in the **difficulty states face in anticipating, preventing, and dismantling criminal networks, many of which operate both locally and transnationally.** National security structures often lack the capacity to effectively address regional and local criminal dynamics, which have their own historical, cultural, and geographical complexities. Similarly, at the international level, strong regional and global cooperation is essential.

Intelligence plays a critical role, not only in gathering information but also in processing, analyzing, and transforming that data into operational insights that can guide strategic and tactical decisions in the fight against criminal networks.

This requires a fundamental shift in how governments collect, analyze, and use data, as well as the integration of advanced technological tools and quantitative and qualitative methodologies that allow proactive responses to criminal dynamics rather than merely reacting to events. **The goal is to transition from reactive models to more preventive and anticipatory approaches.**

Since organized crime in Latin America operates increasingly at a transnational level, **regional and international cooperation is critical.** Criminal groups, including drug cartels, human trafficking organizations, and smuggling networks, do not respect borders—meaning individual efforts by each country will be insufficient without coordinated regional and global collaboration. However, for cooperation to be effective, countries must first build strong internal structures to manage and share valuable intelligence efficiently.

### 3.6. Police, Justice, and Prisons: a weakened chain

The public security system in Latin America relies on the effective interaction of **three key pillars: the police force, the judicial system, and the prison system**. However, in many parts of the region, one or more of these pillars is severely weakened, creating an unsustainable situation in which organized crime operates with relative impunity.

- ▲ **Police:** In many countries, law enforcement agencies are poorly equipped and undertrained. Additionally, in some areas, the police lack control over territories due to the dominant presence of criminal organizations.
- ▲ **Justice:** Latin American judicial systems are often slow and inefficient, allowing criminals to evade prosecution or receive minimal sentences. Impunity remains endemic, and judges and prosecutors are frequently pressured or intimidated by criminal groups, preventing effective law enforcement.
- ▲ **Prisons:** Rather than rehabilitation centers, Latin American prisons have been co-opted by criminal groups, who operate from within and continue running drug trafficking, extortion, and kidnapping networks. Overcrowding and poor living conditions inside prisons worsen the problem, fostering an environment ripe for radicalization and recruitment into criminal organizations.

### 3.7. Success stories: local and regional experiences

The history of the fight against crime and violence in Latin America has been marked by repeated attempts to apply general solutions or “universal formulas” to a problem that is, by its very nature, deeply contextual and diverse. Over the past decades, one clear lesson has emerged: **the most effective and sustainable solutions for combating organized crime and violence in the region do not always come from large national plans or global approaches, but rather from local and regional initiatives tailored to the specific characteristics of each community.**

When analyzing successful cases of violence reduction in cities and regions across Latin America, a clear pattern emerges. The strategies that have achieved lasting results are those that **have taken local dynamics into account, engaged communities, used a multidimensional approach, and prioritized both prevention and enforcement**. These experiences provide valuable lessons that can be adapted and applied to other cities and regions, as long as they are customized to local particularities.



### 3.8.

## Combating predatory crime: the everyday face of the criminal ecosystem

One of the most common strategic mistakes in the fight against crime has been focusing almost exclusively on dismantling major drug cartels, capturing their leaders, or combating transnational illicit trafficking, while neglecting the predatory crimes that directly impact citizens' daily lives. Predatory crimes are those aimed at the wrongful appropriation of victims' property through coercion or violence. Organized crime generates an entire criminal ecosystem around activities such as theft, robbery, extortion, kidnapping, and small-scale drug dealing.

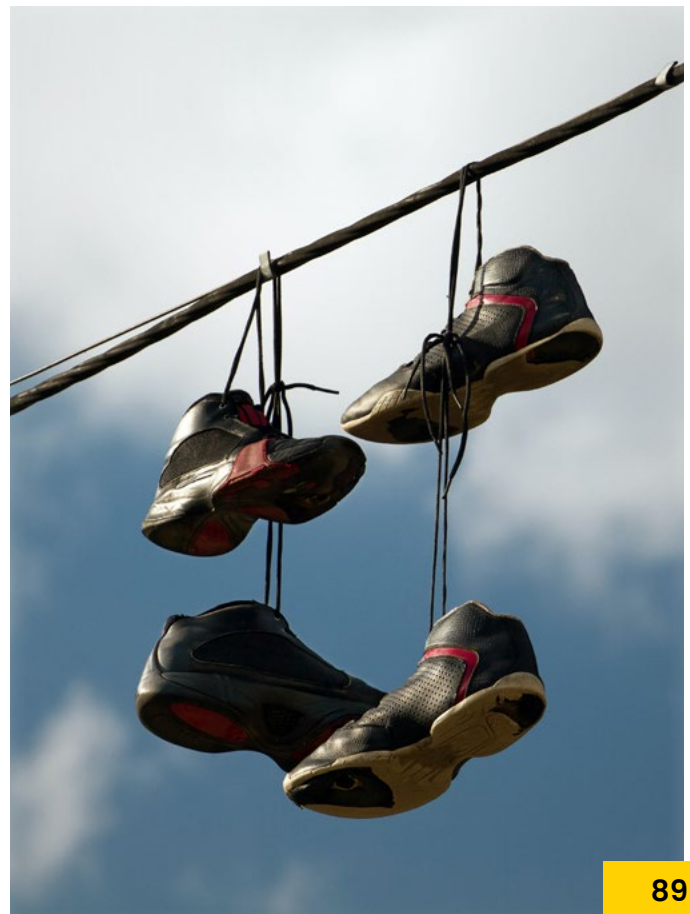
While the fight against cartels and transnational criminal networks is crucial, **organized crime also fuels smaller yet equally destructive offenses, including robberies, thefts, kidnappings, and extortion, which are often underestimated by authorities.**

Predatory crime is a daily manifestation of the power of criminal organizations, which extend their influence beyond drug trafficking, infiltrating local economies and the everyday lives of citizens. These crimes include:

- ▶ **Extortion:** Known as “cobro de piso” in Mexico or the “gota a gota” system in Colombia, extortion is a widespread practice where business owners, entrepreneurs, and residents are forced to pay criminal groups to operate safely or ensure personal security. **This practice not only destroys local economies but also creates an atmosphere of fear within communities.**
- ▶ **Kidnappings:** Although kidnappings for ransom have declined in some countries, they remain a serious issue in various parts of the region. This crime not only generates significant revenue for criminal organizations but also **intensifies insecurity, especially in rural and peripheral areas** where state presence is minimal.
- ▶ **Robbery and Theft:** Often carried out by small criminal cells linked to larger organizations, robbery and theft represent territorial control exercised by criminal groups. **The increase in these crimes is directly tied to the presence of highly structured criminal networks, which finance their operations through these widespread yet seemingly minor offenses.**

▶ **Small-Scale Drug Trafficking:** Also known as microtrafficking, this crime is a direct consequence of large-scale drug trafficking networks, which establish local drug markets in both urban and rural areas. While less visible than large transnational shipments, microtrafficking **has a devastating impact on communities**, especially on young people, who become both consumers and recruits within these networks.

Combating predatory crime is just as critical as dismantling large criminal networks, as it represents the daily face of organized crime and is the primary source of victimization for most citizens. Security policies cannot be limited to targeting major cartels or transnational networks—they must also address these daily crimes that directly affect the quality of life for millions.



### 3.9. Impact in Europe: lessons from Latin America

Latin America's experience in combating crime and violence has provided valuable lessons that are now highly relevant to Europe, where organized crime is rapidly expanding.

In recent years, **Europe has seen a significant rise in the influence of transnational criminal organizations, many of which have direct or indirect ties to Latin American cartels and other illicit structures.** Drug trafficking networks, in particular, have extended their reach from Latin America to key European ports such as Rotterdam, Hamburg, and Barcelona. Beyond the importation of illicit substances, these criminal organizations have also introduced violent methods and tactics widely used in Latin America, such as contract killings (sicariato), extortion schemes, and innovative robbery techniques like *novo cangaço*, which gained popularity in Brazil.

The human and social cost of these criminal phenomena in Latin America has been immense, and Europe must pay close attention to these dynamics to prevent organized crime from becoming an even more destabilizing force across the continent.



### 3.10. Private security in Latin America

**Private security has grown significantly in Latin America over the past few decades, largely as a response to the state's difficulties in effectively ensuring public security.** The region has faced high levels of crime and violence, leading individuals and businesses to rely on private security firms to fill the gaps left by public forces.

According to a report from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the number of private security agents in Latin America far exceeds the number of police officers in many countries. Estimates suggest there are approximately 4 million private security guards in the region, compared to 2.4 million police officers.

While private security offers personalized protection and rapid response, its uncontrolled growth has also raised significant risks and challenges that need to be addressed. In many Latin American countries, regulation of the private security sector is weak or nonexistent, allowing companies to operate without meeting minimum standards for training, supervision, or accreditation. According to UN data, up to 50% of private security companies in some Latin American countries operate without a license, making them informal players within the security landscape.

The future of private security in Latin America and beyond will largely depend on governments' ability to regulate and professionalize the sector, ensuring that it complements rather than replaces public security forces.

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