

# COSTA RICA

## Analysis of intentional homicide January-March 2023



### Highlights

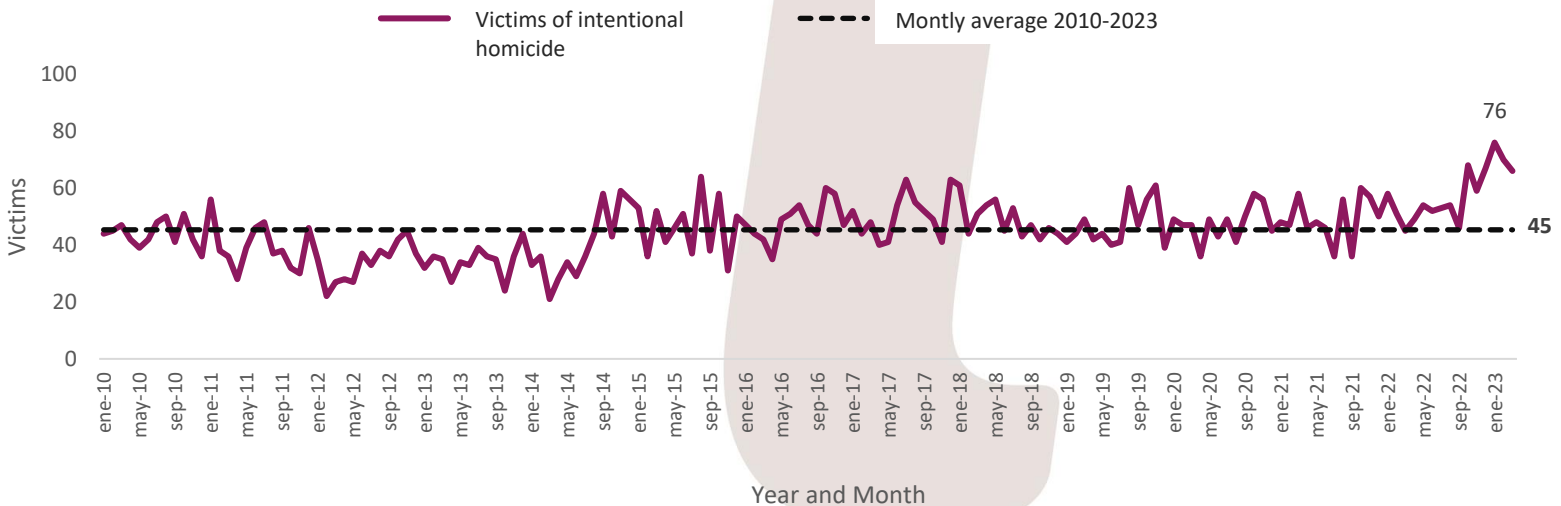
- From January to March 2023, there were 212 intentional homicides, that is 58 more victims compared to the same period in 2022, according to OIJ data.
- Of the total number of victims, 183 were male (39 more compared to the same period in 2022) and 29 were female (19 more compared to the same period in 2022).
- On average, 71 intentional homicides are registered per month, that is 20 more victims per month compared to the previous year.
- As for the profiles of victims in the first quarter, one in two victims were young males ages 15 to 34, and eight in 10 victims were Costa Rican nationals.
- In terms of the method or weapon, eight in 10 intentional homicides involved the use of a firearm, one in 10 a sharp weapon and one in 10 another method.
- As for motive, some 60 per cent involved settling a score or a reprisal, 14 per cent an argument or quarrel, eight per cent were done to commit another crime, five per cent for other motives and 13 per cent was unknown.
- As for a motive linked to drug-trafficking or organized crime, this accounted for six out of every 10 victims in Q1 2023.
- San José, which is the capital of Costa Rica (55 victims), Limon (51 victims), Puntarenas (32 victims) and Alajuela (24 victims) are the provinces with the highest number of victims.
- The cantons of San Jose, Limon, Puntarenas, Alajuela, Santa Cruz, Liberia, Matina, Heredia and Guacimo accounted for 52 per cent of the victims

### Evidence

#### I. Introduction

From January to March 2023, a total of 212 intentional homicides were registered, 58 more victims (38% more) compared to the same period in 2022. By month of occurrence, 76 victims were recorded in January, 70 in February and 66 in March. The January figure is a record in Costa Rica, as it represents the greatest number of victims in a single month since records of this crime started being kept in this country, according to data from the Judicial Investigation Department (OIJ Spanish acronym).

Number of victims of intentional homicide by year and month, Jan 2010 – Mar 2023



Source: Judicial Investigation Department, January 2010–March 2023.

A comparison of first quarter figures from 2010 to 2023 shows a noticeable rise starting in 2020 through 2023 when the first quarter victim rate was 71 intentional homicides per month (20 more victims per month compared to the same period in 2022).

Number of victims of intentional homicide in the first quarter by year of occurrence and monthly average, 2010–2023

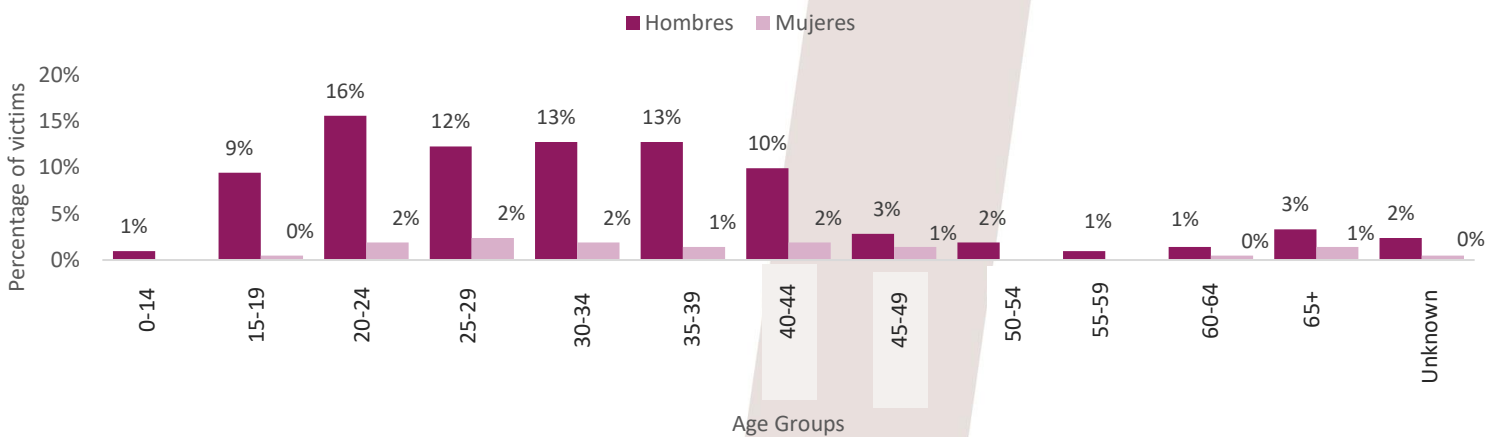


Source: Judicial Investigation Department, first quarter in the period 2010–2023.

## II. Victim profiles

When the number of intentional homicides in the first quarter of 2023 is disaggregated by sex, it appears that 86 per cent (183 victims) were male and 14 per cent (29 victims) were female. By age, victims from age three to 90 years old were recorded. By sex and age, one in two were young males ages 15 to 34 years old.

Percentage distribution of intentional homicide victims by sex and age, January–March 2023



Source: Judicial Investigation Department, first quarter 2023.

As for nationality, 83 per cent (176 victims) were Costa Rican, 13 per cent (28 victims) were Nicaraguan and the remaining four per cent corresponded to 2 Colombian victims, 1 Honduran victim, 1 Panamanian victim and 4 victims of unknown nationality, according to the Judicial Investigation Department (OIJ).

### III. Describing the facts

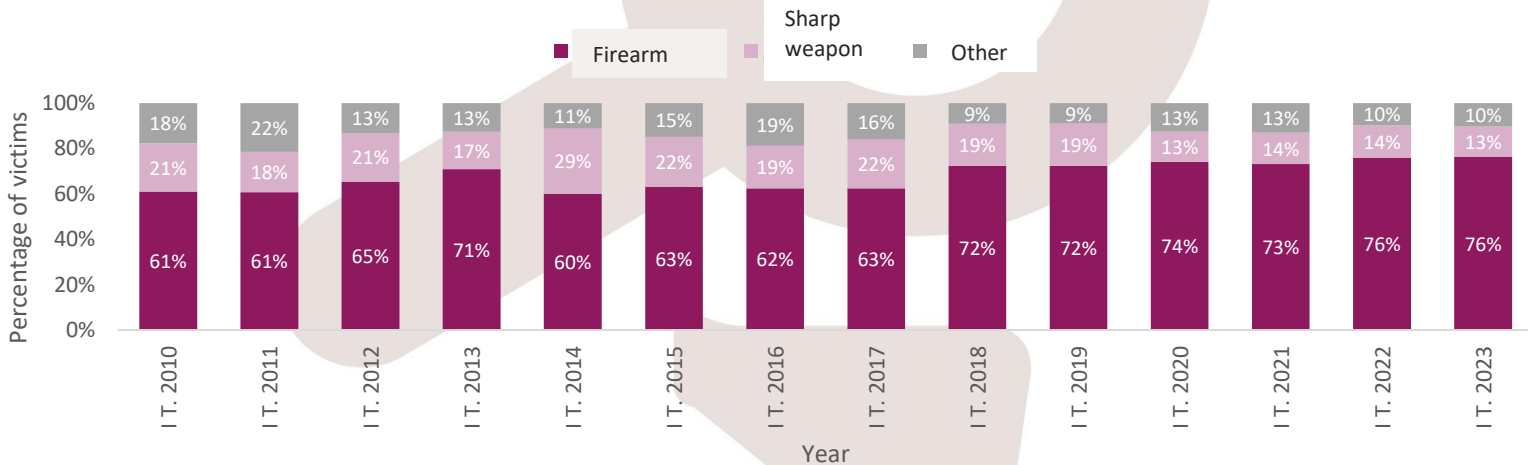
- **Method or weapon:**

Comparing figures from Q1 2010–2023, it appears that in 2013, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 over 70 per cent of intentional homicides involved the use of a firearm, and in the last two years this proportion rose to 76 per cent of cases.

On the other hand, during those years (2013 and 2018–2023) there is a noticeable decline in the use of sharp weapons and a decline in the use of other methods in the period 2018–2023.

Specifically, during Q1 2023, out of the total number of registered intentional homicides, 76.4 per cent involved a firearm, 13.2 per cent a sharp weapon, and 10.4 per cent other methods.

Percentage distribution of intentional homicide victims during the first quarter, by method, 2010–2023



Source: Judicial Investigation Department, first quarter in the period 2010–2023.

- **Motive:**

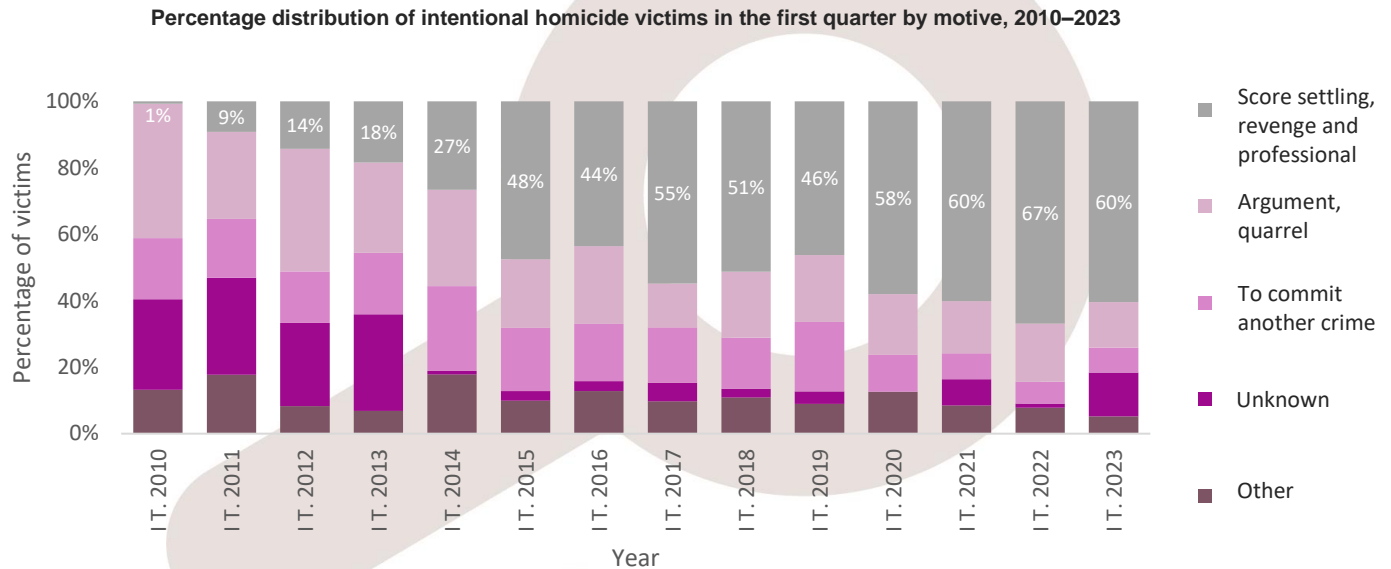
During Q1 2023, in 60 per cent of all registered intentional homicides the motive was score settling or revenge, in 14 per cent argument or quarrel, eight per cent to commit another crime, five per cent for other motives and in 13 per cent of cases, no motive was established.

Comparing the figures from Q1 2010 to 2023, a significant rise can be seen in the number of victims linked to organized crime. This is the category that comprises victims under the "Score settling or revenge" motive, which are cases where circumstances related to drugs or organized criminal groups may be involved, and the "Professional" category, which are cases where the perpetrator is paid to take the victim's life.

The proportion in the first quarter of 2023 equals that of 2021. In both years, in 60 per cent of the intentional homicides, the motive was linked to organized crime. In the first quarter in the period 2010–2023, the year 2022 is the high point with 67 per cent of the victims.

Moreover, the proportion of cases related to "Argument/ quarrel" had decreased. In the period 2010–2013, it had been the most recurring motive and starting in 2014, the proportion practically evens out with the category "Score settling, reprisal" or "Professional" and as of 2015, it starts to decline and then drops to 14 per cent in Q1 2023.

As in the case of the previous category, the proportion of intentional homicide “To commit another crime” had decreased during period 2010–2023. Specifically, in recent years (2019–2022), there is a noticeable reduction, down to six per cent in the first quarter of 2022.



Source: Judicial Investigation Department, first quarter in the period 2010–2023.

- **Place of occurrence:**

**By province:**

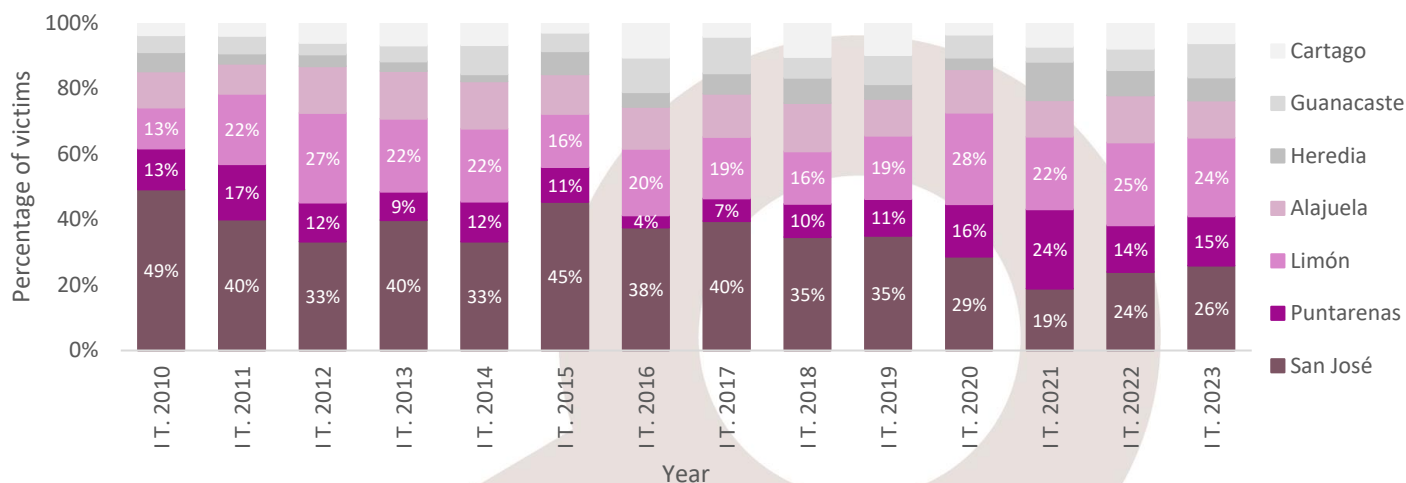
Comparing first quarter data in the period 2010–2023 by province, it appears that San Jose, registers the highest proportion of occurrence from 2010 to 2019. As of 2020, the province of Limon (28%) practically matches the proportion of intentional homicide in San Jose (29%).

During the first quarter of 2021, Puntarenas became the province with the highest occurrence, with a historical rate of 24 per cent of all intentional homicides registered in the country.

In 2022 and 2023, San Jose and Limon regain first place with a 25 per cent average occurrence. That means, one in two intentional homicides in Costa Rica occurred in these two provinces.

The remaining provinces (Alajuela, Heredia, Cartago y Guanacaste) have a lower average occurrence at 15 per cent. Historically, the province with the lowest occurrence is Cartago at six per cent of all victims of intentional homicide.

Percentage distribution of intentional homicide victims during the first quarter, by province of occurrence, 2010–2023



Source: Judicial Investigation Department, first quarter in the period 2010–2023.

### By canton:

Regarding canton of occurrence in Q1 2023, San Jose (23 victims), Limon (22 victims), Puntarenas (17 victims), Alajuela (9 victims), Santa Cruz (9 victims), Liberia (8 victims), Matina (8 victims), Heredia (7 victims) and Guacimo (7 victims) account for some 52 per cent of the total number of victims.

These are densely populated cantons, provincial capitals, coastal and border areas, with the latter facing conditions of deprivation and inequality:

- San Jose, Limon, Puntarenas, Alajuela and Heredia are eponymous province capitals, while the canton of Liberia is the capital of Guanacaste province.

Santa Cruz is canton number three in the province of Guanacaste, located in the far northeast of the country, while Matina and Guacimo are cantons number five and six in the province of Limon, which borders on the north with Nicaragua and in the northeast with the Caribbean.

- San Jose is the most populated canton in the country with a population of 354,025, followed by Alajuela with a 325,567 population. The population density in the remaining canton capitals is high: Heredia (147,353 population), Puntarenas (145,711 population), Limon (100,401 population) and Liberia (80,874 population).

Santa Cruz, Matina and Guacimo have a population of 72,412, 47,894 and 57,952 respectively.

Heredia (0.816) has a very high-level human development as per the HDI 2020<sup>1</sup>, while HDI levels in Alajuela (0.784), San Jose (0.758) and Liberia (0.714) are high. For their part, in the cantons of Puntarenas (0.692), Limon (0.688), Guacimo (0.676) and Matina (0.579) HDI level is medium.

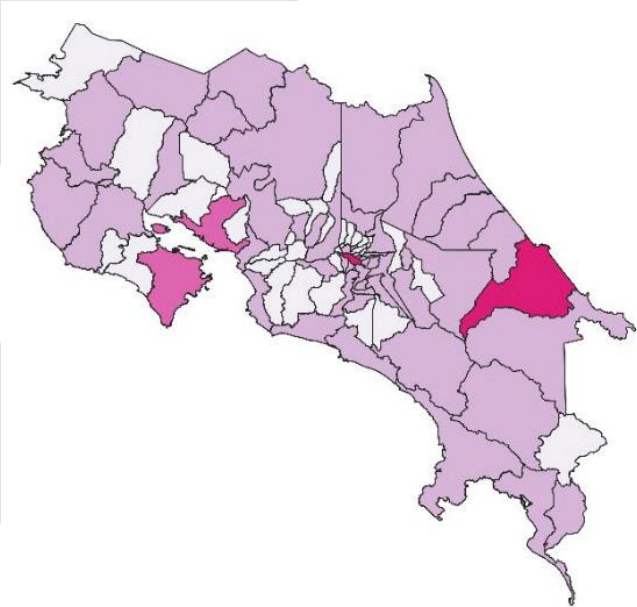
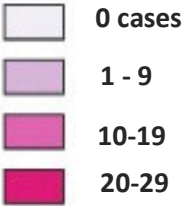
- Heredia (0.040) and Alajuela (0.044) have low levels of multidimensional poverty, according to the MPI 2020<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, in the cantons of San Jose (0.062), Santa Cruz (0.063), Liberia (0.070), Guacimo (0.079), Puntarenas (0.083) and Limon (0.098) the level is medium. Only Matina exhibits a high multidimensional poverty level (0.102)

<sup>1</sup> The canton Human Development Index (HDI 2020) measures the average achievements of a specific geographic area in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy at birth), being knowledgeable (measured by expected years of schooling and average years of schooling), and a decent standard of living (measured by the Material Welfare Index based on average household income per capita).

<sup>2</sup> The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI 2020) identifies multiple individual deprivations in education, housing and access to internet, health and social protection.

Number of intentional homicide victims in Costa Rica by canton of occurrence, January–March 2023

Total of homicides 2023



Source: Violence Observatory based on data provided by the Judicial Investigation Department, Q1 2023.

**Metadata:** This report was prepared with data provided by the Vice Ministry of Peace and Justice's Violence Observatory based on databases of the Judicial Investigation Department (OIJ) Q1 2023.