

— Strategic framework for **security** and **justice** for development

Strategic framework for security and justice for development

Editor:

CAF – development bank of Latin America and the Caribbean

This document has been published under the leadership of Executive President Sergio Díaz-Granados.

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Strategic Communication Directorate, CAF

Graphic design:

Estudio Bilder / Buenos Aires

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Crime, violence, and insecurity are major constraints on sustainable and inclusive development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Addressing these issues requires a multidimensional and multi-level approach, calling for active and coordinated public policies across various areas.

Given the recent escalation of transnational organized crime (TOC) across the region, it has been identified as the main threat to democracy. In addition to generating high levels of violence and insecurity, it corrodes state institutions, leads to the loss of territorial control in both rural and urban areas, and contributes to the weakening of the rule of law—ultimately generating social and political instability.

Crime, in all its forms, hinders the mission of CAF – the development bank of Latin America and the Caribbean – to accelerate sustainable and inclusive growth in its member countries. This strategic framework outlines the foundational concepts that should guide CAF's interventions on security as it relates to regional development. In doing so, it aligns with international treaties ratified by its member countries, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and the efforts of other multilateral organizations combatting crime and violence.

The multidimensional approach of this framework recognizes the complex nature of security, which calls for broad and coordinated policies across multiple sectors and levels. It goes beyond the traditional security ecosystem and places citizens at the center of these efforts. It seeks to drive public policies and programs in prevention, human development, urban development, and institutional strengthening to consolidate the rule of law. Its multi-level approach promotes collaboration among the state, civil society, and the private sector to ensure a comprehensive response. It also calls for transnational cooperation.

This document outlines a network-based approach that connects diverse actors to improve understanding of risk dynamics and to build a robust response system. In line with CAF's Institutional Strategy (2022–2026)—the guiding framework for the bank's actions—and drawing from the experience gained by the bank, other international cooperation organizations, and countries across the region, security is positioned as a cross-cutting initiative for institutional strengthening.

— Foreword

Latin America and the Caribbean is currently experiencing an unprecedented surge in insecurity. High levels of crime and the deterioration of public safety are not only a daily threat—like a perverse lottery in which no one knows what might happen when they step outside—but also a structural trap that hinders development. We face a persistent and dangerous equation shaped by low growth rates, inequality, a lack of institutional trust, and the expansion of criminal markets.

Our region must successfully navigate a triple transition—green, digital, and energy—with a strong emphasis on human development. To return to a path of growth and avoid falling behind, we must tackle a number of structural challenges—the proverbial half-empty glass—that continue to weigh us down.

These challenges include five key elements: the stagnation of the middle class and rising poverty, driven by low economic growth and limited public and private investment; our high vulnerability to climate change; the challenges of the energy transition; the erosion of democratic institutions; and the deterioration of public safety.

Without security, there can be no development—and without development, there can be no security. Crime, violence, and the perception of insecurity undermine sustainable and inclusive development in Latin America and the Caribbean. We must confront organized crime through a comprehensive strategy that not only suppresses criminal activity but also advances prevention and social inclusion as key levers for closing opportunity gaps and driving progress.

The link between security and development is not a new topic for CAF – development bank of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Our 2014 *Report on Economic Development (RED)* focused on this issue. Even before the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), CAF was already emphasizing the importance of security for development.

Today, in alignment with SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions, this agenda is more urgent than ever.

Everyday life in the region increasingly feels defined by the imminent risk of becoming the next victim. Crime threatens citizen safety and property rights, while also shaping private investment decisions. It affects human capital accumulation and labor market participation—two key drivers of productivity and income.

Promoting development in lockstep with security means saving lives. It is both an ethical imperative and a public mandate.

Latin America and the Caribbean is considered the most violent region in the world. Despite accounting for just 9% of the global population, the region is responsible for nearly one-third of all homicides committed worldwide. Moreover, 43 of the 50 most dangerous cities and 17 of the 20 countries with the highest homicide rates are in the region. Sexual violence is also alarmingly high: 1 in 3 women in LAC has experienced—or will experience—sexual violence in her lifetime.

In this context—exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic—many of the most vulnerable citizens see criminal economies as a way out of their current situation. Of the 15 largest criminal markets in the world, 12 are led by actors in this region. Meanwhile, more than 30 million young people in LAC are NEETs—neither in employment, nor in education or training—and are a prime target for recruitment by criminal networks.

At CAF, we are committed to supporting sustainable development and regional integration by promoting strong, democratic governance and the rule of law.

We work shoulder to shoulder with our partner countries, their national and local governments, public authorities, civil society, and the private sector. We are bringing to the table our knowledge, expertise, and robust financial capacity.

CAF's work on security is guided by three core principles. First, it is multidimensional, recognizing the complex and multifaceted nature of insecurity and crime. Addressing this challenge requires broad, coordinated policies across sectors that go beyond the traditional security ecosystem, placing citizens, their realities, and their rights at the center.

Second, our approach is multilevel, aiming to foster collaboration across different levels of government—from the local to the national and transnational. Third, we emphasize networked action, which is essential for coordinated efforts among the state, civil society, the private sector, and academia. This type of collaboration is vital for building economic, political, social, and institutional resilience to insecurity.

Two cross-cutting pillars support this strategy: information and evidence, which enable data generation, program evaluation, and the promotion of evidence-based policymaking; and good governance, centered on coordination, accountability, citizen participation, and participatory governance.

The strategy presented in this document reflects growing concern in the region—and a clear commitment from CAF to help rise to this challenge through knowledge, long-term initiatives, and timely financing. Addressing a complex and evolving issue like insecurity requires ambitious, flexible, and innovative responses.

That is our commitment—as the development bank of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Sergio Díaz-Granados

Executive President, CAF — development bank of Latin America and the Caribbean

— Acknowledgments

This document was prepared by the Security, Justice, and Governance for Development Unit (OPE/USJGD). It was written by Lea Giménez, Senior Advisor to the Executive Presidency (OPE); Carlos Charme, Principal Executive (USJGD); Lucía Dammert, Senior Security and Justice Consultant (USJGD); Jorge Srur, Southern Regional Manager; and Juan Carlos Pinzón, Senior Security Consultant (OPE).

The content was enriched through multiple rounds of discussion and input from colleagues across various areas of the bank. We are especially grateful for the time and contributions of: Lina Mondragón (former Advisor to the OPE), Pablo Terrazas (Chief of Staff to the Executive Presidency), Alejandra Claros (Corporate Secretary), Samya Paiva (Corporate Risk Manager), Jorge Silva (Legal Advisor), Iván Haas (Senior Director, Office of the Auditor General), Ángel Cárdenas (Manager of Urban Development, Water, and Creative Economies), Ana María Baiardi (Manager of Gender, Inclusion, and Diversity), Pablo Bartol (Manager of Social and Human Development), Julián Suarez (Representative in Chile), Stacy Richards-Kennedy (Caribbean Regional Manager and Representative in Barbados), Alejandra Botero (Manager of Planning and Development Impact), Verónica Frisancho (Manager of Knowledge), Jaime Holguín (Advisor to the Executive Presidency), Mónica Obando (Director of Human Capital), Emil Rodríguez (Director of Habitat and Sustainable Mobility), Daniel Ortega (Director of Development Contributions and Impact Measurement), and Jaime Fajardo (Principal Executive, Execution Office).

We also express our appreciation for the guidance and support of the Vice Presidents: Christian Asinelli (Corporate Vice President for Strategic Programming), Gianpiero Leoncini (Executive Vice President), Gabriel Felpeto (Vice President of Finance), and Antonio Silveira (Vice President of the Private Sector).

Finally, we extend special thanks to the external reviewers whose insights and analysis significantly enriched this work: Gaston Schulmeister, Director of the Department against Transnational Organized Crime at the OAS (DTCO); Rodrigo Ubilla, former Deputy Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Chile and professor at Universidad San Sebastián; Jairo García Guerrero, Secretary of Security and Justice of Cali – Mayor's Office of Cali, Colombia; and Juan Londoño (Senior Executive for Strategic Programming at CAF).

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— Abbreviations and acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ENVIPE	National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Safety (Mexico)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIAOC	Global Initiative Against Organized Crime
IACHR	Inter American Commission on Human Rights
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IT	International Treaties
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
NUA	New Urban Agenda
OAS	Organization of American States
PDL	Person Deprived of Liberty
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PPU	Pacifying Police Units (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SFSJD	Strategic Framework for Security and Justice for Development
TOC	Transnational Organized Crime
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WB	World Bank
WVS	World Values Survey

Executive summary —

Crime, violence, and the perception of insecurity pose significant barriers to sustainable and inclusive development in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Addressing these issues, as with broader development goals, faces obstacles such as corruption, exclusion, and institutional weaknesses. These challenges require multidimensional, multisectoral, and cross-cutting solutions involving diverse sectors and actors.

This Strategic Framework for Security and Justice for Development (SFSJD) stems from the cross-cutting institutional strengthening initiative adopted by CAF – development bank of Latin America, laid out in its institutional strategy. The initiative encompasses the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, adopting a systemic and sustained long-term vision. Its implementation also involves the joint participation of civil society and markets, with a focus on institutional development as a core pillar of the rule of law. Democratic governance depends on a solid rule of law, grounded in legitimate institutions that operate effectively and equitably, safeguarding citizens' rights and freedoms so they can live in peace.

Security, broadly understood as the process of establishing, strengthening, and protecting democratic civil order by eliminating threats of violence to the population and enabling safe and peaceful coexistence (UNDP, 2013), is central to this strategic proposal. This definition integrates the concept of multidimensional security, established by the Declaration on Security in the Americas (OAS, 2003), which encompasses traditional threats (armed conflict, terrorism), public security (crime, violence), economic and social security (poverty, inequality), environmental security (natural disasters, environmental degradation), and political security (democratic stability, human rights). Together, these

dimensions center state policy efforts on citizens and their right to reside in peaceful environments.

In this context, “strengthening” underscores the necessity of building and consolidating effective and trustworthy institutions. This means that citizen security relies on preventing crime and violence, establishing competent security institutions, and providing accessible and efficient justice systems. The reference to a “democratic civil order” emphasizes a commitment to the rule of law, under which rules and laws are applied fairly, and all citizens are equal before the law. Moreover, the concept of multidimensional security highlights a comprehensive approach, offering a holistic vision of security and recognizing the interdependence between threats and the responses required from states.

In LAC, negative trends such as persistently high levels of violence, crime, insecurity, and low public confidence in state effectiveness and its institutions interact and reinforce each other. This motivated CAF to propose this strategic framework as part of its commitment to institutional strengthening.

For years, LAC has been considered the most violent region globally, a designation it has retained over time. Fifty percent of Latin Americans and Caribbean residents feel unsafe, compared to a global average of 20% (WVS, 2017–2022). Currently, nine of the 10 most violent cities worldwide (CCJPP, 2024) and 17 of the 20 countries with the highest homicide rates are in LAC (UNDP, 2019). Statistics on sexual violence are alarming: one in three women in the region has experienced or will experience sexual violence in her lifetime—a figure significantly higher among girls aged 10–14 and adolescent women aged 14–19 (WHO, 2021).

In parallel, government effectiveness¹ in the region has historically been low and declined in three out of four countries between 2010 and 2022 (World Bank, 2023). According to the Latinobarómetro survey (2020), 80% of Latin Americans perceive the justice system in their countries as unfair or very unfair, while 50% distrust the police (Gallup, 2023)—the lowest level of police trust compared to other regions worldwide. Furthermore, half of citizens choose not to report minor crimes, reflecting deep-seated distrust in the effectiveness of justice systems and, consequently, in the rule of law (Latinobarómetro, 2020).

The post-COVID-19 pandemic period has marked a turning point in security, as criminal activity has adapted and expanded in response to new vulnerabilities. This shift is evidenced by a fundamental change in the dynamics of crime, particularly the consolidation of transnational organized crime (TOC), with LAC currently leading in 12 out of 15 criminal markets (Global Organized Crime Index, 2023). Half of violent homicides are linked to TOC (UNODC, 2023)—meaning that out of the more than 410 murders occurring daily in the region, 205 are associated with TOC. Victims and perpetrators are predominantly young men (UNODC, 2023). Firearms are used in 67% of homicides, compared to 13% in Asia and 12% in Europe, underscoring severe regulatory weaknesses and inadequate control over arms markets (UNODC, 2023). Globally, homicides now exceed armed conflict as the leading cause of violent deaths, with LAC accounting for a significant share of these figures (UNODC, 2023).

Within this context, money laundering plays a crucial role in sustaining organized crime, enabling not only the financing of illicit activities but also the infiltration of legitimate sectors, thereby expanding criminal organizations' economic and social influence (UNODC, n.d.). In Latin America, the scale of illicit revenue generated by organized crime makes money laundering a major concern, with significant repercussions for the region's economies and societies (Corrales, 2024). As the world's leading producer of illicit drugs, the region experiences a constant influx of drug trafficking proceeds, which not only fuels violence but also creates an ongoing need to launder funds to legitimize criminal profits.

These activities destabilize economies by distorting key markets—particularly real estate and services—while also granting criminal organizations significant economic and social power, further weakening institutions and fueling corruption (Fernández, Bravo, and Zambrano, 2022).

Money laundering enables criminal groups to inject capital into productive sectors, distorting competition through artificially low prices that harm legitimate businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (Rodríguez, Bello Salgado, Martínez, and Fernández, 2021). Furthermore, the funds generated through money laundering finance other illicit activities and facilitate territorial control, intensifying violence and strengthening corruption networks that involve both public and private sector actors (Pierre and Cuenca, 2017). This cycle perpetuates institutional fragility and reinforces the dominance of organized crime in the region.

This phenomenon is amplified in the digital domain, where cybercrime has become an essential tool for money laundering, extortion, and fraud. Cybercrime in Latin America has notably increased in recent years, impacting public institutions and private companies alike. According to data from Kaspersky, in 2024, the region recorded an average of 3,277,414 cyberattacks per day, equivalent to roughly 2,274 attacks per minute (Dalence, 2024). These attacks have become increasingly sophisticated, incorporating advanced techniques such as artificial intelligence (AI) to generate highly convincing phishing messages, making them harder to detect. This trend has driven a sharp increase in ransomware and data hijacking incidents in countries like Mexico, affecting both individuals and organizations (Rodríguez, 2024).

In this scenario, cryptocurrencies have emerged as a means to facilitate anonymity and global transfers of illicit funds, posing unique challenges for states that must adapt to an increasingly sophisticated and globalized criminal landscape.

In response, development institutions have sounded the alarm over the interaction of these trends (UNDP, 2019; ECLAC, 2019; UNDP, 2022; IMF, 2023; OAS, 2024). In 2019, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

¹ The government effectiveness indicator captures perceptions of the quality of public services, the competence and independence of the civil service from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to those policies (Kaufmann et al. 2010).

warned of an “epidemic” of crime and insecurity that was hindering and reversing development in LAC. That same year, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) identified various emerging forms of violence as one of the eight key obstacles to inclusive development.

Subsequently, in its 2021 Regional Human Development Report, UNDP warned of the development trap of high inequality and low growth and development, dedicating its fourth chapter specifically to the links between violence, inequality, low productivity, and growth. In 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) highlighted the need to promote medium-term economic growth in LAC by strengthening social cohesion through enhanced social protection systems and combating insecurity resulting from social tensions and violence. In 2024, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) underscored the alarming rise of TOC in LAC and its severe impact on human rights throughout the region.

Low growth, inequality, diminished trust in institutions, and high levels of crime coupled with the pervasive influence of TOC constitute four intertwined development traps in the region, threatening the democratic social contract. In this scenario, exacerbated by the pandemic, citizens increasingly perceive criminal economies as an opportunity—a source of income otherwise inaccessible—and join the ranks of TOC groups in search of protection and justice that the state fails to provide. This trend strengthens TOC, further weakening the state through informal economies, state subjugation, or political financing with illicit funds.

This SFSJD proposes an approach based on three guiding principles:

Multidimensional: Recognizing the complex and multifaceted nature of insecurity and criminality, this principle emphasizes that addressing these challenges requires broad, well-coordinated policies across multiple sectors. It goes beyond the traditional security framework, placing citizens, their lived realities, and their rights at the core. This approach promotes public policies and programs focused on prevention, human development, urban development, and institutional strengthening, adopting a holistic security perspective to reinforce the rule of law.

Multi-level: This principle encourages collaboration among different government levels, from local to national and transnational.

Network-based collaboration: Enables systemic cooperation among the state, civil society, the private sector, and academia to strengthen economic, political, social, and institutional resilience against insecurity.

Similarly, the updated citizen security approach proposed in the Safer Cities Strategy forms part of CAF's expanded SFSJD and seeks to move beyond a strictly local view of urban security.

This approach is based on a detailed assessment of specific challenges—insecurity, crime, TOC, and emerging forms of crime such as cybercrime—while also recognizing the need for institutional mechanisms beyond traditional security institutions. In addition to police, investigative, judicial, and penitentiary systems, it incorporates **prevention, protection, rehabilitation, and victim support** systems.

The implementation of all stages of this approach is complemented by two cross-cutting elements. First, information and evidence, which support data generation, program evaluation, and evidence-based policymaking. Second, good governance, facilitated through methodological and technological tools that enhance coordination, accountability, citizen engagement, and participation.

LAC is grappling with a multi-systemic security crisis, characterized by high levels of crime, violence, and widespread insecurity. These challenges not only affect social well-being but also impose significant economic costs, weaken institutions, and undermine fundamental rights. The message is clear: for the region to advance pending structural reforms and achieve its development goals, it must take decisive action against pervasive violence and criminality. Without security, there can be no development.

Crime and violence in Latin America and the Caribbean—

— Regional context

Crime- and violence-related insecurity has long been a challenge in LAC. However, despite its historical presence, it has only begun receiving the attention it deserves in the past decade. Given security's fundamental and cross-cutting role in development, its absence—evidenced by persistently high levels of crime and violence—is now widely recognized as a major obstacle to accelerating regional progress.

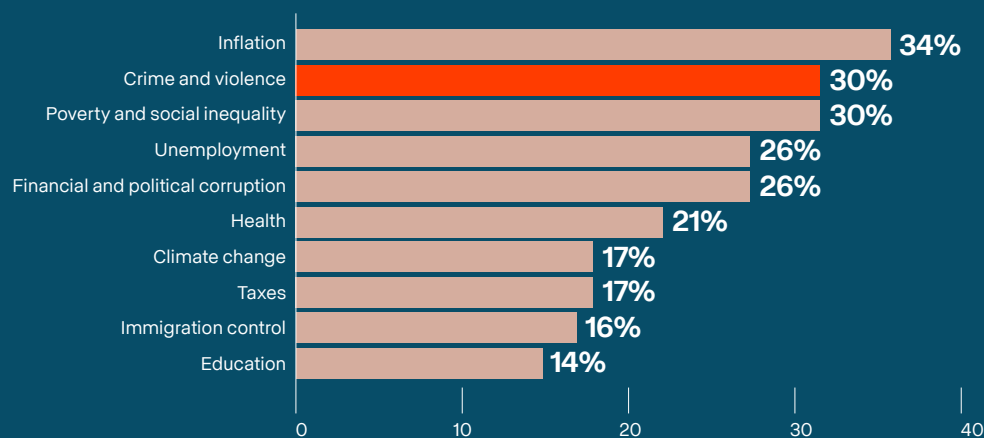
In 2019, the UNDP warned of an “epidemic” of crime and insecurity stalling and reversing development in LAC. That same year, an ECLAC report identified various emerging forms of violence among eight critical obstacles to inclusive development. In its 2021 Regional Human Development Report, UNDP highlighted the trap of high inequality and low development, dedicating the fourth chapter to the connections between violence, inequality, low productivity, and growth.

In 2023, the IMF emphasized that promoting medium-term economic growth in LAC requires strengthening social cohesion through robust social protection systems and tackling insecurity stemming from social tensions and violence. According to the IMF, these efforts are crucial not only to enhance population well-being but also to create a more stable environment conducive to sustainable development.

Insecurity in LAC is chronic and persistent. Globally, crime and violence are the main concerns for approximately one in three citizens (see Graph 1). In several LAC countries, this figure doubles (see Graph 2), and across nearly all countries in the region, insecurity concerns have remained high and constant for the last three decades.

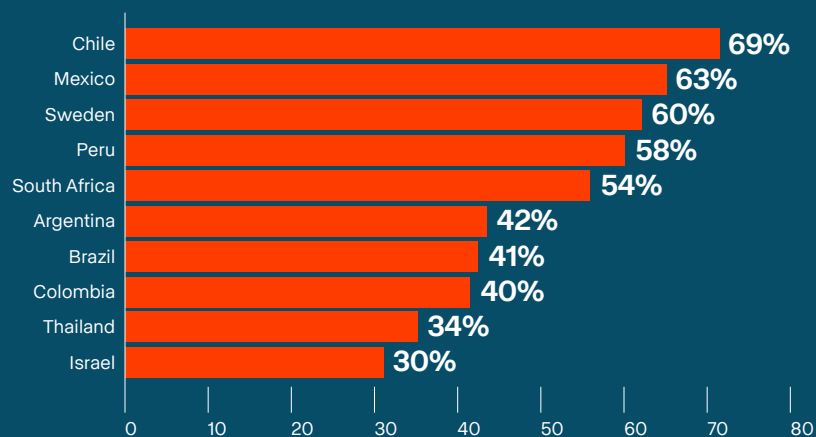
The latest report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2023) revealed an alarming dynamic: globally, homicides surpass armed conflicts in terms of violent deaths, with the LAC region accounting for a substantial portion of this outcome. Although home to less than 9% of the world's population, LAC accounts for one-third of global homicides. It is no coincidence that nine of the 10 most violent cities worldwide are located in Latin America (Table 1).

— Graph 1
**Main concerns among citizens
(World 2024)**



Source: Data from the public opinion survey “What worries the world,” Ipsos 2024.

— Graph 2
**Crime and violence as the main concern, 2024
(% of population)**



Source: Data from the public opinion survey “What worries the world,” Ipsos 2024.

— Table 1
The world's most dangerous cities are in LAC

Ranking	City	Country	Homicide Rate	Ranking	City	Country	Homicide Rate
1	Colima	Mexico	140	14	Memphis	United States	69.66
2	Ciudad Obregón	Mexico	117.83	15	Acapulco	Mexico	68.49
3	Port-au-Prince	Haiti	117.24	16	Durban	South Africa	65.01
4	Zamora	Mexico	105.13	17	Cape Town	South Africa	63.94
5	Manzanillo	Mexico	102.58	18	Urapan	Mexico	65.43
6	Tijuana	Mexico	91.76	19	Feira de Santa-na	Brazil	58.69
7	Zacatecas	Mexico	88.99	20	Irapuato	Mexico	56.39
8	Guayquil	Ecuador	88.82	21	Kingston	Jamaica	55.35
9	Mandela Bay	South Africa	78.33	22	New Orleans	United States	52.20
10	Juárez	Mexico	77.43	23	León	México	51.63
11	Port of Spain	Trinidad & To-bago	77.38	24	Buenaventura	Colombia	50.94
12	Celaya	Mexico	75.44	25	Sincelejo	Colombia	50.65
13	Cuernavaca	Mexico	74.32				

Source: Citizen Council for Public and Criminal Justice, 2024 Report.

In the post-COVID-19 period, the landscape of crime evolved dramatically. Today, in many countries across the region, a significant share of violence is closely tied to organized crime.² While LAC governments were focused on containing the pandemic and managing its effects with limited resources, organized crime groups seized the opportunity presented by rising demand for illegal drugs, surging prices in illicit markets (such as unregulated gold mining and the exploitation of other natural resources), and increased access to new technological tools—allowing them to strengthen their operations and adapt to global shifts.^{3,4}

Regional levels of GDP and poverty alone do not explain LAC's high rates of crime and violence. The average LAC country, in terms of GDP per capita, has a homicide rate 4.8 times higher than that of a comparable country in other regions. Similarly, when matched by poverty levels, the average LAC country exhibits a homicide rate 5.4 times higher than its counterparts elsewhere. However, three decades of sluggish economic growth and stagnation in social indicators such as poverty and inequality levels (see Box 1) have lowered the perceived costs of criminal behavior, making it an increasingly viable alternative for income generation.

2 Half of all homicides in LAC are linked to organized crime. (UNODC, 2023).

3 Coca cultivation in Latin America surged by 35% from 2020 to 2021. World Drug Report on Cocaine (UN, 2023).

4 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, the Global Organized Crime Index 2023, Global Organized Crime Index (Geneva: Global Initiative, 2023).

— Box 1

Growth, poverty, vulnerability, and inequality in LAC

LAC has recorded a third lost decade in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) growth, according to ECLAC estimates (ECLAC, 2023). Between 1980 and 2009, average annual growth stood at 2.7%, while from 2010 to 2024, this rate fell to 1.6%.

In 2022, poverty in LAC reached historically low levels, with approximately one in four residents living on incomes below the poverty line of USD 6.85 per day (purchasing power parity, PPP, 2017). However, from 2015 to 2022, the share of the population living in poverty or vulnerability⁵ remained virtually stagnant (World Bank, 2024; Fernández et al., 2023).

Regarding income inequality, Alvaredo et al. (2023) describes its evolution as following an inverted U-shaped pattern between 1970 and 2010 in most countries of the region. The top 10% of earners capture 55% of total income, compared to 36% in Europe. Wealth inequality is even more pronounced: the same top 10% holds 77% of household wealth, while the bottom 50% owns just 1%. LAC has the most unequal wealth distribution in the world.

5 Under this definition, individuals earning more than USD 6.85 but less than USD 14 per day (PPP, 2017) are considered vulnerable, as they face a high risk of falling into poverty in the event of an economic shock.

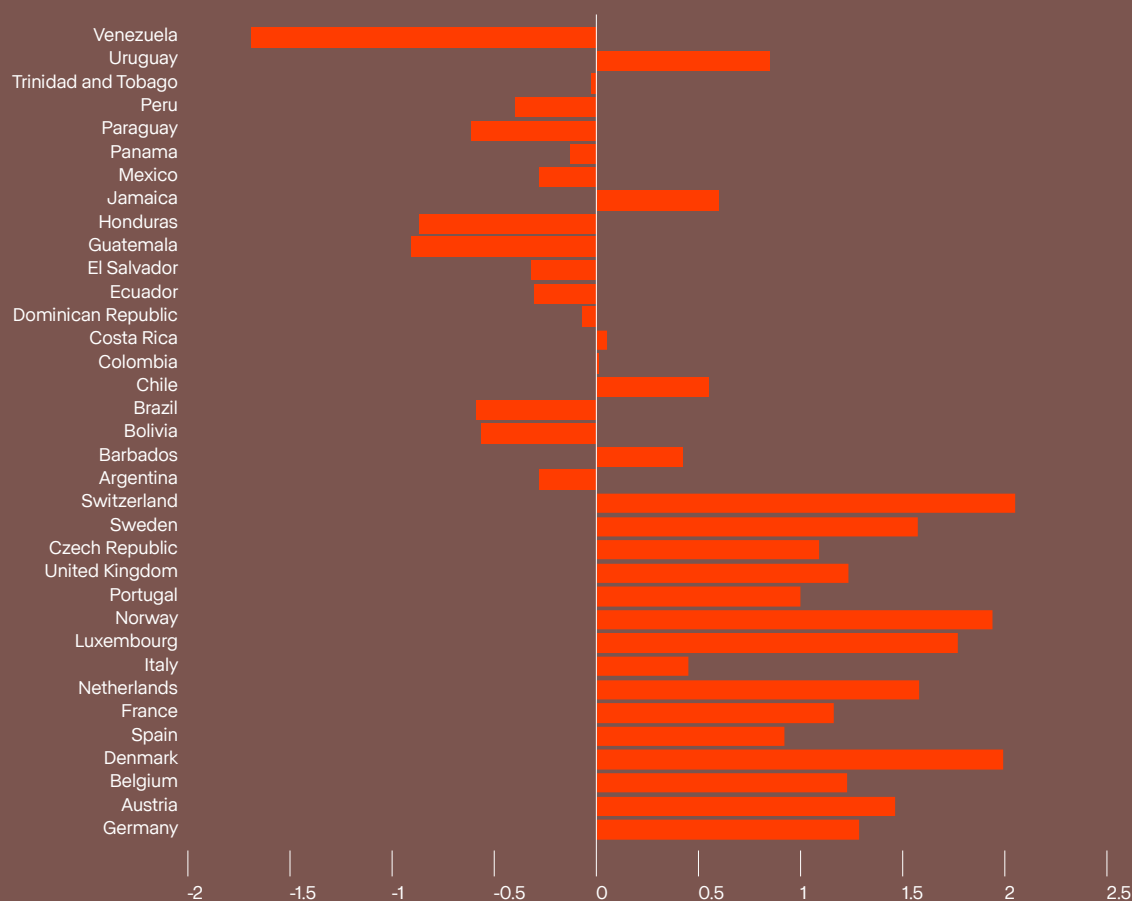
— Box 2

Government effectiveness indicators

Among the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators, "Government Effectiveness" assesses the quality

of public services, civil service, policy formulation and implementation, and government credibility.

Government Effectiveness (2022)



Source: World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI). www.govindicators.org

This indicator measures governments' ability to efficiently and transparently deliver essential public goods and services, create favorable conditions for private sector development, job creation, and inclusive economic growth, correct market failures, address complex challenges such as climate change and inequality, prevent conflict and violence, and promote citizen participation in decision-making processes. In essence, it evaluates the capacity

of governments to uphold the social contract.

Countries scoring above 0 (up to a maximum of +2.5) have better governance practices than the global average. According to the latest data, most countries in the region perform negatively on this indicator, ranking significantly lower than European countries. Furthermore, three out of four LAC countries experienced declines in government effectiveness between 2010 and 2022.

Change in government effectiveness (2010–2022)



Source: World Government Indicators (WGI) of the WB. www.govindicators.org

— Box 3

Crime and violence in economic and social context

There is substantial theoretical and empirical literature linking crime, insecurity, and violence to income inequality and unequal access to opportunities. In developing rational choice theory, Gary Becker (1968) argues that the decision to commit a crime—or not—is based on an evaluation of costs and benefits; for instance, individuals are more likely to commit crimes when the potential gains exceed the perceived risks, such as punishment. Additionally, Becker's human capital theory associates low investment in human capital (nutrition, health, education, skills) with increased criminal propensity, as the lack of legal opportunities makes underground economies a viable substitute.

Ehrlich (1973) applies Gary Becker's economic theory to the analysis of criminal behavior. His findings suggest that economic incentives and deterrents are significant predictors of crime rates and that policies aimed at reducing inequality or increasing employment could, in turn, lower criminal participation. The study also highlights the role of law enforcement and punishment in deterring crime, noting that both the perceived likelihood of apprehension and the severity of punishment can influence the decision to commit crimes. However, the effectiveness of deterrence ultimately depends on offenders' perceptions of these risks.

Bourguignon (2001) examines how economic inequality and limited social mobility foster crime and violence, particularly highlighting the role of inequality in escalating violence in developing countries experiencing

volatile growth—historically the case in LAC. Bourguignon warns that significant economic shocks—such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic—can exacerbate poverty and inequality, fueling criminal activity unless efforts to deter crime are simultaneously reinforced. Several subsequent studies conclude that more unequal societies typically face higher levels of violence and criminality, partly due to social exclusion, lack of opportunities, and perceived social injustice (Fajnzylber, Lederman, and Loayza, 2002; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; World Bank, 2011; UNDP, 2013).

Crime and violence negatively impact economic growth, legitimate economic activity, and private investment through multiple transmission channels. Their effect on economic activity is comparable to that of a distortionary tax (Goulas and Zervoyianni, 2015). On one hand, violence and crime undermine domestic and foreign investments by raising operational costs and perceived risks for businesses, discouraging both local and foreign direct investments and reducing local employment opportunities (World Bank, 2005; Daniele and Mariani, 2008; Detotto and Otranto, 2010; Ashby and Ramos, 2013; Cabral, Mollick, and Saucedo, 2019). The impact disproportionately affects localities vulnerable to theft or extortion, prompting businesses to relocate to safer areas (Camacho and Rodríguez, 2013). On the other hand, insecurity reduces competitiveness and can distort public expenditure priorities (Barone and Narcisio, 2013; Dell'Anno et al., 2019).

Note: It is important to distinguish between income inequality—which commonly refers to the distribution of income within a nation's population—and inequality of access to opportunities, which refers to disparities in people's or groups' ability to access essential resources and services such as education, healthcare, and employment. Income inequality is not necessarily a problem in itself; however, unequal access to opportunities can perpetuate cycles of poverty and hinder sustainable economic growth.

Crime, violence, and the expansion of organized crime are enabled by weak institutions responsible for security and justice, which are meant to uphold the rule of law in LAC (see Box 2), as well as by ineffective coordination among different levels of government and across countries. This institutional fragility prevents a sufficiently coordinated transnational response, leaving states vulnerable to infiltration by criminal actors and further eroding governance and the rule of law. Indeed, the trajectory of crime and violence within LAC's current economic and institutional landscape poses a serious threat to the democratic social contract—an urgent warning sign. Beyond continuing to be the world's most violent region, LAC has now become the epicenter of organized crime.

Organized criminal networks operate without regard for rules or borders, often stepping in to replace the state by providing social protection where governments fail. In this context, exacerbated by the pandemic, citizens increasingly see criminal economies as an opportunity—a source of income otherwise unavailable to them. They join TOC groups in search of protection and justice absent from the state. This dynamic strengthens TOC and further weakens state authority, whether through the informality of criminal economies, direct subjugation of state institutions, or the financing of politics with criminal proceeds.

The absence of long-term, sustainable growth drivers, persistently high inequality, weak institutional and governance capacity (ECLAC, 2023), and elevated levels of crime and TOC penetration form four development traps that interact in LAC more acutely than in any other region, endangering the democratic social contract (see Box 2). In other words, the development dynamics converging in LAC collectively create a vicious cycle of hopelessness and eroding trust in governments' ability to foster sustainable, inclusive development. This, in turn, drives populations—especially the most vulnerable—toward violence and crime in search of economic opportunity, profit, security, and justice.

The absence of a comprehensive national strategy and a coordinated regional agenda to address these challenges has led to fragmented solutions that treat symptoms rather than root causes. The expansion of TOC is a rapidly escalating threat—not only fueling high levels of violence but also wielding the tools to systematically erode public institutions and destabilize societies and governments. Urgent reassessment of both successes and failures in policy is needed to redefine strategies for tackling security challenges more effectively.

— Current situation: Key indicators of crime and security in the region

LAC faces a multi-systemic security crisis, characterized by high levels of crime, violence, and perceived insecurity. These challenges not only impact social well-being but also carry significant economic consequences and erode institutions and fundamental rights.

Between 2012 and 2021, feelings of insecurity increased significantly in the region, reflecting a structural crisis that disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, women, and youth. Victimization rates for violent crimes—such as robbery, homicide, kidnapping, and sexual offenses—demonstrate the magnitude of the issue. Additionally, TOC, including drug trafficking and human trafficking, plays a central role in this dynamic, exacerbated by

institutional weaknesses and corruption. Illicit economies not only drive violence but also impose substantial economic costs, equivalent to 3.44% of the region's GDP, impacting both the public and private sectors.

It is crucial to recognize that this phenomenon is deeply localized. While aggregate crime rates provide a useful overall perspective, they fail to capture the specific challenges faced by individual countries or the regional disparities within a given territory. Some areas grapple with critical levels of violence linked to organized crime, while others are primarily affected by common crimes or social conflicts with distinct dynamics.

— Figure 1
Homicide rates in LAC cities and countries (2023)

Country	National homicide rate (per 100,000 in-habitants)	City	Homicide rate (per 100,000 inhabitants)
Mexico	24.8	Ciudad de México	12.7
		Tijuana	91.76
		Zacatecas	88.99
Brazil	22.8	São Paulo	4.01
		Amazonía	32.2
		Fortaleza	38.99
Argentina	4.4	Córdoba	2.9
		Buenos Aires	4.86
		Rosario	22
Chile	6.3	Región Metropoli-tana	6.7
		Valparaíso	6.8
		Arica & Parinacota	12.3
Ecuador	45.7	Quito	9.85
		Guayaquil	84.29
		Durán	145.43
Colombia	25.7	Bogotá	13.6
		Cúcuta	34.7
		Cali	44
Jamaica	49.3	Kingston	55.35
Haiti	41.1	Puerto Príncipe	117.4

Source: UNODC data.

In Mexico, national figures tend to mask significant differences among states and cities. While some regions face extreme violence directly linked to organized crime, others grapple with different problems ranging from petty crimes to social conflicts. Similarly, countries like Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay—historically known for their relatively low levels of violence—face different challenges compared to nations such as Honduras or Jamaica, where violence and the presence of criminal organizations are more deeply entrenched and severe.

Although national statistics on homicides and other crimes offer a broad overview of the situation, they fail to capture the complexity of local dynamics. These

dynamics depend on factors such as organized crime activity, inequality, gang presence, and institutional strength or weakness. Clearly, even within the same country, security realities can differ radically. This fact underscores the necessity of crafting targeted public policies tailored to local contexts to address regional particularities. The following table highlights how drastically security situations can vary within a single country, emphasizing the need for specific and contextually appropriate public policies.

This climate of insecurity and violence in the region calls for a deeper analysis of the key factors driving this crisis. This section first examines public perceptions and fear of

crime, highlighting how insecurity affects daily life. It then explores the dynamics of victimization and its regional variations, kidnappings as one of the most alarming criminal activities, and homicides as the most reliable indicator of extreme violence. Additionally, it considers the epidemic of sexual violence, which disproportionately affects women and girls, and the growing entrenchment of organized crime at the core of illicit economies.

Lastly, this section assesses both the direct and indirect costs of crime and offenses, recognizing them as significant barriers to the region's economic and social development. This comprehensive approach not only examines statistics and trends but also highlights the structural implications that necessitate sustainable and effective policy responses.

Public perception and fear

Citizen insecurity in LAC is a structural challenge impacting social well-being, community cohesion, and fundamental rights. The increasing perception of insecurity and fear, exacerbated by gender-related factors, highlights an alarming reality: crime

and violence disproportionately affect vulnerable segments of society, limiting their development and full participation. This context generates constant public pressure for governments to prioritize combating crime in their agendas. Analyzing these dynamics and their multidimensional impacts is crucial to formulating effective, sustainable public policies.

Feelings of insecurity have intensified in the region: between 2012 and 2021, the probability of an individual feeling highly insecure about becoming a victim of crime rose from 8% to 18% (Lupu et al., 2023). Globally, crime and violence are among citizens' primary concerns; however, in LAC, these concerns are notably higher (see Graph 2).

In the region, public perception regarding the increase of neighborhood crime in its various forms—such as vehicle theft, drug trafficking, vandalism, violence against women, and gang-related activities—is significant (see Table 2). Among 29 surveyed countries, five of the 10 nations where crime is perceived to be increasing most rapidly across all analyzed crime categories are in LAC (Ipsos, 2023). According to the World Values Survey, 30% of households in LAC reported being victims of crime within the last year of the survey period (2017–2022), and 51% of the population said they felt unsafe (WVS, 2022).

— Table 2
Perception of crime

Country	Increased crime	Vehicle theft	Drug trafficking	Vandalism	Violence against women	Neighbor-hood gangs
Chile	68%	80%	66%	72%	52%	53%
Argentina	64%	76%	72%	71%	59%	38%
Peru	64%	73%	50%	66%	63%	58%
Colombia	56%	72%	56%	65%	53%	46%
Mexico	46%	71%	58%	71%	55%	51%
Brazil	40%	68%	60%	56%	63%	38%

Source: Data from the study "Crime. Views on crime and law enforcement around the world." Ipsos (2023)

Note: The survey question was as follows: "In the past 12 months, have you seen or heard about the following in your neighborhood?"

From a gender perspective, women's perception of insecurity in LAC is alarming. According to a recent study (Ipsos, 2024), a vast majority of Chilean women feel unsafe when walking home at night (90%), using public transportation (78%), leaving home for everyday activities (77%), or engaging in leisure activities outside the home (74%) (see Graph 3).

This heightened and persistent sense of insecurity constitutes a violation of the fundamental human right established in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁶ It forces women to adopt self-protective measures (Ipsos, 2024) and structurally restricts their life projects (see Graph 4). The elevated perception of insecurity and citizen victimization in LAC translates into clear public demand that governments place crime and violence prevention prominently in their agendas.

In Caribbean countries, data from the AmericasBarometer (LAPOP, 2023) reveal significant variations in perceived insecurity depending on context and gender, with common patterns indicating higher concern among women. Even though women do not always experience higher victimization rates, they consistently report a heightened sense of vulnerability to violence in their daily environments, underscoring inequalities in the experience and impact of insecurity.

In Trinidad and Tobago, 62% of women view security issues as the country's most significant challenge, compared to 53% of men. This higher level of concern among women is linked to recent serious violent incidents, including murders, rapes, and physical assaults, which led to public protests during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although only 27% of residents report feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods, this perception has risen since 2014, despite the country still having one of the lowest perceived insecurity rates in the region.

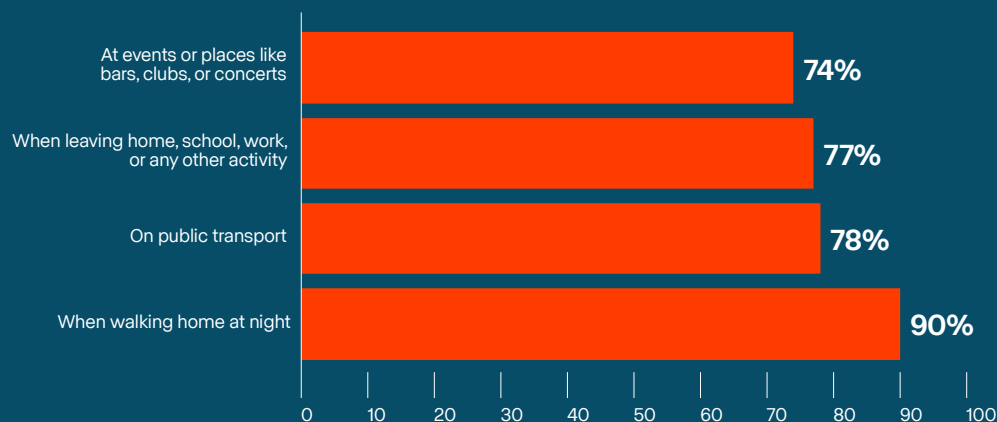
In Suriname, women are also significantly more likely than men to feel unsafe. In 2023, 45% of respondents reported feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods, the highest level recorded in the last four survey rounds. Women and lower-income individuals are the most affected groups. Although men have a higher probability of being crime victims (22% compared to 18% of women), women perceive greater risks, particularly in urban areas like Paramaribo, where 27% of residents reported being crime victims. Insecurity in Suriname primarily involves economic crimes such as theft and fraud; violent crimes have not risen as one might expect.

In the Dominican Republic, gender disparities strongly influence perceptions of insecurity. While 26% of men reported being victims of crime in 2023, women feel significantly more unsafe due to their greater exposure to domestic violence and heightened awareness of insecurity in their surroundings. Additionally, 21% of the population considers crime one of the country's most pressing issues. Attitudes toward gender-based violence also expose deep-rooted inequalities: 23% of women and 33% of men believe violence is justified in certain circumstances, perpetuating environments of vulnerability for women.

In Jamaica, 23% of citizens reported feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods, a figure that has increased by five percentage points since the previous survey round. Gender differences are evident: 26% of women reported feeling unsafe, compared to 21% of men. Perceived insecurity is notably high in Cornwall County (30%) compared to the Kingston Metropolitan Region (22%). Moreover, people from lower-income households (30%) experience higher levels of insecurity compared to those from wealthier households (18%), highlighting how socioeconomic factors amplify inequalities.

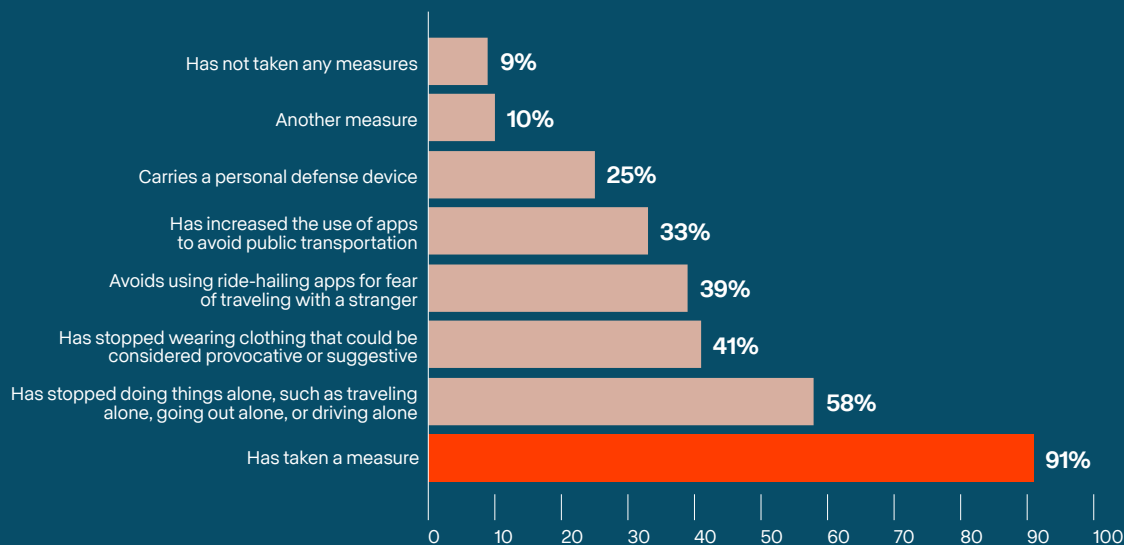
⁶ United Nations. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Art. 3. Adopted by the General Assembly in 1948. "Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person."

— Graph 3
I feel “unsafe” always or almost always (%)



Source: Data from Report No. 27, Ipsos Keys, Ipsos 2024.

— Graph 4
Those who have taken measures for their safety (% of women)



Source: Data from Report No. 27, Ipsos Keys, Ipsos 2024.

Lastly, in Haiti, perceptions of insecurity remain critical, with more than 56% of citizens reporting feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods in 2023—though this figure is lower than the 66% reported in 2021. Women face increased risks of sexual and domestic violence in a context characterized by instability and widespread gang presence.

Gang activity, reported in 24% of neighborhoods, heightens fear and vulnerability, especially in urban areas such as Port-au-Prince. Victimization is also high: 25% of Haitians reported having been crime victims, surpassing the regional average of 22%. Insecurity is considered the country's primary concern by 70% of the population, reflecting its profound impact on everyday life.

Victimization in LAC

Victimization is the indicator that most rigorously seeks to estimate the number of individuals (or households) who have been victims of a crime in the past 12 months. Not all countries conduct victimization surveys, and those that do often use different questions or sampling designs, making cross-country comparisons difficult. While there has been significant progress in countries like Mexico and Chile, which have dedicated surveys specifically designed to measure victimization in detail, regional analysis must rely on opinion surveys that include victimization-related questions.

It is worth noting that victimization data conclude not necessarily reflect the severity or complexity of criminal activity. For instance, a country with high victimization rates may be experiencing frequent but lower-impact crimes such as petty theft, while another country with low general victimization rates may be concealing high levels of homicide—since homicides are often not included in victimization survey questions.

The victimization survey conducted by LAPOP,⁷ in 23 LAC countries, measures victimization rates for offenses including robbery, theft, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, threats, and other criminal acts during 2023. The latest survey (Lupu et al., 2023) found an average victimization rate of 23% among the surveyed countries (see Graph 5.a).

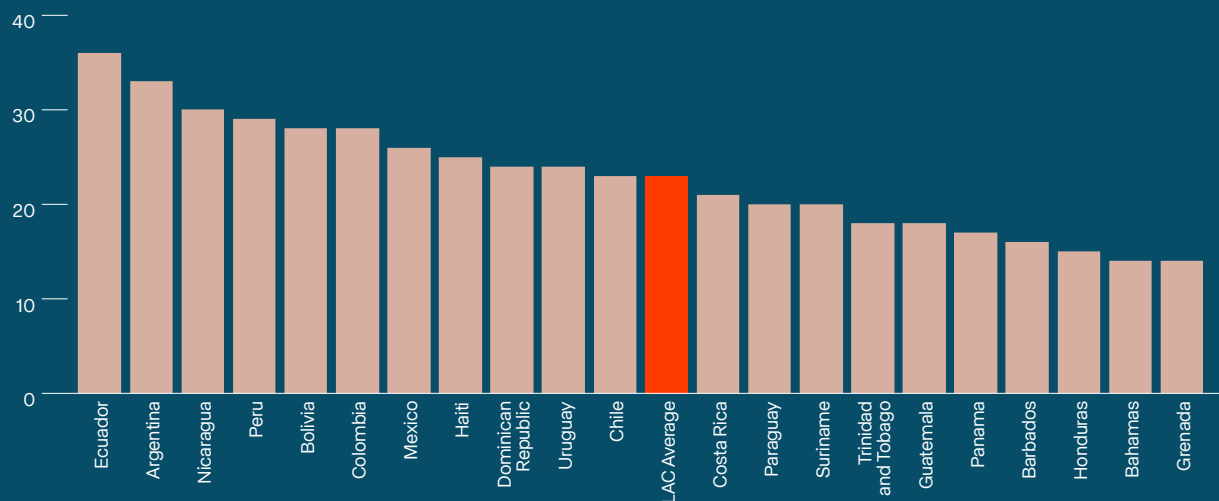
Focusing on regional variations, countries in the Caribbean (Haiti, Dominican Republic, Suriname, Grenada, Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica) report, on average, lower victimization rates for these offenses (19%) compared to Central, South, and North America (24%) (Lupu et al., 2023).

The survey reveals that patterns of victimization vary significantly across LAC. Ecuador (36%), Argentina (33%), Nicaragua (30%), Peru (29%), and Bolivia (28%) lead the region in victimization rates. In contrast, El Salvador (10%), Jamaica (13%), Bahamas (14%), Grenada (14%), and Honduras (15%) are the five countries with the lowest victimization rates in LAC.

The prevalence of crimes such as robbery, theft, and fraud indicates insufficient security systems and structural vulnerabilities, both institutional and social. However, these figures are also intrinsically linked to violent crimes such as assaults, kidnappings, homicides, extortion, and physical attacks—factors explored next—which not only intensify crime's impact on communities but also exacerbate perceptions of insecurity and limit sustainable development in the region.

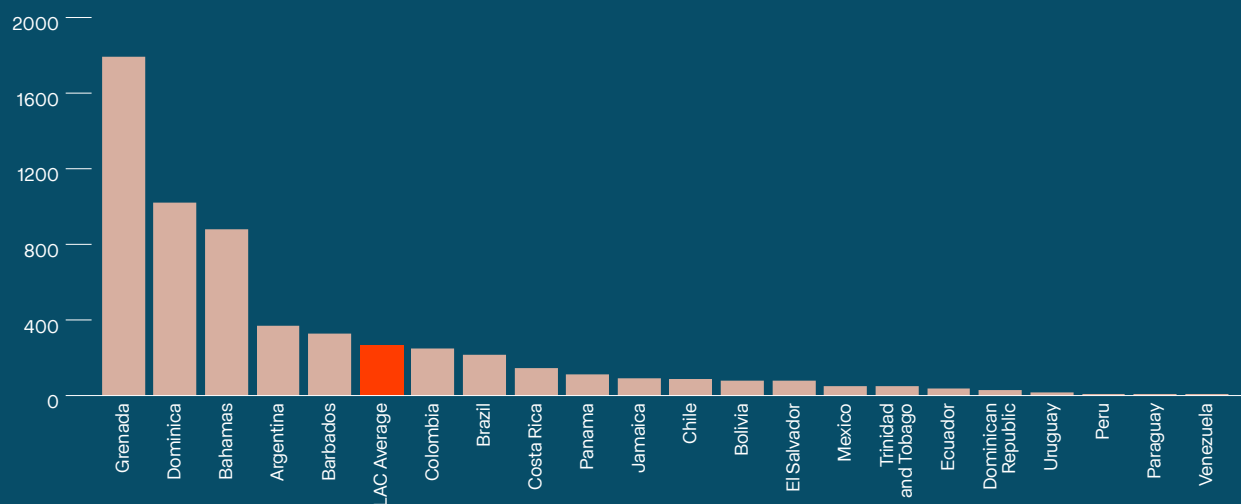
⁷ The LAPOP victimization survey is part of the AmericasBarometer initiative, known as *Pulse of Democracy*, and includes the following question: "Have you been a victim of any act of delinquency in the past 12 months? That is, have you been a victim of robbery, theft, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, threats, or any other type of criminal act in the past 12 months?"

— Graph 5.a
Percentage of victimized individuals in LAC (2023)



Source: Data from the The Pulse of Democracy in the Americas (LAPOP Lab 2023).

— Graph 5.b
Violent assaults in LAC per 100,000 inhabitants (2018–2022)



Source: UNODC (2024). Data on crime and criminal justice: Serious assault.
Retrieved October 15, 2024, from <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-crime-violent-offences>.

— Box 4

Mexico: Detailed data on victimization

Mexico stands out in LAC for the quality and comprehensiveness of its victimization and crime statistics, conducting annually the National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Safety (ENVIPE). This robust survey collects detailed data on:

- The most frequent types of crime, including theft, fraud, extortion, and assault; reporting rates; and the percentage of unreported crimes (the dark figure of crime);
- Public perception of insecurity;
- Economic and emotional costs associated with victimization;
- Data disaggregated by region, gender, age, and socioeconomic status.

Key findings from ENVIPE 2023

- 27.5% of households in Mexico had at least one member who was a victim of crime.
- The crime prevalence rate stood at 23,323 victims per 100,000 inhabitants, an increase from 2022.
- The most common crimes were fraud, robbery or assault in public spaces or on public transportation, and extortion.
- An estimated 31.3 million crimes occurred, 92.9% of which were either unreported or not formally investigated by authorities.

Key statistics (2022–2023)

Indicador	2022	2023
Hogares víctima de delito %	27,4	27,5
Tasa de víctimas del delito por cada 100.000 habitantes	22.587	23.323
Tasa de víctimas por fraude por cada 100.000 habitantes	5.770	6.962
Tasa de víctimas por robo o asalto por cada 100.000 habitantes	5.689	6.526
Tasa de víctimas de extorsión por cada 100.000 habitantes	5.056	5.213
Víctimas de secuestro	77.825	85.931
Delitos cometidos con portación de armas %	35,5	34,2
Cifra negra %	92,4	92,9

Lessons from the use of data in the Mexican case:

1. Disaggregated data: Reports enable detailed analysis of victimization by region, gender, age, and socioeconomic status.
2. Continuous monitoring: Annual frequency allows for identifying trends and assessing public policy effectiveness.
3. Transparency and accessibility: Data are publicly available, strengthening analysis and accountability.

Mexico's experience serves as a model for other countries in the region, illustrating how reliable data can inform the design of more effective and targeted security policies.

Victimization from crime is equally troubling. According to the 2023 AmericasBarometer (LAPOP), 20% of respondents in Suriname reported being victims, while Jamaica's figure reaches 22%, primarily concentrated in urban areas such as Kingston and Montego Bay. Haiti presents an even more critical situation, with 25% of citizens reporting victimization in the past year—the highest level recorded in these surveys.

In other Caribbean countries, such as Trinidad and Tobago, gender-based violence remains a persistent issue. According to UN Women (2024), 44% of women who have been in an intimate relationship have experienced some form of violence—whether physical, sexual, emotional, or economic. In the first eight months of 2024, authorities recorded 1,227 cases of domestic violence involving physical abuse, 117 cases of sexual abuse, and 111 violations of protection orders (IACHR, 2024). These figures have triggered public protests and renewed calls for more effective protection policies.

The Dominican Republic, including the tourist region of Punta Cana, faces a severe crisis related to femicides, particularly among girls and adolescents. According to the Public Ministry, 16% of intimate-partner femicides in 2024 involved minors. With a rate of 2.4 femicides per 100,000 women, the country ranks second in LAC, behind only Honduras (Cabrera and Romero, 2024). These femicides, linked to patterns of sexual abuse and domestic violence, highlight a deeply rooted structural issue.

Box 4 presents the case of Mexico, noteworthy in the region for its annual statistics on victimization and crime. Mexico's experience serves as a valuable model for other countries.

Homicides

The homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants is a widely used indicator for measuring violence, as it is based on violent death data, which is considered relatively reliable, less susceptible to underreporting compared

to other crimes, and internationally comparable. In 2021, the average homicide rate in LAC was 15 per 100,000 inhabitants, nearly triple the global average of 5.8 (UNODC, 2023). These rates vary significantly by country. In 2021, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Bahamas had the highest homicide rates in the region, more than doubling the regional average, while Barbados, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Venezuela also exceeded the regional average (see Graph 6.a).

In terms of homicide demographics, young men (aged 15–29) in the Americas face the highest homicide risk compared to women and men of any other age group, with a rate of 56.3 per 100,000 inhabitants—more than twice the regional average and five times the global average (see Graph 6.b). More than 45% of homicide victims in the Americas are young people aged 15 to 29. Countries with the highest proportion of homicide victims in this age group include the Bahamas, Colombia, Guatemala, and El Salvador, with rates as high as 43 per 100,000 inhabitants. The second-most affected group comprises men aged 30 to 44. Regarding female homicide rates, the Americas ranks second globally (3.4 per 100,000 inhabitants),⁸ surpassed only by Africa (see Graph 7); 14 of the world's 25 countries with the highest femicide rates are in the Americas (ECLAC, 2018).

The distribution of homicides in the Americas is unique: 50% are related to organized crime compared to just 6% in Europe, while interpersonal homicides⁹ represent 28% in the Americas compared to Europe's 89% (Graph 8.a). While patterns of homicide by demographic characteristics such as age and gender are similar globally, overall homicide levels differ significantly by region and country. Unlike Asia and Europe—where firearms are the least frequently used method—in LAC, firearms represent the primary means of lethal violence, accounting for 67% of homicides (see Graph 8.b). This reality is exacerbated by easy access to firearms, inadequate oversight, and high levels of impunity.

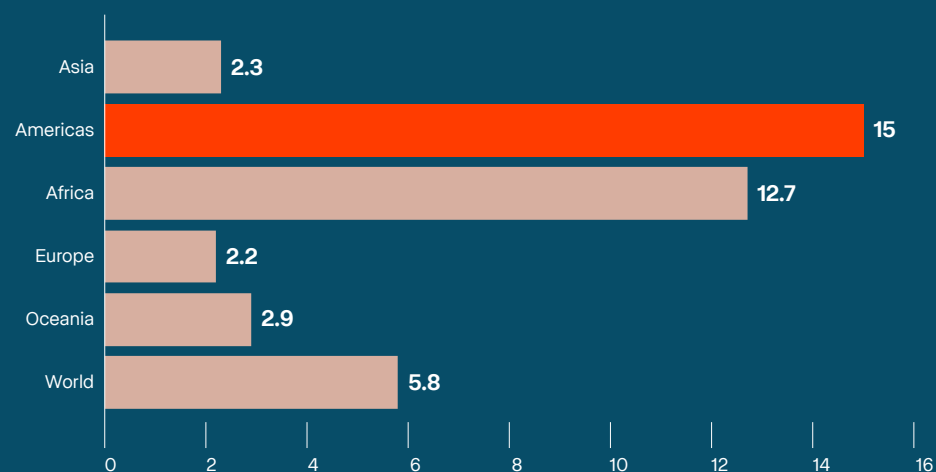
8 With a rate of 5.5 per 100,000 inhabitants, the majority of victims are between the ages of 15 and 29.

9 Homicides related to intimate partners, family members, or other interpersonal relationships.

— Graph 6.a
Homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (2020–2022)



— Graph 6.b
Homicide victimization rate per 100,000 inhabitants (2021)



Source: Data from the report “Global Study on Homicide 2023,” UNODC 2023.

Moreover, urban poverty and structural inequalities disproportionately affecting Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations correlate positively with homicide rates, increasing these groups' vulnerability to various forms of violence. UNICEF data from Brazil reveals that between 2016 and 2020, approximately 30,000 adolescents and young people (aged 15–19) were murdered, 80% of whom were Afro-descendants. In the Ecuadorian province of Esmeraldas, where 70% of the Afro-Ecuadorian population resides, homicide rates surged nearly 400% from 2016 to 2022. Brazil's Atlas of Violence shows that states in the North and Northeast regions—where more than 70% of the population identifies as Afro-descendant—recorded homicide rates between 54 and 62 per 100,000 inhabitants, approximately five to six times higher than those in the Southeast region. This stark contrast underscores how racial and spatial inequalities intersect closely with citizen security.

Haiti is experiencing an unprecedented security crisis. Between 2019 and 2022, homicides nearly doubled, primarily concentrated in areas like Cité Soleil in Port-au-Prince, according to data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2023). However, in recent months, this violence has extended to other regions. Kidnappings surged by 1,642% between 2019 and 2022, rising from 78 to 1,359 reported cases (UNODC, 2023).

Haitian gangs have consolidated territorial control through terror, employing tactics such as the systematic rape of women and girls. In April 2024, members of the G9 gang committed acts of sexual violence against 49 women in Cité Soleil, a crime that the United Nations described as a “weapon of war” (BINUH, 2024). This phenomenon underscores a humanitarian crisis that transcends conventional violence, revealing extreme patterns of abuse.

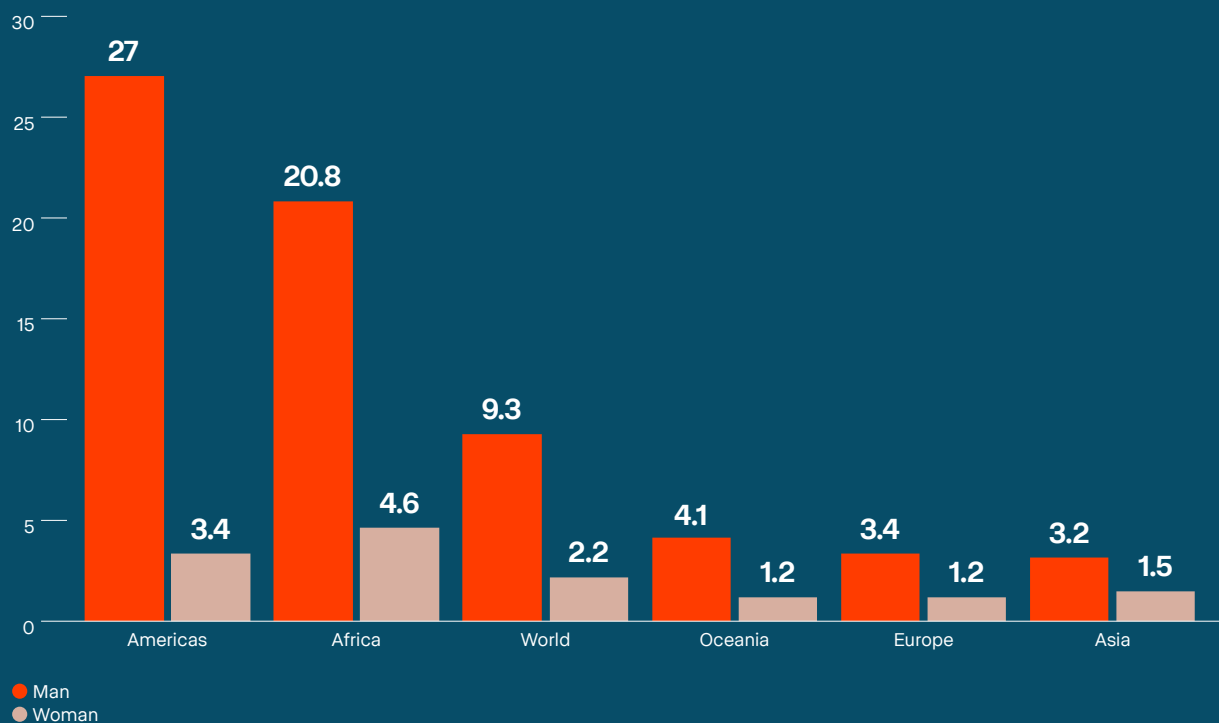
Arms trafficking is another aggravating factor in the region, with the United States as the primary supplier. Between 80% and 99% of firearms seized in countries such as the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti in 2021 were traced back to U.S. manufacturers (ATF, 2021). Nevertheless, the lack of precise data makes it challenging to assess the full scale of the issue.

Sexual offenses

Rates of sexual offenses in LAC remain significantly high compared to the rest of the world, particularly in Caribbean and Central American countries, where the figures are alarming. This type of crime disproportionately impacts women—especially girls aged 10 to 14 and adolescents aged 15 to 19 (Chinchilla, 2024). According to data from the UNODC and international studies, regions such as Western Europe and East Asia report considerably lower rates of sexual offenses.

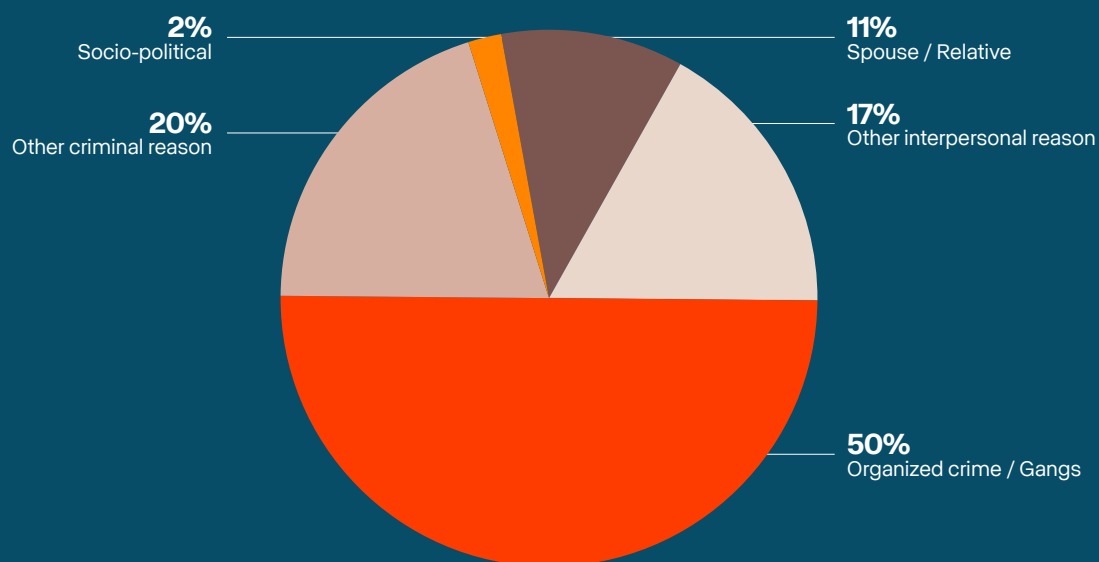
Graph 9 highlights variability in sexual offense rates across LAC between 2016 and 2022. Grenada reports the highest rate at 273.44 per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Panama (168.92) and Costa Rica (145.92). These figures significantly exceed the regional average of 92.06, underscoring the severe prevalence of sexual crimes in specific parts of the region. Uruguay, with a rate of 23.17 per 100,000 inhabitants, records the region's lowest level of sexual offenses.

— Graph 7
Global homicide victimization rate by gender
per 100,000 inhabitants (2021)

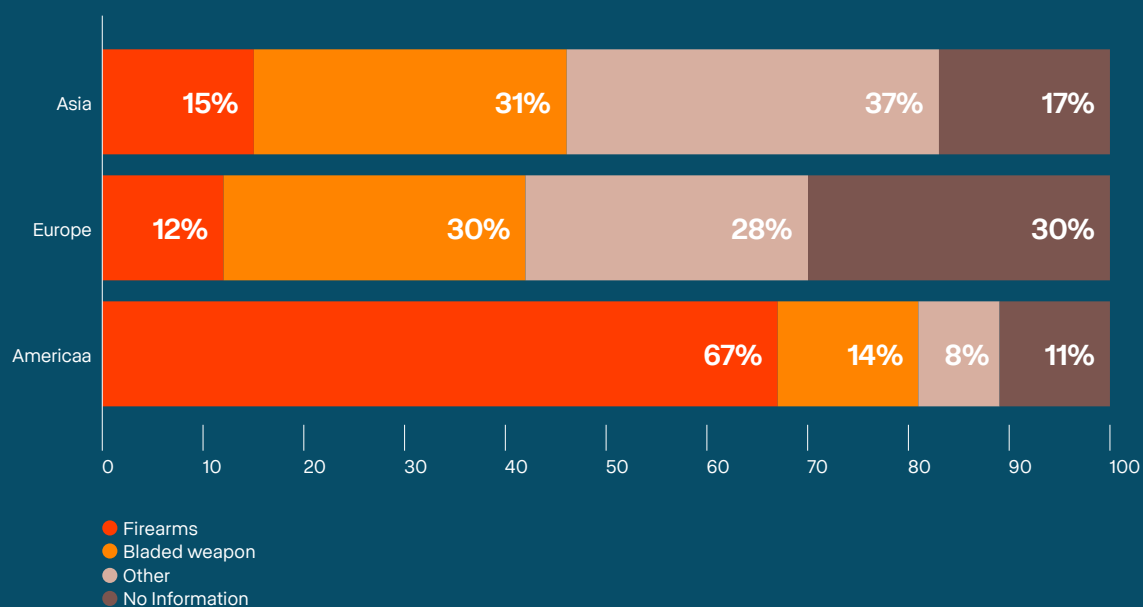


Source: Data from the report "Global Study on Homicide 2023," UNODC 2023

— Graph 8.a
Percentage of completed homicides



— Graph 8.b
Percentage of homicides by weapon
used in the Americas (2021)



Source: Data from the Global Study on Homicide 2023 (UNODC, 2023).

Violent assaults

Graph 9 illustrates significant variability in violent assault rates per 100,000 inhabitants in LAC countries between 2018 and 2022. Grenada (1,790), Dominica (1,020), and the Bahamas (878) exhibit notably high rates, significantly exceeding the regional average of 366. Compared to other regions, assault rates in LAC are particularly alarming. According to UNODC data, regions such as Western Europe and East Asia report much lower figures, typically below 100 incidents per 100,000 inhabitants. Paraguay (8.39) and Venezuela (6.3) report notably lower assault rates compared to their LAC counterparts. However, when interpreting these statistics, it is essential to consider that the figures might not fully capture reality, due to variations in data collection methods or potential underreporting.

Kidnappings

Kidnapping rates in LAC remain relatively high compared to other regions globally (see Graph 10). According to UNODC data, LAC, with 1.65 kidnappings per 100,000 inhabitants, along with parts of Africa, has the world's highest kidnapping rates. In comparison, Europe and Asia report much lower rates, usually under one per 100,000 inhabitants. Significant variation exists in regional kidnapping incidence.

There is a high degree of variation in the incidence of kidnappings across the region. Countries such as Dominica and Ecuador—with rates of 8.25 and 6.92 per 100,000 inhabitants, respectively—far exceed the regional average, while Peru (3.61) and Chile (3.29) also record elevated rates. In contrast, countries like Argentina (0.22), El Salvador (0.05), and Grenada (0.0) report significantly lower kidnapping rates.

— Transnational organized crime

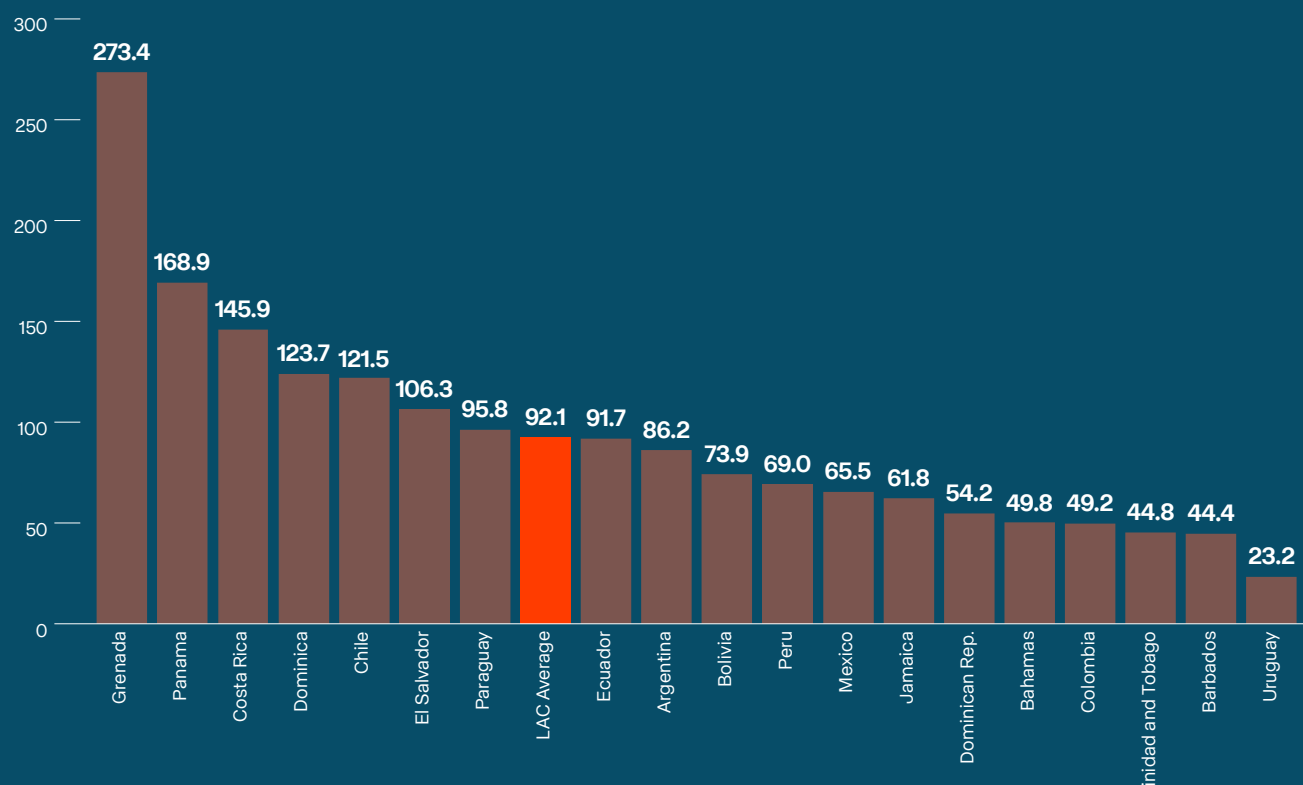
Consolidation and expansion

The high levels of perceived insecurity globally and the rising lethal violence in LAC are largely driven by the expansion and consolidation of TOC. Data from 2023 indicate that approximately 50% of homicides in the region are linked to TOC (UNODC, 2023), marking a sharp increase in this form of violence in less than three years.

The presence of local criminal groups is also widespread in the region, reported by 54% of the population (Latinobarómetro, 2018). These criminal groups, whether operating transnationally, nationally, or locally, carry out their activities through various criminal markets.

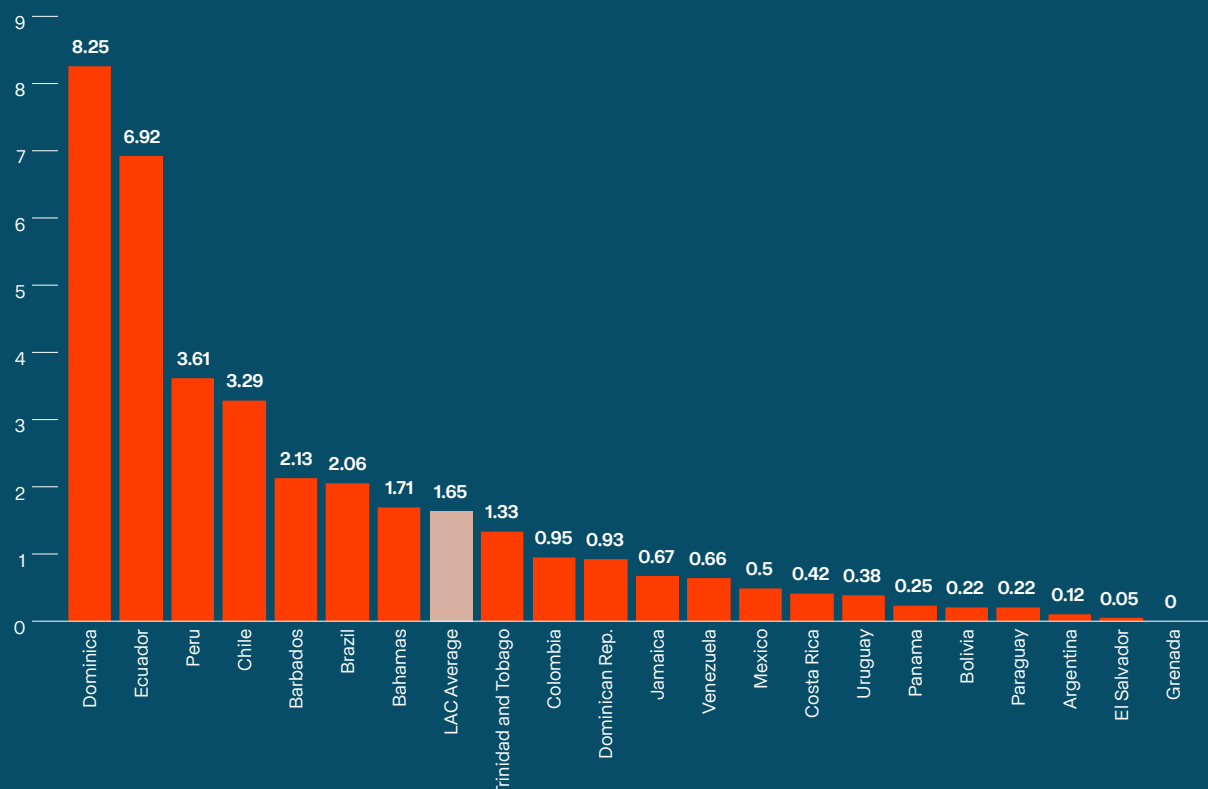
It is essential to clarify that illegal markets and organized crime are interconnected but distinct in their nature and scope. Illegal markets refer to economic activities conducted outside legal frameworks—such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and smuggling—that operate based on supply and demand for illicit goods and services. Organized crime, however, consists of hierarchical structures and sophisticated criminal networks that oversee and control these markets, sustaining their operations through corruption, violence, and money laundering.

— Graph 9
Sexual offenses in LAC per 100,000 inhabitants
(2016–2022)



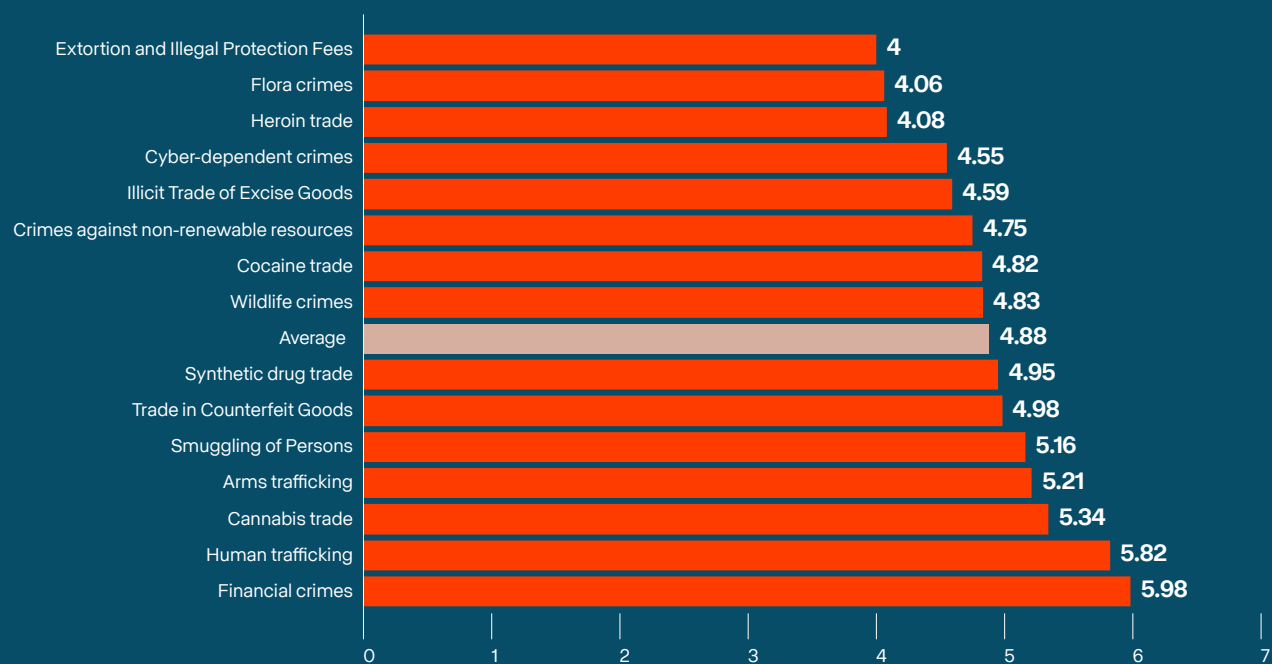
Source: UNODC [2024]. Data on crime and criminal justice: Sexual violence.
Retrieved October 15, 2024, from <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-crime-violent-offences>.

— Graph 10
**Kidnappings in LAC per 100,000 inhabitants
(2018–2022)**

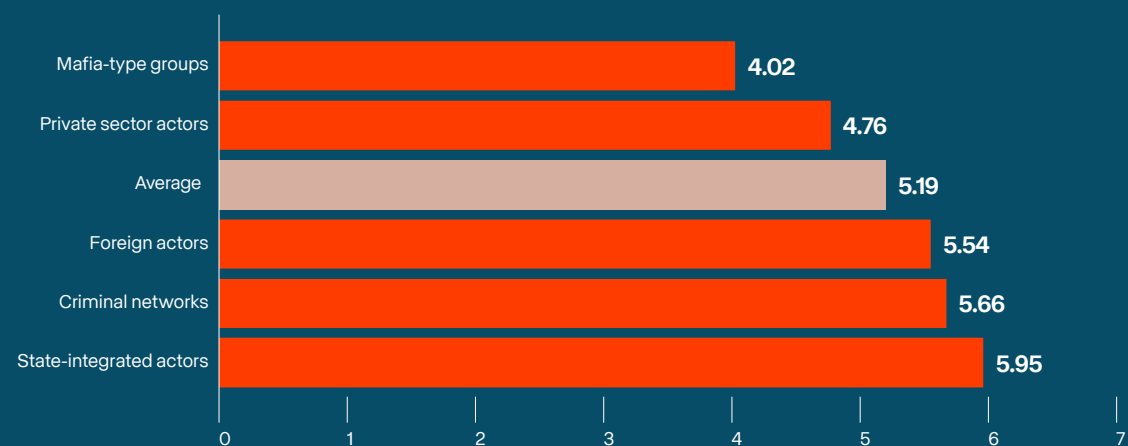


Source: UNODC (2024). *Data on crime and criminal justice: Serious assault*.
Retrieved October 15, 2024, from <https://dataUNODC.un.org/dp-crime-violent-offences>

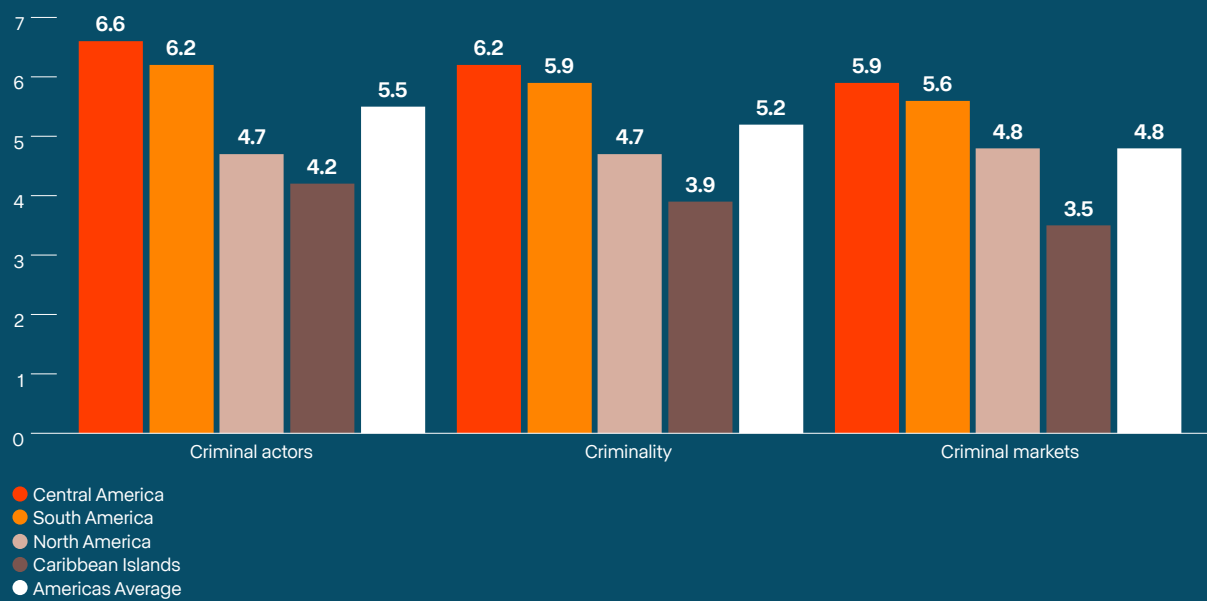
— Graph 11.a
Criminal markets – World average (2023)



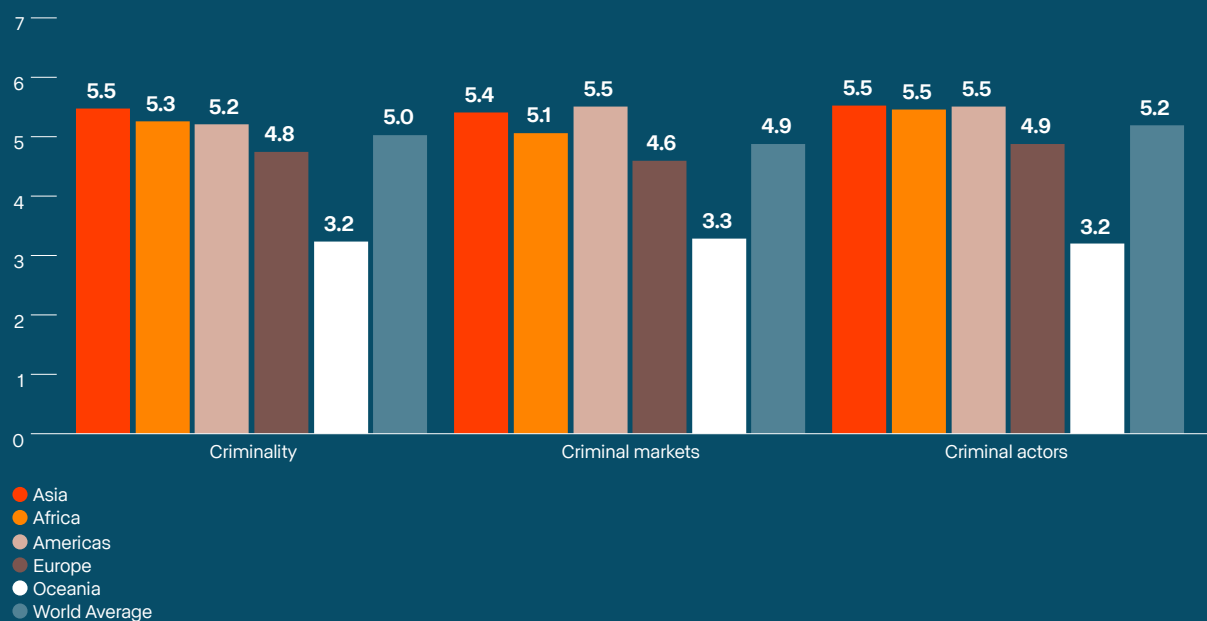
— Graph 11.b
Criminal actors – World average (2023)



— Graph 11.c
Organized crime – Subregion of the Americas



— Graph 11.d
Organized crime by continent



Source: Data from the Global Organized Crime Index (2023).

Graph 11.a provides an analysis of the main global criminal markets in 2023,¹⁰ highlighting financial crimes (5.98), human trafficking (5.82), and the cannabis trade (5.34). Among leading criminal actors worldwide, “state-embedded actors” (5.95), “criminal networks” (5.66), and “foreign actors” (5.54) stand out (see Graph 11.b).¹¹ The prominent involvement of state-embedded actors reveals significant institutional permeability and weakness at governmental levels. These state-integrated actors not only facilitate criminal activities but also undermine the very functioning of the state.

On the other hand, the significant involvement of criminal networks and foreign actors suggests a high level of national and cross-border coordination in criminal activities. Operating outside legal frameworks, these actors leverage their transnational networks to maintain a persistent advantage over law enforcement agencies, which, unlike them, must adhere to legal procedures and often navigate highly bureaucratic processes to combat crime. While *mafia-style groups* (4.02) and *private sector actors* (4.76) appear comparatively less influential, their impact should not be underestimated, as they exert strong control over certain regions and economic sectors.

In the Americas, indicators for crime levels (5.2), criminal markets (5.51), and criminal actors (5.45) consistently surpass global averages across all categories (Graphs 11.c and 11.d). This underscores the severity of organized crime in the region and aligns with existing literature that identifies the Americas as a hub for complex illicit activities, particularly drug trafficking, human trafficking, and environmental crimes. The expansion of this criminal phenomenon not only threatens public security but also undermines economic and social stability across the region, posing a direct risk to democracy itself.

Several criminal markets in the Americas surpass global averages (Graph 12), pointing to critical areas that represent significant regional challenges. Scores for cannabis (7.4), cocaine (5.9), and human trafficking (5.82) markets are notably higher than global averages, making clear the influence of these illicit economies in the

Americas. The cannabis trade in LAC, scoring 7.4, is the highest worldwide, reflecting widespread production and distribution within the region, where some countries are key producers.

The cocaine trade also registers an alarming score (5.9), reinforcing the Americas’ role as a global hub for cocaine production and trafficking. The region not only hosts the world’s primary producing countries (such as Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru) but also serves as a critical transit route to other continents. This reality presents significant challenges for public security and underscores the urgency of international cooperation in combating crime and disrupting trafficking routes.

Similarly, human trafficking in the Americas (5.82)—one of the gravest forms of organized crime predominantly affecting women, children, and migrants—exploits vulnerable populations through transnational networks, representing a severe violation of human rights. Additionally, human trafficking often intersects with other serious crimes, such as sexual exploitation.

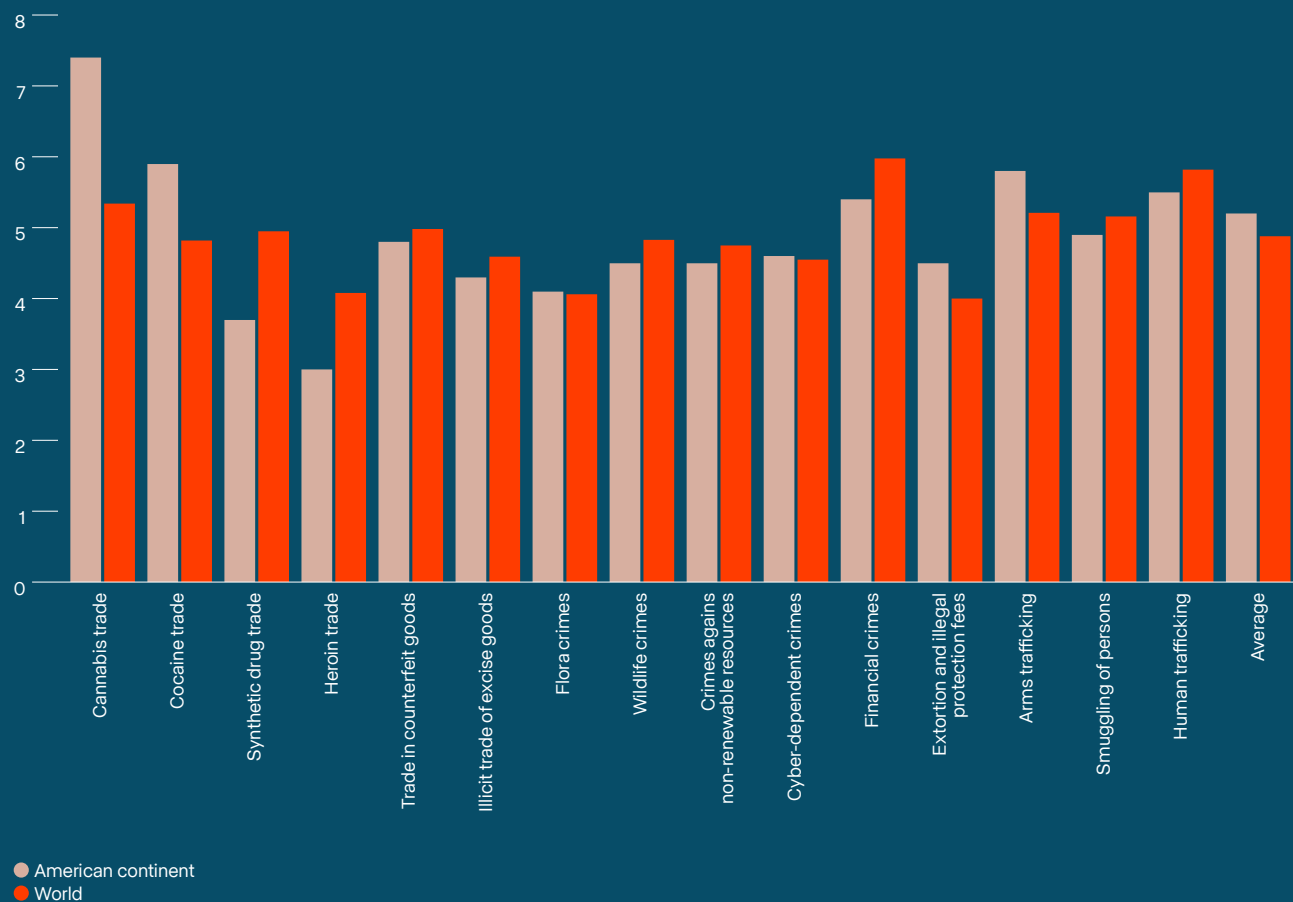
The quality of governance (Dammert et al., 2024) is a major factor linked to organized crime. The legitimacy of the government and the powers of the state also emerge as notable variables among the most impactful factors. All of this is further compounded by institutional corruption, which shapes the dynamics of criminal groups and illegal markets. Without corruption, illegal markets would be significantly less resilient, as suppliers and traffickers would struggle to sustain the movement of illicit goods and services over the medium and long term (Dammert et al., 2024).

These data underscore the necessity of strengthening governmental capacities in the Americas to counteract illicit economies effectively. A holistic approach is required, encompassing not only law enforcement and efficient justice administration but also policies addressing root causes, emphasizing prevention, international cooperation, and victim protection.

10 The assessment of the criminal markets subcomponent involves determining both the monetary and non-monetary impact of a given market, considering various factors such as its geographic concentration, the number of people affected or involved, the presence of violence, and the scarcity of the illicitly traded commodity (Global Organized Crime Index, 2023).

11 The assessment of the criminal actors subcomponent measures the organizational capacity and complexity of criminal groups, as well as their overall influence on the state and society.

— Graph 12
Criminal markets – Averages in the Americas and the world (2023)



Source: Data from the Global Organized Crime Index (2023).

— Measurable costs of crime in the region

The levels of insecurity and violence experienced by citizens in LAC consistently make it the most violent region in the world. The average economic cost of crime and violence is estimated at 3.44% of the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Pérez-Vincent et al., 2024) (see Graph 13.a). In practical terms, this figure is equivalent to approximately 78% of public education budgets, twice the allocation for social welfare, and 12 times the investment in research and development in these countries (Pérez-Vincent et al., 2024). Among subregions, the Caribbean bears the highest costs as a percentage of GDP (3.83%), followed by Central America (3.46%), the Andean region (3.22%), and the Southern Cone (3.2%).

When analyzing direct crime-related costs by country, Jamaica tops the list, with crime accounting for 5.04% of GDP, followed by Trinidad and Tobago (4.79%), Honduras (4.6%), and the Bahamas (4.17%)—all significantly exceeding the regional average. In these countries, high homicide rates, drug trafficking-related crimes, and criminal activities targeting the tourism sector, such as extortion, play a major role in illicit economies. Economic diversification and strengthened international cooperation to combat trafficking networks are essential to reducing these costs.

Countries like Brazil (3.38%) and Colombia (3.57%) are close to the regional average, reflecting a mix of challenges ranging from drug trafficking to urban and rural violence. In contrast, Uruguay (2.67%) and Chile (2.4%) report significantly lower crime-related costs. While both Chile and Uruguay have seen rising homicide rates and increasing infiltration by TOC, the economic impact as a share of GDP remains comparatively lower. Nonetheless, crime remains a significant barrier to economic development in nearly all countries analyzed, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that combine security interventions with institutional strengthening.

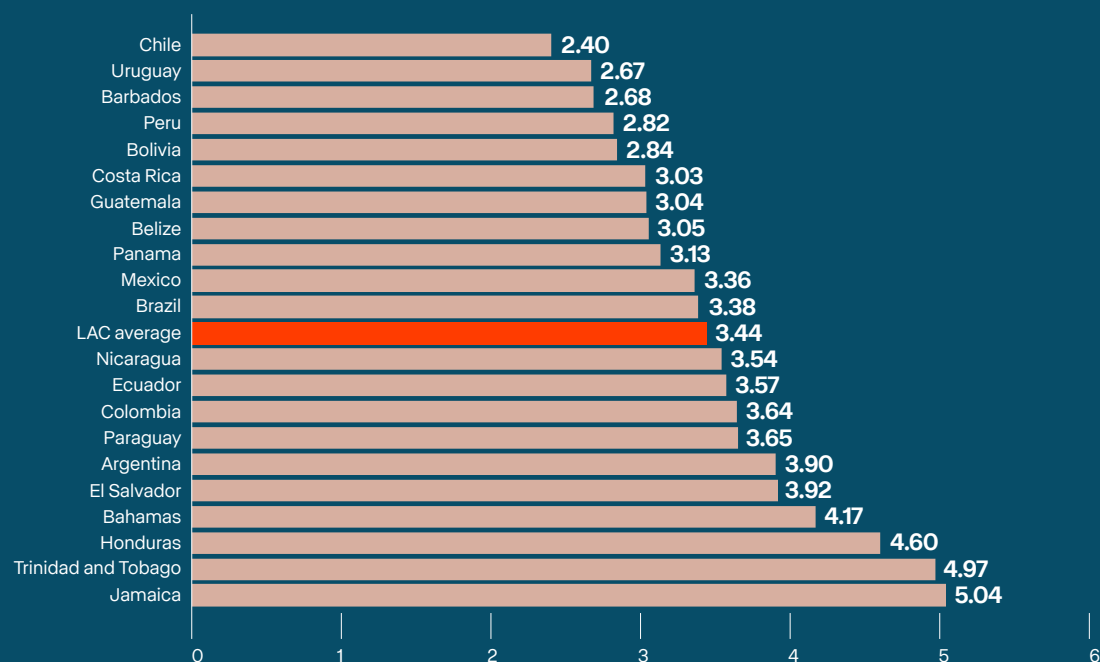
Graph 13.b provides a breakdown of crime-related costs in LAC into three categories: human capital costs, derived from lost productivity due to victimization by homicide, non-lethal crimes, and deprivation of liberty for incarcerated individuals; public costs, representing resources allocated by states to crime prevention services and criminal justice administration; and private costs, reflecting expenditures incurred by businesses for crime prevention goods and services (Pérez-Vincent et al., 2024).

Private costs have the highest regional incidence (47%), equivalent to 1.6% of GDP. This is consistent with high levels of criminality and the presence of influential criminal actors throughout the region.

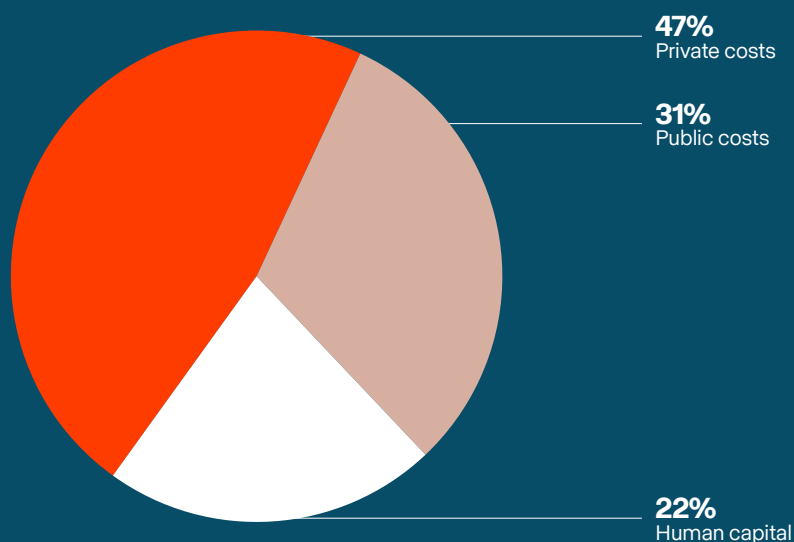
Public costs (31%), equivalent to 2.08% of regional GDP, encompass expenditures in state-led crime prevention systems and criminal justice systems. LAC governments allocate substantial portions of their budgets to crime containment, funding judicial systems, police forces, and prisons. Spending on combating crime, violence, and illicit economies represents a significant fiscal burden for states, limiting investment opportunities in equally critical sectors such as education, health, and basic infrastructure.

It is paradoxical that the state, primarily responsible for maintaining national security, incurs fewer direct costs compared to the private sector, highlighting the limited legitimacy and effectiveness of public institutions in fulfilling their obligation to protect citizens. This phenomenon also points to the need for states to invest more in preventive programs, such as those addressing citizen perceptions of crime—investments that could potentially reduce both public and private costs.

— Graph 13.a
Cost of crime as % of GDP (2022)



— Graph 13.b
Direct costs of crime and violence (2022)



Source: Data from IDB (2024).

Human capital costs (22%), equivalent to 0.76% of the region's GDP, include the loss of potential due to homicides, as well as productivity losses resulting from other reported crimes and incarceration (Pérez-Vincent et al., 2024). Previous analyses of criminal markets, such as human trafficking and drug trafficking, demonstrate how these violent crimes directly impact victims and communities, generating profound social consequences. Similarly, the high incarceration rates in LAC contribute to these costs by reducing the available workforce and hindering economic development.

Indirect costs encompass a wide range of negative impacts, including lower economic activity and growth, weaker business performance, reduced foreign investment, declines in formal employment and labor income, slower human capital accumulation, adverse effects on newborn health, environmental degradation, diminished public trust, and negative impacts on mental and physical health. These costs also impair individuals' ability to generate income, particularly in cases of gender-based and domestic violence (IDB, 2024). Additionally, crime significantly disrupts specific economic sectors. For instance, a rise in a country's homicide rate is linked to declines in international tourism revenue in subsequent years. Likewise, businesses that perceive crime, theft, and disorder as operational obstacles experience productivity levels between 10% and 35% lower than those that do not report these obstacles (IDB, 2024).

Institutional ecosystem of justice and security —

This section examines the security and justice ecosystem in LAC, breaking down each key phase of the public security chain—from crime prevention to rehabilitation and reintegration. It begins with a reflection on citizen confidence in institutions responsible for security and justice, as this is a central factor to the legitimacy and effectiveness of the entire system. **Perceived confidence affects both citizen engagement and cooperation with authorities and is an essential component of an inclusive and sustainable justice system.** Throughout

this chapter, the analysis highlights how coordination, transparency, and accountability at every stage of this chain are fundamental to addressing both common crime and the threats posed by organized crime. Additionally, it underscores the importance of implementing data-driven mechanisms, evidence-based policies, and governance strategies to strengthen institutional responses and promote a comprehensive and collaborative security framework.

— Rule of law, citizen confidence, and institutional performance in justice and security

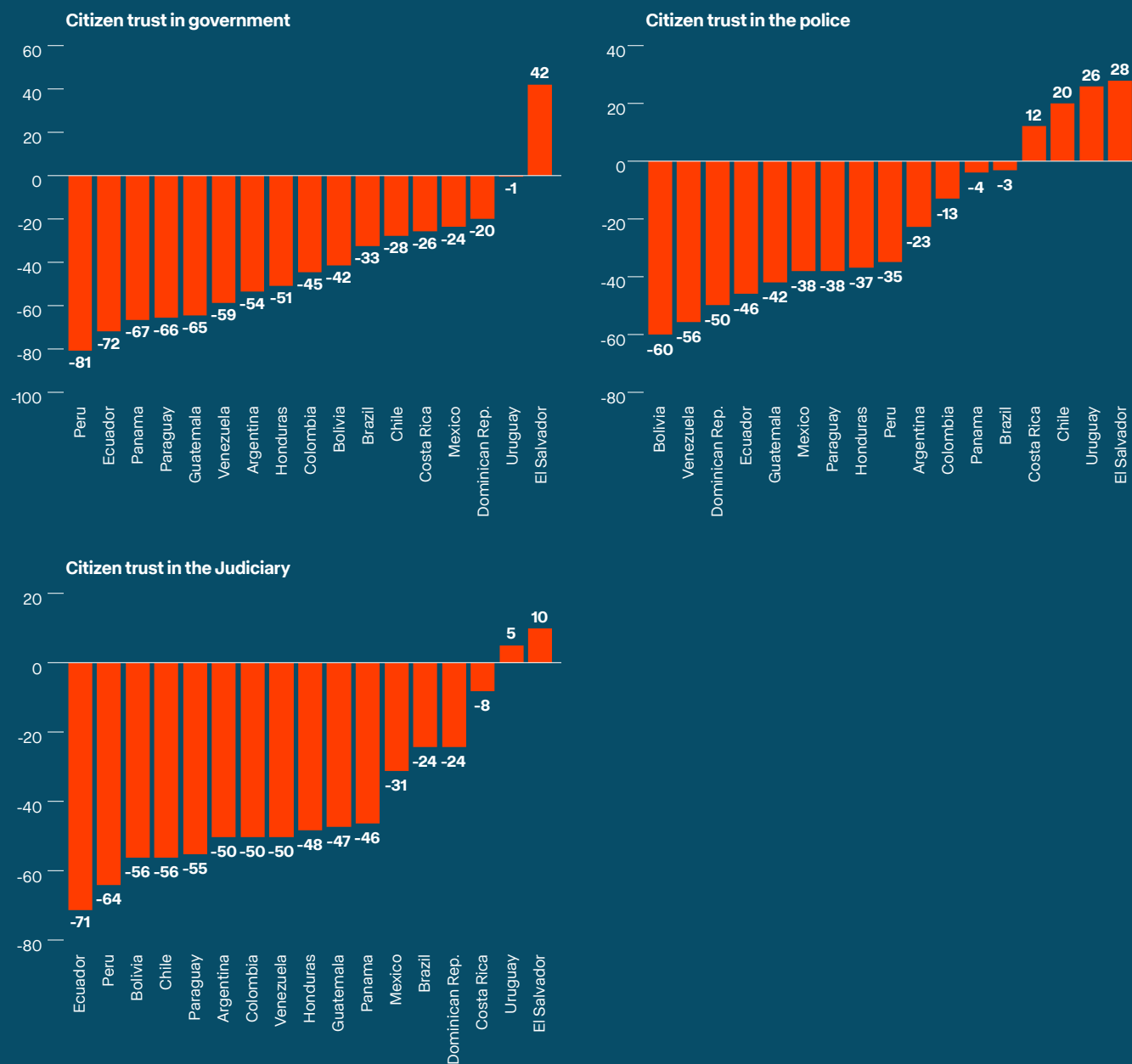
A strong interconnection exists among the rule of law, security, justice, and democratic governance. The rule of law relies on strong and trustworthy institutions that provide the framework for security and justice to function legitimately, effectively, and equitably. The goal is to uphold citizens' rights and freedoms, allowing them to live, make decisions, and carry out their daily activities with confidence.

A judicial system that inspires trust and operates effectively is built on open access to justice, impartiality, the duty to investigate, the right to defense, and due process within reasonable timeframes (IACHR, 2023). Citizen security involves the establishment, reinforcement, and protection of democratic civil order by eliminating threats of violence and fostering safe and peaceful coexistence (UNDP, 2013). A weak rule of law fails to guarantee that justice functions independently,

impartially, and transparently. This fosters distrust in institutions, discourages cooperation with authorities and adherence to the law, and ultimately contributes to insecurity and social fragmentation.

Citizen trust in government institutions remains low across LAC (see Graph 14). According to the Latinobarómetro survey (2023), only citizens in El Salvador reported confidence in their government. In contrast, trust levels in other countries are significantly lower, ranging from minimal to nonexistent. Police forces and the judiciary are no exception. Four countries—Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Uruguay—record comparatively higher levels of trust in police institutions, while El Salvador and Uruguay stand out with the highest trust ratings for the judiciary.

— Graph 14
Citizen trust in institutions (2023)



Source: Latinobarómetro [2023].

Satisfaction is an indicator used to measure public sector performance from the perspective of service users, in this case, citizens. According to Gallup (2023), only 38% of Latin American and Caribbean citizens expressed trust in the judicial system in 2022, a significantly lower percentage compared to trust in the education system (66%) and healthcare system (53%). These differences underscore a notable lack of citizen confidence in the judicial system's effectiveness.

Overall, the security and justice ecosystem in LAC generates low levels of trust and is widely perceived as ineffective. Several factors contribute to this outcome. The World Justice Project's (WJP) Rule of Law Index provides detailed insights into how countries and jurisdictions adhere to the rule of law in practice, facilitating regional and global comparisons. Graph 15 illustrates the stark contrast between ratings obtained by LAC countries and those of Europe and North America.

The "civil justice" component evaluates whether the system is accessible and affordable, impartial, and free of corruption, allowing citizens to resolve disputes peacefully and effectively. The average rating for LAC (0.47) is nearly identical to Hungary's score (0.46), which is the lowest-ranked European country; only Uruguay surpasses the average for the European and North American countries considered (see Graph). In line with citizen perceptions, LAC countries generally receive low scores across all evaluated dimensions.

The "criminal justice" component assesses the effectiveness of criminal justice systems, including the police, lawyers, prosecutors, judges, and prison officials. In this dimension, the LAC average score (0.38) falls significantly below Bulgaria's (0.45), the lowest-scoring European country; no LAC country included surpasses the European and North American average. The Bahamas receives the highest score among LAC countries considered (0.58), yet remains substantially below the European and North American average (see Graph 15).

According to the latest report by Transparency International (2023), a lack of judicial independence and weak rule of law contribute to widespread impunity throughout the Americas. In 2002, only 28% of Latin Americans expressed confidence in judicial impartiality, a figure that decreased to 23% by 2020. When asked whether the judicial system punishes the guilty regardless of their identity, 63% of the region's citizens disagreed or strongly disagreed. In other words, citizens distrust the impartiality of the judicial system and feel unequal before the law. Indeed, 80% of Latin Americans perceive their national justice systems as unjust or very unjust. Although trust in the judiciary showed slight improvement between 2020 and 2023, the historical trend reveals an overall decline from 36% in 1995 to 29% in 2023 (Latinobarómetro 1995–2023) (see Graph 16).

The impunity index measures the exercise of power without accountability, which can manifest as the commission of crimes without punishment. It is built on five key dimensions: irresponsible governance, human rights abuse, economic exploitation, conflict and violence, and environmental degradation. Each dimension is assessed using a set of statistical indicators drawn from various credible sources. Graph 17 presents the results for countries in LAC and Europe. Only Uruguay (1.17) and Saint Kitts and Nevis (1.18) score better than the European average (1.20), which includes Eastern European countries. Meanwhile, 95% of European countries score below (better than) the LAC regional average (2.20).

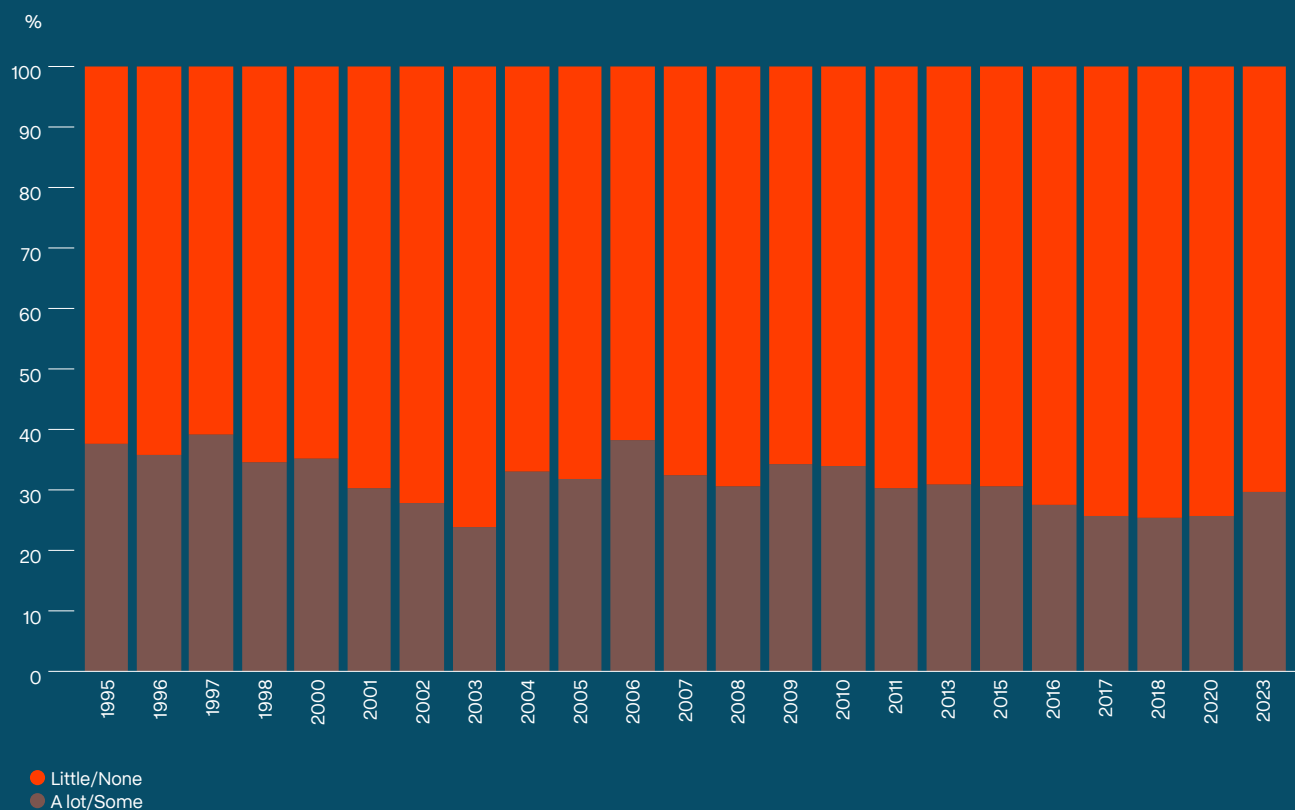
The security and justice ecosystem in LAC exhibits structural fragility, fostering low levels of citizen trust and perceptions of inefficiency. Distrust in judicial and security institutions stems from profound issues such as insufficient institutional independence, widespread impunity, and perceived inequalities before the law. These challenges not only erode institutional legitimacy but also undermine social cohesion and restrict state capacity to effectively respond to growing crime and violence.

— Graph 15
Components of the Rule of Law Index 2024



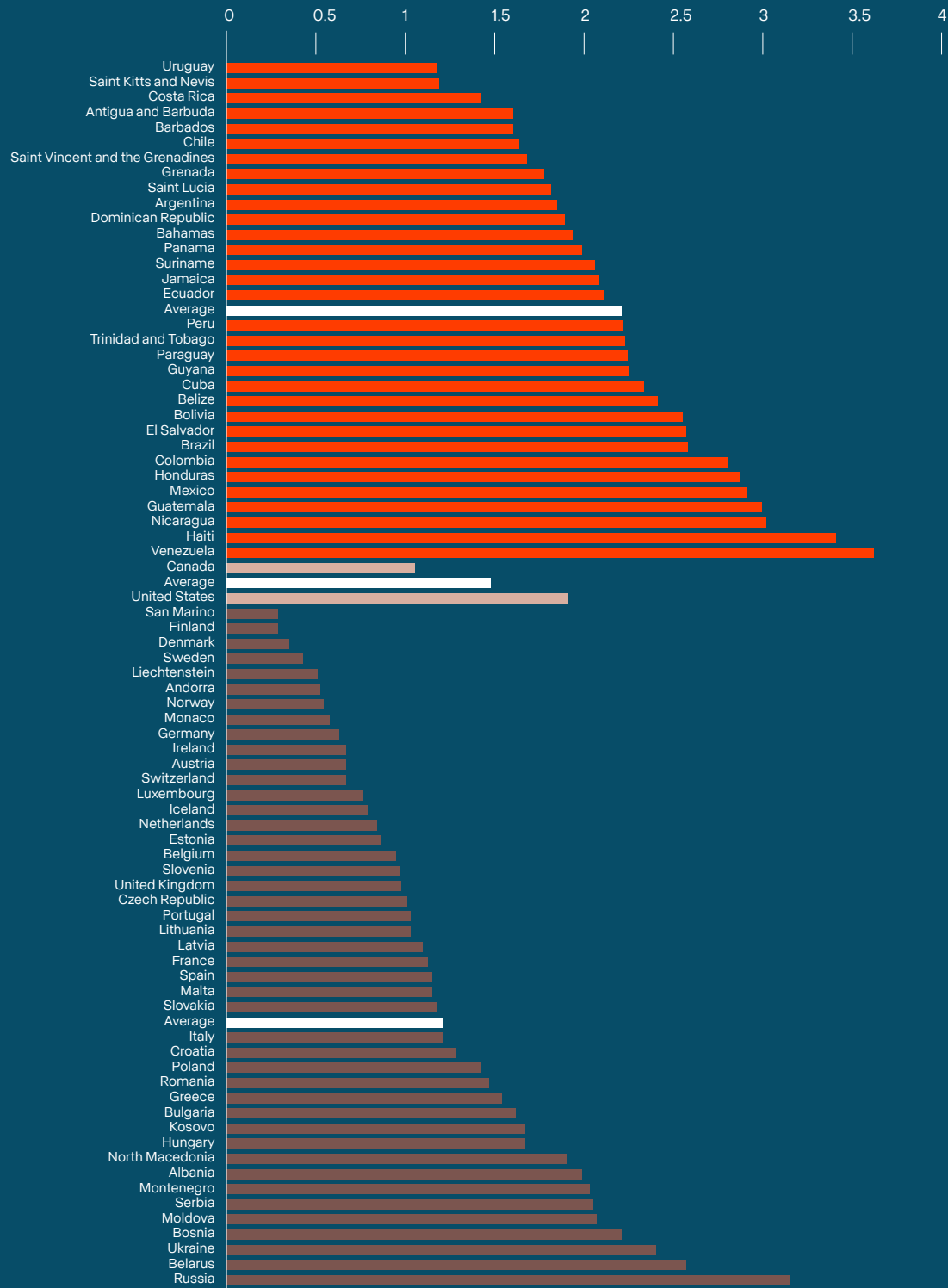
Source: State of Law Index, World Justice Program (2024).

— Graph 16
Citizen trust in the judiciary (1995–2023)



Source: Latinobarómetro (1995–2023).

— Graph 17
Impunity Index



Overall, the institutional ecosystem of justice and security across the region offers significant room for improvement. Its various weaknesses not only limit effectiveness and credibility but also constitute a clear obstacle to economic and social development. Moreover, these deficiencies undermine democratic governance, making it essential to address them without delay. Strategically, tackling citizen distrust in justice and security institutions involves improving operational efficiency, establishing structures that ensure accountability, impartial and accessible justice, and fostering coordinated responses across multiple

sectors and government levels. Restoring citizen trust would not only enhance the role of justice institutions but would also contribute to sustainable development and a strengthened rule of law.

The following section examines the region's security and justice ecosystem in greater depth. It proposes approaches that integrate institutional strengthening, enhanced transparency, and multilateral coordination to establish a governance framework capable of meeting security needs in a legitimate and sustainable manner.

— Prevention and protection

Prevention and protection form the foundation of a sustainable security system. However, in LAC, these tools have not been prioritized as central pillars of security policies. Instead, the predominant approach often emphasizes legitimate state control and repression measures, as they provide the most immediate and visible responses to crime. Yet, while state control is both legitimate and necessary in many situations, it cannot replace the transformative impact of a strong preventive strategy. **At its core, prevention is a proactive and sustainable approach that mitigates risk factors and strengthens protective measures to reduce violence and crime in the long run.**

The state has an ethical and social duty to implement evidence-based prevention policies aligned with international best practices, as these address the root causes of crime rather than merely reacting to its effects. However, prevention programs in LAC have historically been limited and fragmented. While some countries have taken steps in this direction through early intervention programs, these initiatives are often isolated, lack sustainable funding, and are not developed within the framework of a comprehensive and continuous public policy. A lack of resources, inefficient institutional coordination, and limited community engagement remain significant barriers to implementing prevention as a central approach across the region.

To build an effective and sustainable strategy, prevention must be integrated at all levels of intervention. This requires developing preventive policies and programs in key areas such as schools, neighborhoods, families, and communities. Prevention must not only be considered in the initial design of public policies but also be embedded throughout their implementation and continuously evaluated. A truly comprehensive preventive approach demands strategies that simultaneously address both risk and protective factors—mitigating social exclusion, lack of educational and employment opportunities, domestic violence, and the weakening of community ties, while also reinforcing protective elements such as access to inclusive, high-quality education, job creation, community development, and active citizen participation.

— Box 5

TOC as a threat to democratic governance

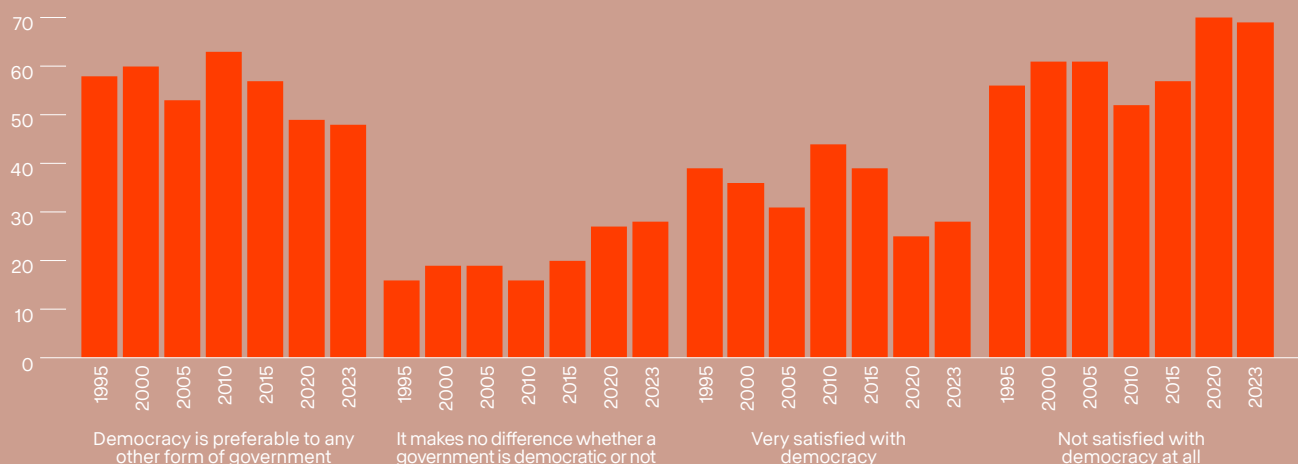
According to *The Economist's* 2023 Democracy Index, the global average democracy score declined from 5.29 in 2022 to 5.23 in 2023. In LAC, the decline was even more pronounced, with an 11% drop over the same period (Democracy Index, 2023). One of the key factors behind this decline is the high level of regional crime, particularly linked to drug trafficking and TOC.

An analysis of public support for democracy as a form of government in LAC between 1995 and 2023 shows a 10-percentage-point drop in support. Meanwhile, indifference toward democracy has risen by 12 percentage points during the same period.

At the same time, the percentage of people who say they are very satisfied with democracy has fallen by 11 points, while those who say they are not satisfied at all has increased by 13%.

TOC, by driving and controlling criminal markets, wields enormous coercive power and has the potential to corrode government institutions, eroding public trust in democratic governance. States often find themselves engaged in an asymmetrical struggle to maintain order and security; when they fail to deliver results, this dynamic fuels public disillusionment with democracy and a turn toward authoritarian governments.

What do Latin Americans think about democracy?



— Box 6

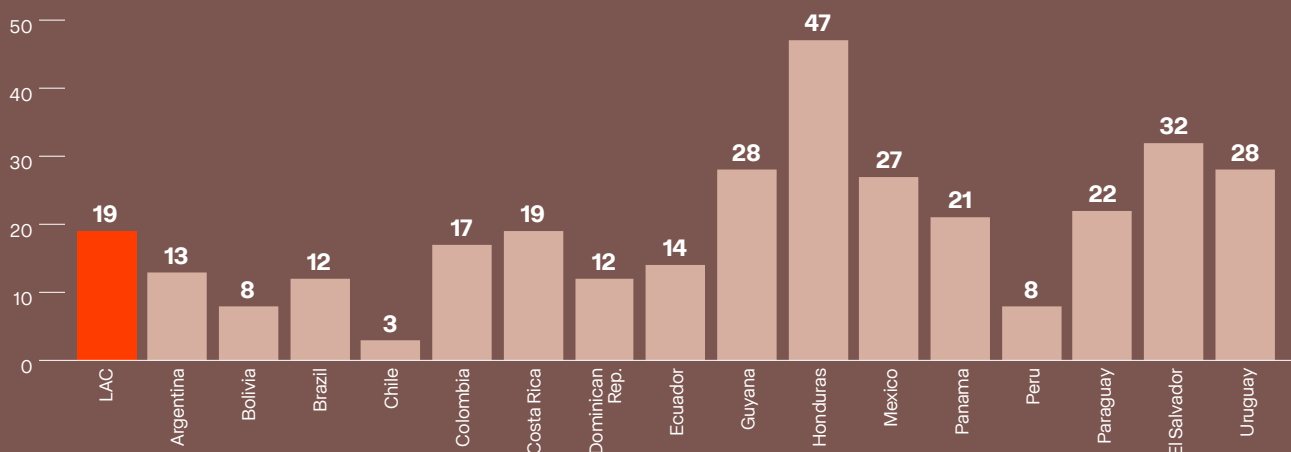
Low capacity of the education system to retain youth

One of the region's main challenges is the high rate of school dropout and the limited capacity of the formal education system to keep young people in the classroom. While primary school completion rates in LAC exceed 90%, four out of ten young people do not finish secondary education. Additionally, 19% of youth aged 18 to 24 are not enrolled at any educational level and have not completed high school. The countries with the highest school dropout rates are Mexico, Guyana, Uruguay, El Salvador, and Honduras.

Dropping out of school not only limits the personal and professional development of young people and their future access to opportunities—it also increases their exposure to social vulnerability. Youth who leave the education system often become targets for recruitment by criminal organizations, raising their risk of becoming involved in illicit activities.

Promoting school retention strategies is essential to the preventive pillar of the security ecosystem, ensuring that more young people complete their education and gain access to better life opportunities.

Youth school dropout rate, ages 8–24, circa 2021 (%)



Source: Arias et al. (2024). Note: For Chile and Mexico, data correspond to 2020; for Honduras and Panama, to 2019.

Within the educational sphere, for example, prevention programs should focus on reducing violence and fostering safe, inclusive, and intimidation-free learning environments. In this context, early intervention programs not only support the development of socioemotional skills among young people but also serve as key tools for preventing youth violence and antisocial behaviors. At the community and neighborhood level, effective interventions should include the development of safe public spaces, the promotion of recreational and cultural activities that strengthen social cohesion, and the establishment of support networks to prevent domestic violence and improve overall community well-being.

Incorporating gender and diversity policies into prevention programs is essential to effectively addressing the region's specific realities. The state is responsible for promoting women's participation in violence prevention, both in policy formulation and through their involvement in security forces and community intervention organizations. **Increasing women's leadership roles within public security institutions and local communities contributes to a more comprehensive manner of addressing gender-based violence and other social issues that disproportionately affect women and vulnerable populations.** A well-implemented gender and diversity approach ensures

that prevention and protection efforts are more effective, responsive, and aligned with the needs of all citizens.

Prevention and protection are complementary concepts within the security ecosystem, though each addresses distinct objectives. Prevention aims to anticipate and mitigate structural and situational factors that facilitate crime by addressing social, economic, and environmental risk factors through integrated public policies and community actions. Protection, on the other hand, seeks to ensure the immediate safety of individuals and communities against existing threats through surveillance, deterrence, and operational responses.

When prevention and protection are recognized as fundamental pillars in public policy design, they can create the conditions for a more just and secure society. Implementing strategies that mitigate risk factors and strengthen protective factors not only leads to a sustained reduction in crime but also promotes a society that upholds human rights, equity and inclusive social development. **By prioritizing prevention, the state fulfills its ethical and social responsibility to protect its citizens and foster an environment where human development and social cohesion serve as the true drivers of public safety.**

— Police action, criminal investigation, and combating transnational organized crime

Public security in LAC requires modernized and strengthened police forces capable of tackling both common crime and complex TOC networks. A well-equipped and highly trained police force is essential for conducting effective criminal investigations—not only to solve crimes and hold offenders accountable but also to build citizen trust in institutions. Addressing threats such as drug trafficking, illegal mining, and human trafficking necessitates continuous upgrades in advanced technology and personnel training in best investigative practices. The ability to identify criminal patterns, rapidly

share intelligence, and collaborate with international agencies is critical to dismantling transnational criminal networks. A modern, professional police force not only protects communities but also plays a key role in combating organized crime, contributing to regional stability and sustainable development.

Trust and efficiency in the region's police forces

Only 52% of the LAC population say they trust the police, significantly less than in other global regions (Gallup, 2023). In countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Peru, trust in police institutions falls below the global average, with all reporting levels under 50% (Ipsos, 2023). This lack of trust is a critical issue in the region, driven by perceptions of inefficiency and widespread corruption within police forces. Public confidence in the police's ability to effectively solve crimes remains low; for instance, the percentage of homicides solved—where perpetrators are identified and punished—is minimal.

Adding to this distrust is the limited representation of women in police forces, at just 20%, primarily in lower-ranking positions. Increasing women's presence in active and leadership roles not only broadens institutional perspectives but has also been shown to improve police responsiveness and effectiveness, particularly in addressing gender-based and domestic violence.

Decentralization of security forces in LAC¹²

Security decentralization has led to municipal-level responsibility, resulting in local security entities such as community and municipal police forces in countries like Argentina and Brazil. The organization, administration, and responsibilities of these security forces vary significantly across countries in the region, reflecting differences in their underlying political systems (see Table 3).

These decentralized institutions aim to enhance crime prevention through community proximity and the visible presence of municipal authority. However, these decentralized models have faced challenges including fragmentation, inconsistent policy implementation,

and intergovernmental conflicts. International experience, such as in South Korea, demonstrates that decentralization can improve police responsiveness but also highlights challenges in coordination and corruption control.

In LAC, these challenges are particularly evident in Mexico, where decentralization has fragmented the management and response to organized crime, creating disparities in how local authorities address complex criminal organizations. Efforts at police decentralization in Argentina and Brazil further illustrate how political shifts can destabilize local security initiatives, underscoring the need for consensus and continuity in policy implementation at the subnational level.

At the regional level, inter-institutional cooperation and the strengthening of local governments' administrative capacities are crucial for effectively implementing decentralized security policies. However, evidence shows that decentralization in LAC has been inconsistent, producing disparate outcomes between and within countries, where differences in resources and political capacities shape the outcomes of local security policies.

Moreover, decentralization highlights the necessity of establishing coherent and coordinated governance models for security, including clear coordination and accountability mechanisms across government levels. It is also critical for local governments to develop specialized capacities in crime prevention and conflict management, supported by rigorous diagnostics and reliable data to underpin their strategies.

¹² Information primarily sourced from the consultancy report for CAF (2023), *Update and Strategic Positioning of the CAF Citizen Security Agenda*, pp. 10–19.

— Table 3
Security forces dedicated to public safety in Latin America

Country	Political System	Administrative Organization	Security Forces
Argentina	Presidential Republic	Federal	National Gendarmerie / Airport Security Police / Argentine Naval Prefecture / Federal Police / Provincial Police / Municipal Police
Bolivia	Presidential Republic	Unitary	National Police / Special Force to Fight Drug Trafficking / Municipal Guards
Brazil	Presidential Republic	Federal	Federal Police / State Police / Municipal Guards
Belize	Constitutional Monarchy (Parliamentary)	Unitary	National Police Force
Chile	Presidential Republic	Unitary	Carabineros / Investigative Police / Gendarmerie / Citizen Security
Colombia	Presidential Republic	Federal	National Navy of Colombia / National Police of Colombia / Metropolitan Police
Costa Rica	Presidential Republic	Unitary	Public Force of Costa Rica / Migration and Immigration Police / Penitentiary Police / Traffic Police / Fiscal Control Police
Ecuador	Presidential Republic	Unitary	National Police / Judicial Police
El Salvador	Presidential Republic	Unitary	National Civil Police
Guatemala	Presidential Republic	Unitary	National Civil Police
Honduras	Presidential Republic	Unitary	National Police / Military Police for Public Order
Mexico	Presidential Republic	Federal	Secretariat of the Navy / Secretariat of National Defense / Federal Ministerial Police / Federal Police / State Police / Municipal Police
Nicaragua	Presidential Republic	Unitary	National Police of Nicaragua
Panama	Presidential Republic	Unitary	National Police / Municipal Police
Paraguay	Presidential Republic	Unitary	National Police / Fiscal Police / Serenazgo (Community Safety Force)
Peru	Presidential Republic	Unitary	National Police
Uruguay	Presidential Republic	Unitary	National Police
Venezuela	Presidential Republic	Federal	Bolivarian National Police / Scientific, Criminal, and Forensic Investigations Corps (CICPC) / Bolivarian National Guard / Municipal Police

Source: Consulting report for CAF (2023). Strategic update and positioning of CAF's Citizen Security Agenda.

Strengthening and modernizing police forces

As regional police forces foster closer ties with the community, their legitimacy and effectiveness improve (CAF, 2014). Institutional strengthening is vital not only for local crime control and prevention but also for addressing the transnational criminal networks operating throughout the region. Multi-level cooperation involving various countries and agencies facilitates a coordinated approach to these complex threats and promotes the exchange of information and resources among neighboring countries. Locally, transparency and accountability are essential for building public trust and encouraging cooperation between communities and law enforcement agencies.

In this modernization process, ongoing police training is also crucial. Police forces that are well-trained and up-to-date on investigative methods and intervention strategies—both preventive and enforcement-focused—are more effective in carrying out their duties and enhancing the community's perception of security. Proper training also helps reduce incidents of corruption and abuse of power, two critical issues that often undermine citizen trust in law enforcement.

The success of any police modernization and strengthening effort in LAC depends on a holistic vision of security that incorporates the relationship between policing and the community. In recent decades, community-oriented policing has emerged as the most significant innovation in police practices compared to the traditional model (CAF, 2014).

The effectiveness of police strategies lies in the implementation of advanced technologies and operational methodologies, as well as in the ability of police forces to build trust-based relationships with citizens. For this reason, public safety policies must prioritize not only operational efficiency but also transparency and accountability. A modern, well-structured police force not only protects communities from crime but also plays a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and legitimizing the region's justice system.

Effective deterrence: Targeted policing and public safety outcomes

Evidence suggests that deterrence is the most effective mechanism for crime reduction (CAF, 2014). In LAC, effective policing strategies require approaches such as hotspot policing, which focuses resources on high-crime areas, and the strengthening of community-oriented policing, which fosters collaboration with residents to build trust and cooperation. These strategies have proven effective in multiple regions, not only by reducing crime in targeted areas but also by involving communities in policing efforts. This strengthens institutional legitimacy and fosters a collective sense of security.

Police action and technology

Technological innovations have significantly reshaped crime prevention and control strategies. Byrne and Marx (2011) classify these innovations into two categories: hard technologies, which include physical equipment, devices, and gear; and soft technologies, which involve the strategic use of information (CAF, 2014). The adoption of technological innovations represents a key opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of police forces in crime prevention and control across LAC. However, in the region, these technologies are often introduced through limited pilot programs without a clear strategy for broader integration. Hard technologies (CAF, 2014)—such as protective gear for officers, advanced weaponry, riot control equipment, and mobile data centers—provide critical infrastructure for security. They also include surveillance systems, voice recognition technology in patrol vehicles, and biometric tools that facilitate the rapid identification of individuals. These technologies are essential for strengthening law enforcement's immediate response capabilities in critical situations.

Simultaneously, soft technologies (CAF, 2014)—including crime mapping to identify hotspots, analysis of criminal patterns, and databases containing criminal records—are indispensable for strategic operational planning. In this context, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a valuable asset, enabling the analysis of complex data and facilitating the identification of potential offenders through watchlists. Additionally, communication tracking systems and gunshot detection devices extend the scope of real-time surveillance.

For these innovations to have a meaningful impact, a holistic approach that integrates them seamlessly into daily operations and promotes interagency collaboration is essential. A comprehensive implementation strategy could transform security in LAC, providing a more robust foundation to address current criminal threats effectively.

Policing and the evolving crime paradigm: How to address TOC

To tackle the evolving security paradigm in LAC, police forces must prepare to confront the increasing threat posed by TOC. Criminal networks operating across multiple territories and illicit markets—such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and arms smuggling—impose significant demands on law enforcement agencies. These challenges require extensive adaptations in technical capabilities, human resources, technological tools, and, crucially, institutional integrity.

Police forces must have advanced technological tools at their disposal, including data analytics systems and real-time surveillance capabilities, as well as personnel highly trained in specialized criminal investigations. International cooperation is also indispensable for effectively combating complex criminal networks that transcend borders. Thus, law enforcement agencies need to master collaboration procedures and protocols enabling effective information-sharing and resource exchanges with other countries and international organizations.

Moreover, reinforcing integrity and transparency within police institutions is essential to gaining citizens' trust. A culture of accountability reduces risks associated with corruption and abuse of power, issues that have historically undermined many security forces across the region. Furthermore, a well-structured police force committed to high ethical standards not only protects communities from criminality but also serves as a cornerstone for strengthening justice systems.

Ultimately, modernizing and professionalizing police forces in LAC requires a strategic vision that integrates technological resources, advanced human capabilities, and robust institutional ethics to effectively respond to current threats and uphold the legitimacy of the region's security institutions.

Efficiency in criminal investigation: A strategic pillar for security

Improving criminal investigative work in LAC is fundamental to complement crime prevention efforts. While preventing crime from occurring remains essential, the region faces a critical challenge: ensuring that, once crimes are committed, they are investigated promptly, accurately, and justly. Efficient criminal investigations not only enable authorities to identify perpetrators and deliver justice but also strengthen public perceptions of security and trust in institutions. When citizens perceive that the criminal justice system identifies and penalizes those responsible, it reinforces credibility in the state and its security agencies and serves as a deterrent for potential offenders.

To achieve significant improvements in criminal investigations, LAC must adopt international best practices and invest in advanced technologies that streamline and optimize investigative processes. The implementation of biometric identification systems, sophisticated data analysis software, artificial intelligence (AI), and interconnected criminal record databases can revolutionize criminal investigations, facilitating the detection of patterns and connections among cases and perpetrators. Additionally, technologies such as voice

recognition systems, geolocation tracking, and hotspot mapping are essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of the criminal landscape, optimizing investigative efforts, and enabling more strategic interventions.

It is equally crucial to ensure that police personnel are highly trained in these technological tools so that they

can use them effectively. Prioritizing continuous training will keep criminal investigation professionals up to date with the latest techniques in evidence collection and analysis. With these improvements, LAC can strengthen its crime response capabilities, establishing a criminal investigation system that fosters public confidence and provides a solid foundation for the administration of justice across the region.

— Justice system

The ability to sanction offenders under the rule of law and with full respect for human rights is not only essential for crime deterrence but also for strengthening the rule of law itself, as it helps to establish a credible and effective justice system. However, in LAC, high levels of impunity erode citizen confidence in judicial institutions, reinforcing perceptions of insecurity and weakening the legitimacy of the justice system. This issue—rooted in the inability to properly investigate, resolve, and sanction crimes—demands a profound modernization and strengthening of the region’s judicial systems. Such modernization is not merely a matter of infrastructure and technological resources; it also requires a firm state commitment to ensuring adequate funding and the development of institutional capacities.

Judicial modernization must focus on improving the efficiency and transparency of legal processes, from investigation and prosecution to sentencing and enforcement. Promoting more effective judicial practices should include the integration of advanced technologies for case management, such as digital platforms that allow real-time tracking of legal files and tools that enhance resource administration. These innovations can significantly expedite judicial processes and alleviate the backlog of unresolved cases—a critical bottleneck in many LAC judicial systems.

Additionally, continuous training for judicial personnel is essential to ensure that judges, prosecutors, and public defenders are well-versed in modern investigative and analytical tools. This training should cover new technologies, digital evidence management, and alternative dispute resolution techniques. Keeping

judicial operators up to date enables them to handle complex cases—such as those involving organized crime and financial offenses—fairly and efficiently. Moreover, integrating a human rights perspective into judicial and prosecutorial training is crucial for fostering an impartial system that upholds individual rights.

The implementation of monitoring and evaluation systems within judicial processes is another essential strategy for assessing efficiency and making real-time adjustments. Developing specific performance indicators—such as case resolution times, conviction rates, and the quality of judicial rulings—allows justice systems to identify weaknesses and prioritize areas for improvement. Developing these monitoring mechanisms is critical for generating reliable data on judicial performance and enhancing accountability to the public.

Ultimately, modernizing and strengthening LAC’s judicial systems not only has the potential to reduce impunity and improve perceptions of security but is also essential to ensuring equitable and effective access to justice. A justice system that enforces laws transparently, effectively, and proportionally—while respecting the rights of all involved—not only reinforces institutional legitimacy but also fosters a culture of legal compliance and strengthens the region’s social contract.

— Sentence execution: Prison systems

Graph 18 presents incarceration rates—measured as the number of persons deprived of liberty (PDL) in prisons, penal institutions, or correctional facilities—across LAC for the years 2021–2022. El Salvador has the highest rate in the region: 623.98 per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Dominica [519.68] and Panama [507.08]. These figures are significantly higher than the regional average [291.15], reflecting elevated incarceration levels in several countries.

Compared to other global regions, LAC has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, second only to North America. According to data from the UNODC¹³ and the World Prison Brief, the Americas¹⁴—encompassing both Latin America and North America—have an average incarceration rate of 346 per 100,000 inhabitants, 2.4 times the global average of 142. In contrast, regions such as Europe and Asia report substantially lower rates, with averages of 155 and 111 per 100,000 inhabitants, respectively. These differences reflect not only divergent criminal justice policies but also variations in sentencing practices and, above all, the overuse of pretrial detention. In contexts of relatively weak judicial systems, excessive reliance on preventive imprisonment leads to high levels of overcrowding in prisons.

The prison system in LAC faces a host of challenges, including overcrowding, violence within facilities, and the control of prisons by criminal organizations. These conditions exacerbate recidivism and reinforce criminal networks both inside and outside prison walls. The rehabilitation of inmates and the reintegration of people deprived of liberty into society are essential to reducing reoffending and strengthening social cohesion. However, to be effective, these efforts require a prison system that meets basic standards of dignity and respect for human rights.

These challenges faced by the prison system in LAC hinder its ability to fulfill its rehabilitative and security functions. Among these, overcrowding stands out, as poor prison conditions can turn facilities into criminogenic environments where criminal skills and networks are developed [CAF, 2014]. **In-prison violence and the control of penitentiary facilities by criminal organizations also find fertile ground in these deficient conditions, creating a setting conducive to illicit activities.**

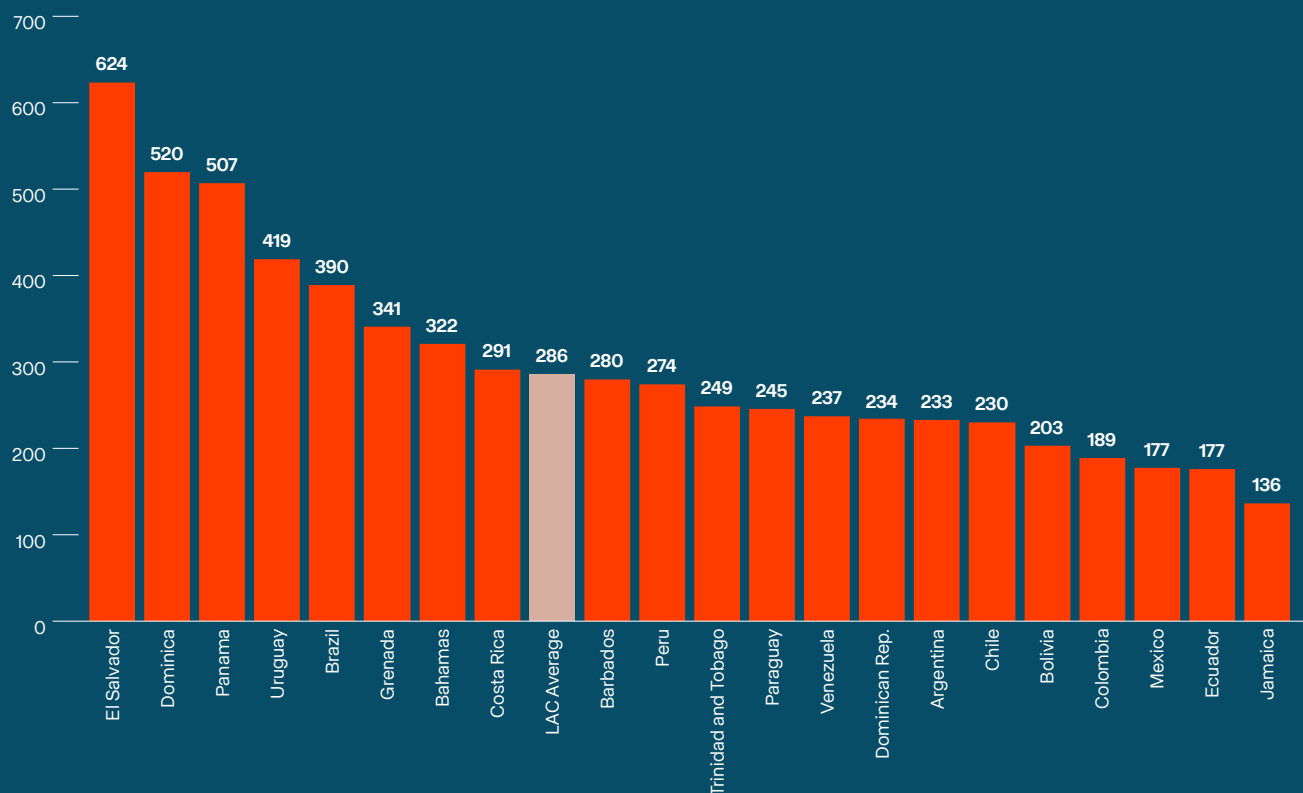
These conditions create crime-inducing or criminogenic environments that strengthen criminal networks both inside and outside prisons, and they worsen the problem of recidivism. Rather than deterring crime, these facilities become spaces that facilitate the expansion of organized crime. Deficiencies in infrastructure and overcrowding in prison facilities contribute to the deterioration of inmates and undermine any efforts toward rehabilitation.

The effectiveness of prison rehabilitation programs is limited by budget constraints and poor living conditions [CAF, 2014]. **While rehabilitation and reintegration are critical to reducing recidivism and fostering social cohesion, they are difficult to implement under precarious prison conditions.** Limited funding and inadequate prison conditions severely undermine reintegration programs, as inmates often lack the psychological and social support necessary to recover from their experience within the penal system. Additionally, insufficient budget allocations for vocational training and education programs reduce opportunities for inmates to acquire skills that would ease their productive and social reintegration upon release.

13 United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC). People in prison. <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-prisons-persons-held>

14 Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research (ICPR), Birkbeck, University of London. World Prison Brief. <https://www.prisonstudies.org>.

— Graph 18.
**Persons deprived of liberty in prisons,
penal institutions, or correctional facilities in LAC,
per 100,000 inhabitants (2021–2022)**



Source: UNODC (2024). Persons Held in Prisons, Penal or Correctional Institutions.
Retrieved October 15, 2024, from <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-prisons-persons-held>.

It is also essential to promote the modernization of prison infrastructure in LAC, supporting the creation of segmented spaces that are safe and dignified, equipped with effective measures to isolate organized crime from the outside, and conducive to rehabilitation. Equally

important is the promotion of education and vocational training programs within detention centers, aimed at providing inmates with the tools they need for successful social reintegration. However, these efforts also depend on increased budget allocations to allow rehabilitation programs to expand and reach a greater number of individuals. It is critical that job training, formal education, and addiction treatment programs receive adequate funding so that inmates have a real opportunity to rebuild their lives outside the world of crime.

Prison management must also improve staff training, equipping personnel with specific skills related to rehabilitation, human rights, and the control of criminal activities within prisons.

International cooperation is also fundamental, given that transnational criminal networks are often able to maintain communication and financial flows from within prison walls. Collaboration with other countries can strengthen justice policies and control mechanisms within LAC's prison systems, helping to promote a safer environment that does not perpetuate criminal activity.

Transforming the prison system is essential to building a justice model that truly rehabilitates and protects society—one in which prisons are no longer merely a link in the chain of crime.

— Support and rehabilitation: Victim assistance and reintegration of offenders

Support and rehabilitation represent the final link in the public security chain in LAC. **Historically, victim assistance has been a neglected priority in the region, where institutional responses to crime have focused heavily on offender control and punishment, while offering far less attention to the repair and comprehensive support needed by those directly affected.** This narrow approach has left a significant gap in services for victims of crime, who often require psychological and social support, as well as legal assistance, to overcome trauma and rebuild trust in public institutions.

Victim assistance is a critical component of a justice system that is inclusive and restorative. It is therefore essential to promote the implementation of comprehensive programs that provide psychological care, legal accompaniment, and social counseling, while also fostering community support networks for victims. These services are key to helping affected individuals recover emotionally and psychologically, restore their sense of personal safety, and regain confidence in the justice system. Legal support also enables victims to understand and participate in judicial processes,

reducing their sense of institutional abandonment and reinforcing their pursuit of justice. These efforts additionally strengthen community ties, rebuild the social fabric disrupted by crime, and reinforce cohesion in vulnerable environments.

At the same time, the rehabilitation of offenders is a crucial process that completes the public security cycle by focusing on reducing recidivism and supporting the social reintegration of those who have served their sentences. Promoting vocational training, formal education, and addiction treatment programs are fundamental pillars of this reintegration process. Vocational training equips former offenders with practical skills and improves their employability, reducing the likelihood of returning to criminal activity. Formal education, in turn, opens pathways for personal and professional growth, empowering individuals to become active and responsible members of their communities.

Addiction treatment—another essential component—addresses a common underlying cause of recidivism and criminal behavior. It helps individuals confront personal challenges and develop healthier coping strategies for rejoining society. **Effective reintegration not only lowers the risk of reoffending but also creates opportunities for individuals to become productive citizens who can contribute to the stability and prosperity of their communities.** In this sense, rehabilitation benefits not only those directly involved, but also society as a whole

by fostering a virtuous cycle in which justice and security go hand in hand with social inclusion.

By bringing closure to criminal cases through reintegration and reparation, a sustainable structure is established—one in which prevention, control, and justice coexist with rehabilitation and victim support. This approach not only reinforces public trust in institutions but also helps build a more inclusive and resilient society, where all actors—from victims to former offenders—can find a path forward and contribute positively.

— Strategic analysis: the importance of the cross-cutting pillars of information and evidence, execution, and governance

The effectiveness of the public security chain in LAC depends largely on the implementation of two essential cross-cutting pillars: information and evidence, and execution and governance. These pillars not only support each phase of the chain but also ensure that security policies are grounded in reliable data and implemented efficiently and in a coordinated manner.

1. **The information and evidence pillar** is crucial for understanding crime dynamics and designing public policies that respond to the specific realities of each context. The collection, analysis, and dissemination of security data make it possible to identify patterns of criminal behavior and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. A security system grounded in evidence can proactively adapt to changes in its environment, enabling early identification of risks and better resource allocation. In addition, transparency in data management fosters public trust and strengthens accountability across security and justice institutions.

2. **The execution and governance pillar** is essential to ensure coordination and coherence in the implementation of security policies. A robust governance structure enables the various actors involved in the security chain—from local governments to international organizations and civil society—to work together efficiently. This pillar also promotes the creation of strategic partnerships that prevent duplication of efforts and maximize the impact of available resources. Effective governance involves continuous policy evaluation and the ability to adjust strategies in response to evolving security threats, contributing to a resilient and adaptable security system.

— Moving toward a robust and coordinated justice ecosystem

The institutional ecosystem of security and justice in LAC faces critical challenges across all phases of the public security chain, from prevention to rehabilitation. These shortcomings are largely the result of insufficient coordination, limited transparency, and inadequate resources. Addressing them requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that strengthens every link in the chain, optimizes the use of resources, and encourages institutional collaboration. The cross-cutting pillars of information and evidence, along with execution and governance, are foundational to ensuring that security policies are based on reliable data and implemented coherently, increasing their impact on citizen security.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) emphasizes that access to justice, due process, and impartiality are fundamental to a justice system that is effective and trustworthy. However, current shortcomings in coordination and resources significantly hinder the ability of justice systems to respond fairly and effectively. At the regional level, jurisdictional disparities, legal framework variations, and uneven institutional capacities present major obstacles to the kind of transnational cooperation needed to address transnational organized crime. Corruption and the lack of clear protection mechanisms for frontline personnel further reduce institutional effectiveness and undermine the trust necessary for critical information sharing.

Strengthening the security and justice ecosystem in LAC must prioritize the establishment of collaborative frameworks and the harmonization of procedures to ensure sustained and efficient coordination. A strong justice ecosystem, including institutions equipped with the tools and capacities they need, will be capable of addressing both common crime and TOC, while advancing the region's economic and social development.

Lessons learned in the field of security—

Addressing violence and crime is a fundamental challenge for contemporary societies. Across LAC, hundreds of interventions have been developed to prevent and control crime. Unfortunately, many of these interventions lack sufficiently rigorous impact evaluations to determine whether they have been successful. Even in cases where evidence is available, results are often mixed or highly context-dependent. Nonetheless, the available evidence does point to several key lessons that can help guide the design of future public policies.

High-level, sustained **political leadership** is essential to ensure the success of initiatives from design through implementation. Such leadership not only provides direction and commitment but also guarantees the appropriate allocation of resources and coordination across multiple actors. Security efforts tend to require long-term investment, and the lack of political continuity can interrupt meaningful progress. International experience shows that sustained political will can overcome administrative and bureaucratic barriers, helping to consolidate programs that might otherwise fail due to a lack of ongoing support. Moreover, strong leadership inspires public trust, an essential factor in fostering community engagement.

Policies and programs must be implemented with both sound planning and adaptive capacity. Initial planning should be evidence-based and supported by monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that allow for adjustments based on observed outcomes. Rigid strategies are prone to failure in complex and dynamic environments. For instance, youth violence prevention initiatives that combine educational and employment components tend to be more successful when tailored to the cultural and socioeconomic realities of their target communities. Adaptability also makes it possible to respond to emerging challenges such as the rise in violence linked to

organized crime or the evolving impact of technology on criminal behavior.

Regional and local governments play a key role in implementing security policies. These entities are closer to communities and better positioned to identify specific needs, allowing for more relevant and effective responses. The decentralization of crime prevention strategies can lead to better resource use and promote collaboration among local actors, such as schools, civil society organizations, and businesses. In cities where local governments have led comprehensive security programs—such as public lighting projects or the creation of recreational spaces—significant reductions in crime rates have been recorded. However, the effectiveness of such efforts also depends on their coordination with national-level institutions.

Police institutions must be involved in the design of initiatives that affect their doctrines or day-to-day practices. Police forces are not only implementers of policy but also strategic partners in developing innovative approaches. Involving them from the outset helps ensure that proposals are feasible and that they secure the commitment of those who will carry them out. It also facilitates training and awareness processes needed to align institutional objectives with community needs.

Communication with the public must be ongoing and not focused solely on short-term wins. Security is a topic that generates high expectations, but sustainable results tend to emerge gradually. Transparent communication that explains both progress and challenges also helps manage expectations and avoid frustration. It also engages the community as an active player in crime prevention. Public awareness campaigns that promote citizen reporting and cooperation with authorities have proven effective in strengthening social cohesion and reducing tolerance for

crime. It is crucial to avoid sensationalism and focus on building a realistic, evidence-based narrative of progress.

In the region, few experiences reflect all of these elements, which makes it difficult to identify long-term successful practices. More often, the region has seen multiple initiatives with promising results—even measurable impacts—but sustained only for limited periods. In an effort to develop more tailored and effective program designs, this section provides

a summary of initiatives that have initially received positive evaluations. In some cases, those results may have shifted due to the limited number of rigorous impact assessments and the methodological challenges involved in carrying them out. The goal is not to replicate these programs, but to show that when some of the lessons outlined above are considered, positive outcomes can be achieved within specific contexts and timeframes.

— Prevention

In LAC, prevention has emerged as an essential tool for addressing complex issues such as violence and crime. Educational, community-based, and economic interventions have demonstrated the potential to drive change—particularly among the most affected groups, such as children, adolescents, and women. These strategies not only reduce immediate risks but also help lay the foundation for a more inclusive and safe society.

One of the most prominent pillars in the region has been the implementation of educational programs aimed at preventing gender-based and domestic violence—although results remain limited. For example, the *Haz tu parte* program in El Salvador has worked with children from an early age to promote gender equality and awareness, challenging cultural norms that perpetuate violence (Bando, Hidalgo & Land, 2018).

In the economic sphere, conditional cash transfer programs in Ecuador reduced domestic violence by 6%–7% (Hidrobo, Peterman & Heise, 2016). These initiatives, primarily targeting women in low-income urban areas, strengthened their bargaining power within the household, reduced poverty-related stress, and promoted shared domestic responsibilities. This approach recognizes that addressing structural economic factors is key to reducing violence—although the impact is greater when paired with educational and community-based programs.

Secondary prevention efforts have also shown some progress in the region. In Brazil, police stations dedicated to women reduced femicides by 10%, particularly in areas with higher levels of female education and better infrastructure (Arvate, Cabral, McGahan & Reis, 2022). Similarly, in El Salvador, the *Ciudad Mujer* program—which integrates legal, reproductive health, and economic empowerment services—achieved a 43% increase in service use and a 10% improvement in user satisfaction (Bustelo, Martínez, Pérez & Rodríguez Silva, 2022). Although both projects showed promising outcomes according to evaluations, they were not scaled up nationally and have since lost relevance.

In Peru, Women’s Justice Centers represent an effective model for addressing gender-based violence (Sviatschi & Trako, 2022). Operated mainly by women, these centers have increased the reporting of gender-based crimes by 40%, reflecting greater trust in authorities among victims. They have also contributed to a 10% reduction in domestic violence and femicides. In Colombia, strengthening staff capacity at Family Police Stations (*Comisariías de Familia*) has improved the institutional response to intimate partner violence. Training efforts led to a 7% increase in reporting and fostered greater perceptions of confidentiality (Romero, Peñaranda, Paredes & Aembrister, 2014). Despite these positive findings, both initiatives remained pilot projects and failed to scale or deliver the long-term impact originally envisioned.

Efforts to prevent property crimes have also yielded innovative solutions. Programs such as *Familias en Acción* in Colombia (Camacho & Mejía, 2013) and *Bolsa Família* in Brazil (Chioda, Mello & Soares, 2016) demonstrated positive impacts in reducing theft and robbery by addressing structural poverty. In Colombia, theft from individuals declined by 7.2% and car theft by 1.3% following program payments. In Brazil, criminal activity in school neighborhoods decreased, highlighting how poverty and inequality reduction can transform entire communities. It is worth noting that these impacts were not part of the programs' original design, and their long-term effects remain unknown following the initial evaluations.

Public policies that modify the physical environment have also shown encouraging results. In Pernambuco, Brazil, extending school hours reduced homicide rates among youth, while rural electrification significantly lowered homicide rates in affected areas (Rosa, Bruce & Sarellas, 2022). In São Paulo, implementing dry laws to restrict alcohol sales hours led to a 10% decrease in homicides—demonstrating how regulation can improve safety in vulnerable communities.

Programs aimed at preventing risky behavior among youth have also yielded promising results. In Jamaica, a teacher training initiative based on the *Incredible Years* model reduced behavioral problems in children and improved their social skills both at school and at home

(Baker-Henningham, Scott, Jones & Walker, 2012). In Chile, the extension of the full school day significantly reduced teenage pregnancy and youth involvement in crime—particularly among adolescents from vulnerable backgrounds (Berthelon & Kruger, 2011). While these initiatives did not fully resolve the issue of youth violence, they offer important insights for shaping future policy interventions. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of follow-up efforts that might have consolidated broader or longer-term impacts.

Situational prevention approaches have shown some targeted effectiveness. For instance, expanding full electricity coverage in poor municipalities in Brazil led to a significant reduction in homicides (Arvate, Ortiz Garcia Riiberiro & Portela Souza, 2017). In Chile, increased exposure to sunlight between 7:00 and 9:00 p.m. reduced crime by 20%, suggesting that improvements in ambient lighting can directly reduce certain types of crime (Domínguez & Asahi, 2019).

The use of surveillance cameras is another widely used tool in the region, with mixed results. In Medellín, one study showed that surveillance contributed to a reduction in crime and arrests, with no evidence of displacement to other areas (Tobón, Mejía & Gómez, 2020). The impact was attributed primarily to their deterrent effect, as no significant increases in arrests were recorded and staffing levels remained constant.

— Police and criminal investigation

Latin America faces significant challenges in the realms of security and justice, but it has also served as a testing ground for innovations and reforms aimed at improving the relationship between police forces, the state, and communities. While long-term results remain elusive, several lessons have emerged regarding what has worked in terms of policing interventions and criminal investigations.

One of the most successful strategies has been the use of technology to improve police interactions. In Santa Catarina, Brazil, the use of body-worn cameras proved effective, reducing police use of force by 61.2% and improving the accuracy of police reports (Barbosa, Fetzer, Soto & Souza, 2021). Notably, the reduction in use of force was observed mainly in low-risk situations, according to prior risk assessments. The impact was especially pronounced among less experienced officers, highlighting how a combination of technology and training can transform policing practices.

On the other hand, community policing initiatives have not produced the expected results. In Latin America, these programs—or the way they have been implemented—have often failed to build trust or reduce crime, largely due to structural challenges such as limited resources and high turnover among police leadership. Likewise, place-based interventions and intensified patrols have shown mixed results. In Montevideo, Uruguay, increased police presence in crime hotspots led to a 23% reduction in robberies [Cabrera, Cid & Veneri, 2022], while in Medellín, Colombia, similar strategies reduced vehicle thefts by 11% [Collazos, García, Mejía, Ortega & Tobón, 2019]. The greatest impacts were seen in the least secure areas, particularly in short-term perceptions of safety, vehicle thefts, and assaults. Importantly, no evidence of crime displacement was found; instead, nearby hotspots saw reductions in vehicle thefts, while adjacent non-hotspot areas experienced declines in assaults. However, experiences such as Bogotá's demonstrate that success depends heavily on local context and adaptive planning. In this same vein, Uruguay's Programa de Alta Dedicación Operativa (PADO) stands out for its success in reducing robberies in hotspot areas without displacing crime to surrounding zones [Chainey, Serrano-Berthet & Veneri, 2021].

Coordination in criminal investigations has also proven critical. In Colombia, the implementation of well-trained teams and clearly defined procedures led to a 30% increase in conviction rates for homicide cases. Similarly, in terms of police training, Colombia's *Plan Cuadrantes* reduced homicides by 22% through the introduction of clear patrol protocols and comprehensive officer training [Collazos et al., 2020]. Professionalization and the assignment of clear responsibilities were key factors in achieving positive outcomes, particularly in high-crime areas.

Targeted police patrol strategies in areas with high homicide rates have also shown significant results. In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Pacifying Police Units [PPU] led to a substantial reduction in killings committed by police

officers in the line of duty [Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco & Melo, 2020]. The study emphasizes that for the state to regain territorial control, community support is essential, something that is unlikely when criminal leaders hold more power than the police. The PPUs also reduced fatal shootings by over 40% and lowered common crime in 60% of the areas where they were deployed. However, failure in the remaining 40% and the displacement of crime highlight the limitations of militarized strategies.

Improving criminal information systems has also emerged as a promising initiative. Experiences in Minas Gerais and São Paulo, Brazil, have shown positive results in reducing property and violent crimes [Soares & Viveiros, 2010]. The study examined the impact of the IGESP program in Minas Gerais, which fosters cooperation and coordination between civil and military police forces through information management systems—similar to the COMPSTAT model—enabling more effective crime response. The findings showed a 24% reduction in property crimes and a 13% reduction in crimes against people.

Finally, comprehensive security policies have proven essential for achieving sustainable results. Brazil's *Estado Presente* program combined police presence, institutional coordination, and technology to reduce homicides [Cerqueira, Neto, Coelho & Accioly Lins, 2020]. The main findings suggest that without Espírito Santo's prison system reform and the implementation of *Estado Presente*, the number of homicides in the state would not have decreased by 10.2%—it would have increased by 29% between 2010 and 2014. In 2014 alone, the homicide rate would have been 20.3% higher than what was observed. Statistically, it is estimated that between 2010 and 2014, the policy in Espírito Santo contributed to saving 1,711 lives.

— Justice system

The impact of judicial performance on reducing violent crime has been a critical issue in the context of Brazil—a country with alarmingly high homicide rates and a judicial system marked by inefficiency and inequality. The *Maria da Penha Law* has played a significant role in addressing domestic violence and stands out as a landmark legal reform within the field of criminal justice. Implemented in 2006, the law was designed to protect women from domestic violence by introducing harsher penalties, establishing mechanisms to reduce victim risk, and promoting cultural changes that encourage the reporting of such crimes.

Chile's *Drug Treatment Courts* offer another example of innovation in the criminal justice system (Paz Ciudadana, 2018). This program introduces an alternative to incarceration, focusing on the rehabilitation of individuals with problematic substance use who have committed minor offenses. According to evaluations, the program led to a reduction in recidivism of 8% to 12% on average. Participants who completed the program also showed greater adherence to rehabilitation treatment and significantly reduced their substance use. However, the program was not scaled up, and there is limited information about its medium-term impact.

— Prison system

The prison system in Latin America faces significant challenges that affect both public safety and the human rights of persons deprived of liberty. Over the years, various countries in the region have implemented policies and programs aimed at improving prison conditions, reducing recidivism, and promoting inmate rehabilitation. However, most of these efforts have not been successful and, in some cases, have even produced counterproductive effects.

One of the most relevant studies on the prison system in Latin America is the analysis of electronic monitoring as an alternative to traditional incarceration, conducted in the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina (Di Tella & Schargrodsky, 2013). The study found that electronic monitoring significantly reduces recidivism compared to imprisonment. Specifically, it showed a decrease in re-arrest rates of between 11% and 16%, roughly half the recidivism rate of individuals released from prison.

Another study, conducted by Fundación Paz Ciudadana and the School of Government at Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez in Chile (2012), examined recidivism in both closed (custodial sentences) and open (non-custodial sentences) systems. It highlighted alarmingly high recidivism rates in the closed system, influenced by poor prison conditions, overcrowding, and a lack of effective rehabilitation programs. However, the success of alternative sentencing measures depends on the type of offense and the characteristics of the population served. The study also emphasizes that recidivism is a multifaceted phenomenon, shaped by individual factors—such as age and offense type—as well as structural issues, including the lack of post-release support and broader social exclusion.

— Support and rehabilitation

Victim reparation in Latin America has seen some progress, particularly through models implemented in Mexico, Chile, and Costa Rica that combine comprehensive care, restorative justice, and human rights-based approaches. In Mexico, *Women's Justice Centers* provide integrated legal, psychological, medical, and social services—mainly for victims of gender-based violence—reducing re-victimization and ensuring effective access to justice. In addition, the *General Victims Law* provides a legal framework that guarantees reparations, along with medical and psychological assistance, while specialized programs for Indigenous women and minors tailor services to cultural and protection-related needs.

In Chile, the *Victim Support Program* (Programa de Apoyo a Víctimas—PAV) stands out for its human rights approach and its ability to promote recovery from harm. The model delivers services at the individual, family, and community levels, offering psychosocial and legal support, as well as strengthening local networks. This has led to a significant reduction in secondary victimization. The program also emphasizes inclusivity by providing differentiated support for women, children, and Indigenous communities, adapting to their specific needs.

Costa Rica has adopted an innovative approach to restorative justice, regulated by the 2019 Restorative Justice Law, which encourages dialogue between parties to resolve conflicts stemming from criminal offenses. The model emphasizes harm reparation and the active accountability of the offender. It has shown positive results, with 96% user satisfaction, high compliance with court-approved agreements, and contributions to both reducing recidivism and strengthening social cohesion. Together, these approaches demonstrate how victim-centered attention, community engagement, and the promotion of rights are essential to achieving effective and sustainable reparation in the region.

In terms of offender rehabilitation and social reintegration, various approaches have proven effective in reducing recidivism. One such approach is Multisystemic Therapy (MST) for youth, which has shown promising results by working directly within adolescents' everyday environments, including their family, school, and community settings (Schaeffer & Borduin, 2005). A study found that four years after receiving MST, only 26.1% of participants had reoffended, compared to 71.4% of those who received individual therapy. This approach promotes family cooperation and has proven to be an effective tool for reducing youth involvement in future criminal activity, marking progress in crime prevention.

Prison labor programs have also been implemented as a strategy for inmate reintegration. In Chile, participating inmates with extensive criminal histories showed a 21% decrease in the likelihood of reoffending. Among those convicted of property crimes and individuals with sentences longer than six months, recidivism dropped by 17% and 10.2%, respectively (Gómez Baeza & Grau, 2017).

Social reintegration programs based on the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model in Chile have also contributed to reducing recidivism by addressing individual risk factors such as education, employment, substance abuse, and pro-criminal attitudes (Letelier, Pereira & Bórquez, 2019). Among participants in the closed prison system, recidivism fell from 38.3% to 21.1%. In the open system, it reached 21.7% in 2018, and in the post-release phase, risk decreased by 54.3%. Key success factors included individualized intervention plans, psychosocial activities, and educational and vocational programs. Educational access rose to 58.1% among convicted individuals in the closed system, and post-release job placements reached 54.3%. Additionally, targeted initiatives for youth and women achieved 100% coverage in areas like mental health and substance use for adolescents, while female participation rose by 91% in 2018. This multidimensional approach has proven to be an effective strategy for reducing recidivism and supporting social reintegration, positioning it as a leading model in the region.

In Honduras, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has proven to be a highly effective intervention for individuals on probation (Capellán, Koppel & Sung, 2020). A study conducted in the Department of Francisco Morazán found that participants who received CBT had a 69% lower probability of reoffending compared to the control group. Recidivism at three months was significantly lower in the CBT group (3%) versus the control group (14%). By the end of the follow-up period, recidivism remained lower in the CBT group (11%) compared to the control (32%). CBT also increased the time between release and any new offense, promoting greater stability and public safety. This approach has proven to be a key tool for rehabilitation in contexts such as the Northern Triangle of Central America, where justice systems are still developing and levels of violence remain high.

Expanding the strategic and operational focus of the security and justice sector —

— Guiding principles of CAF's expanded strategic and operational approach to the security and justice sector

Public insecurity, in all its forms, is a complex, multifaceted, and multicausal phenomenon in LAC. It involves social, economic, political, and cultural factors and carries implications that extend far beyond crime itself. The current landscape—characterized by the intersection of the three development traps mentioned earlier¹⁵ high levels of crime, and the growing entrenchment of organized crime—requires a multicausal approach, multilevel coordination (subnational, national, and transnational), and network-based collaboration. CAF's strategic and operational approach to the security and justice sector will be grounded in three guiding principles:

Multidimensional

This principle is essential for addressing insecurity in a comprehensive and sustainable way, recognizing the need for broad, coordinated policies across multiple sectors that tackle not only the symptoms but also the root causes of insecurity. This involves:

1. **prevention policies** – Establishing targeted programs to prevent violence before it occurs, with a focus on early interventions in areas such as education, school violence, youth employment, and community development, among others.

¹⁵ The three development traps include: the absence of sustainable, long-term growth drivers; high and persistent inequality; and low institutional and governance capacity (ECLAC, 2023).

2. **human development** – Implementing programs that improve access to opportunities, healthcare, and education, thereby reducing risk factors that predispose individuals to violence and crime.
3. **urban development** – Creating safe public spaces through urban planning strategies that strengthen social cohesion, promote inclusive use of these spaces, and support the development of resilient, self-sufficient communities.
4. **institutional strengthening and security governance** – Consolidating the rule of law through strong, transparent, and effective institutions. This includes improving justice and public security systems to provide fair and effective responses to crime, ultimately reducing impunity.
3. **global collaboration** – Security in LAC also benefits from partnerships with international organizations and global actors. These alliances provide access to specialized expertise, advanced technologies, and best practices that enhance local and national capacities to confront transnational threats.
4. **collaboration with civil society** – Involving civil society fosters more inclusive and effective security. Community organizations contribute to prevention, local monitoring, and data generation, while promoting dialogue between citizens and authorities and strengthening local capacities. This supports the development of security policies that are adaptive, sustainable, and aligned with the real needs of communities.

Multilevel

Security in the region cannot rely solely on local or national efforts, as many threats—such as organized crime and illicit trafficking—are transnational in nature. This principle calls for collaboration across various levels of government and stakeholders, from the local to the international, and is structured based on the following levels:

1. **local and national collaboration** – Integrating efforts between local and national governments is key to strengthening urban security. This requires improved coordination among local police, national security forces, and judicial systems to ensure a comprehensive response.
2. **subregional and regional collaboration** – Cooperation among neighboring countries or within the same subregion is essential to addressing shared threats. Initiatives such as information sharing, joint training, and harmonized security policies can provide a more effective and coordinated response to TOC.

Network-based approach

This principle is essential for building a robust and resilient security system capable of understanding the region's complex risk dynamics. It facilitates cooperation among the state, civil society, and the private sector, promoting a collective and coordinated response to security threats. Key elements of this approach include:

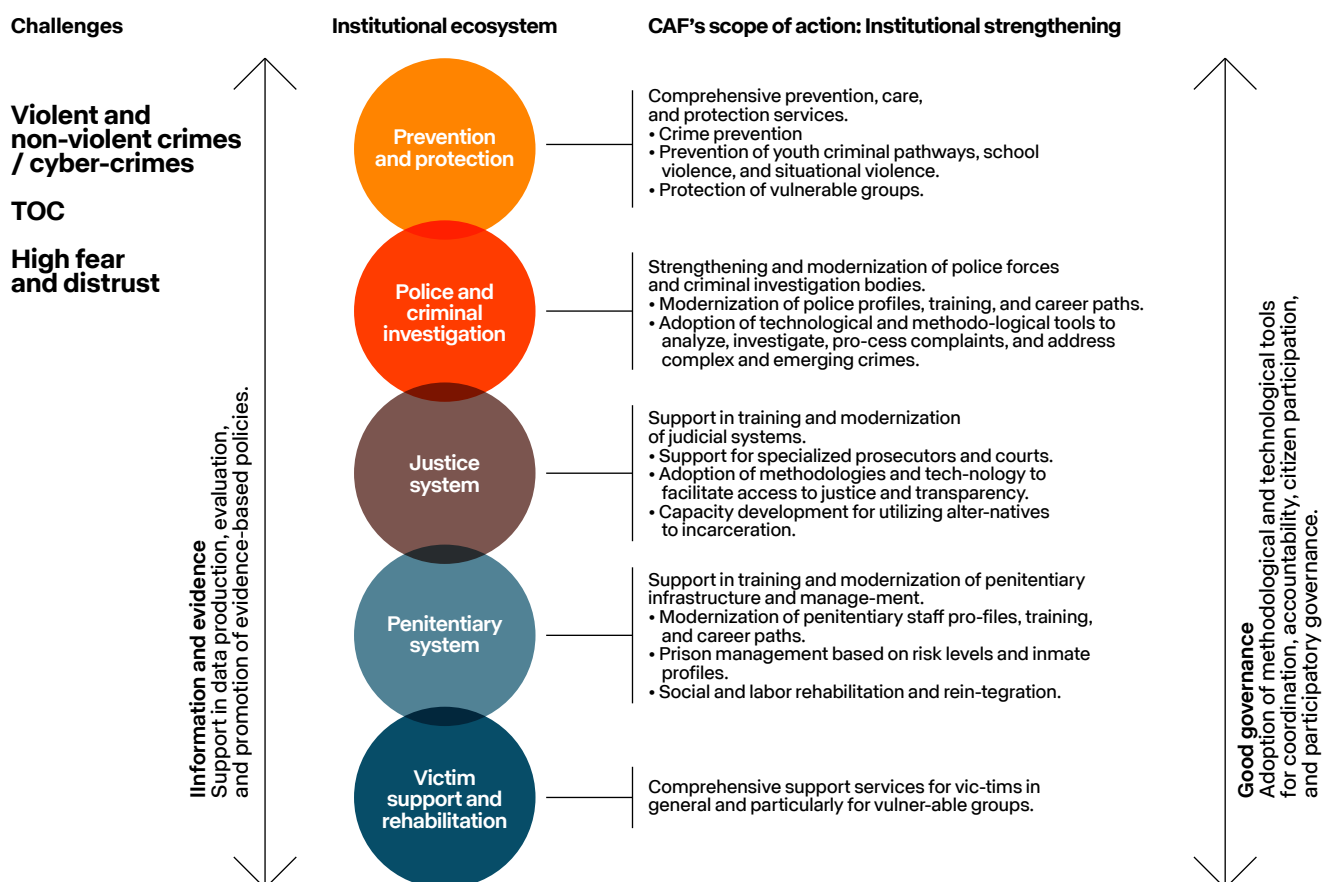
1. **connecting actors** – Creating networks that link security institutions, civil society organizations, private companies, and communities. These networks enable real-time information sharing, early threat detection, and the implementation of collaborative strategies.
2. **strengthening collective capacities** – Networks foster the development of joint capabilities, with each actor contributing their expertise, resources, and specialized knowledge. This is particularly valuable in areas such as community prevention, space rehabilitation, and crime monitoring.
3. **resilience and adaptability** – A networked system is more flexible and responsive to change and emerging threats, allowing for swift and coordinated action. Moreover, networks enhance social cohesion and community engagement, fostering an environment where security becomes a shared responsibility.

— Areas of intervention and cross-cutting pillars of the expanded strategic and operational approach to the security sector

CAF's Strategic Map for the New Security Approach (see Figure 1) is designed to comprehensively address the various forms of crime affecting the region. These challenges impact not only physical safety but also the

psychological well-being of individuals, and they demand coordinated responses that tackle root causes while fostering safer, more resilient social and institutional environments.

— Figure 1
Strategic map of the new security approach



Source: Authors.

Note: The measures listed under the "CAF Scope of Action" column are not exhaustive, but rather a selection of potential initiatives that could be considered within the bank's strategy.

This strategic approach provides a comprehensive framework for addressing criminal phenomena from a broad and coordinated perspective. Two cross-cutting pillars and five areas of intervention have been identified, outlining the actions needed to respond to the various forms of crime and their effects across the region.

CAF's Strategic Map for the New Security Approach structures its intervention around the main types of criminal activity affecting the region, including non-violent crimes, violent crimes, TOC, and the high levels of fear among the public. These issues are initially addressed through the cross-cutting pillar of information and evidence, which collects, analyzes, and generates essential data to understand the complexity and specific characteristics of each type of crime. This pillar provides a solid knowledge base for designing public policies that are realistic and tailored to the needs of each context.

Building on this evidence, the strategic map outlines five areas of intervention that span the entire public security chain: prevention and protection, policing and criminal

investigation, justice systems, prison systems, support and rehabilitation.¹⁶ These areas focus on implementing targeted policies that, grounded in reliable information, contribute to a comprehensive and coordinated response to security challenges.

Finally, the cross-cutting pillar of execution and governance supports the implementation and continuous improvement of the public policies developed, promoting effective governance and stronger coordination among public and private actors.

The structure of this approach (see Figure 1) follows a top-down flow. The framework begins with observed and measured outcomes that allowed for the identification of the main criminal phenomena affecting the region. It then addresses the five pillars of the strategy, with an emphasis on generating data, evidence, and sound governance. This integrated vision facilitates a systematic, coherent, and efficient intervention in public security across LAC—an essential step toward achieving more effective outcomes.

— Cross-cutting pillars

The cross-cutting pillars of information and evidence and execution and governance are foundational to CAF's strategic security approach, aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of public policies in LAC. **The pillar of information and evidence ensures a solid base of accurate and up-to-date data, enabling a deeper understanding of crime dynamics and the design of responses that address both the causes and consequences of insecurity.** It also reinforces transparency and accountability while fostering inter-institutional collaboration through a shared language and common goals.

In turn, **the pillar of execution and governance ensures the proper implementation of policies through a coordinated and collaborative structure that integrates both public and private actors.** This pillar not only

enables the continuous improvement of strategies but also provides tools to optimize governance, contributing to a security system that is resilient, adaptable, and efficient.

Cross-cutting pillar: Information and evidence

One of the essential pillars of the strategic approach is the production of information and the generation of evidence. On one hand, **effective security policy must be grounded in precise, up-to-date data on crime dynamics, their root causes, and the most affected geographic areas.** On the

¹⁶ The map illustrates some of the policies the bank considers relevant, which will continue to be expanded as more evidence becomes available.

other, it is crucial to advocate for impact evaluations that rigorously measure the results of implemented changes, incorporating them as a core component of reform processes and, in doing so, helping to strengthen the region's limited evidence base.

A strong foundation of evidence enables the design of public policies that not only respond to the symptoms of the problem but also address its underlying causes and prevent its spread.

This approach encourages the collection, analysis, and dissemination of security data, incentivizing local and national institutions to use these tools to develop sound diagnostics (as promoted, for example, through crime observatories and supported by artificial intelligence tools). Such evidence is critical for identifying crime patterns and trends, as well as for evaluating the effectiveness of implemented interventions. Moreover, having a reliable database makes it easier to adapt policies to changing security conditions, allowing decision-makers to take a proactive rather than reactive approach.

The information and evidence pillar also fosters transparency in justice administration and strengthens accountability, as it enables authorities to demonstrate the impact of their interventions. Additionally, it promotes inter-institutional collaboration by providing a common language based on shared data and clearly defined objectives.

Cross-cutting pillar: Execution and governance

The effective implementation of security strategies requires a solid governance structure that coordinates the actions of the various actors involved—both public and private. This pillar aims to continuously improve security policies through the application of governance tools that ensure efficiency and coherence in the execution of interventions.

Effective governance also involves establishing inter-institutional coordination mechanisms with unified command structures that enable a comprehensive response to security challenges. This pillar will promote collaboration among local, national, and international governments, as well as with civil society organizations and the private sector. The creation of strategic partnerships supports a shared vision of objectives and reduces duplication of efforts, thereby maximizing the impact of financial and human resources.

This pillar also focuses on the evaluation and continuous improvement of implemented policies, ensuring that lessons learned are incorporated into future interventions. Strong governance allows for adjustments to strategies based on evolving security threats and supports the development of a security system that is both resilient and adaptable.

Finally, **it is committed to providing tools and capacity-building for all actors in the public security chain, promoting a comprehensive governance model that strengthens participation and coordination at every level of action—ultimately optimizing the performance and effectiveness of the security system as a whole.**

— The strategic approach's areas of intervention

CAF has defined five key areas of intervention that enable a comprehensive approach to security. These areas span the full spectrum of actions needed to address insecurity at every stage, from prevention through to rehabilitation.

Prevention and protection

This constitutes the first line of action in CAF's public security strategy for LAC, focusing on reducing and mitigating the risk factors that drive violence and crime. This pillar is based on the premise that timely and well-designed interventions can prevent crime before it occurs, creating safer environments and easing the burden on the justice system. The bank is committed to promoting preventive public policies grounded in evidence and international best practices, with the goal of addressing the drivers of criminality in a comprehensive manner and fostering a culture of peace and social coexistence.

To implement this strategy, CAF will drive forward a series of targeted prevention programs focused on early-stage interventions in the lives of at-risk youth. These programs include educational initiatives to reduce school violence through conflict resolution and coexistence programs that promote a culture of respect and cooperation among students. In addition, CAF will prioritize early interventions for youth living in socially vulnerable contexts, with the aim of diverting them from potential criminal pathways through efforts to reduce school dropout rates, expand access to educational, cultural, and sports activities, strengthen skills and capacities, and improve opportunities for entrepreneurship and employability.

CAF also supports protection policies targeting vulnerable groups such as women, children, ethnic minorities, and individuals experiencing exclusion. These policies focus on developing dedicated programs to ensure protection from violence and discrimination, while

promoting inclusion and access to fundamental rights. This approach not only seeks to protect those most at risk of victimization, but also to help build an environment where all citizens can coexist safely and with dignity—contributing to stronger social cohesion.

A key component of this area of action is situational prevention, which plays a fundamental role in shaping physical environments to discourage crime. **CAF promotes urban design policies that integrate security as an essential element of public space planning.** These include interventions like lighting in high-crime areas, the creation of safe recreational spaces, and proper maintenance of public infrastructure. **International evidence has shown that such interventions in the built environment can significantly reduce opportunities for crime by creating spaces where citizens feel safe and where criminal activity is disincentivized.**

CAF also encourages interventions aimed at strengthening social cohesion and community ties, recognizing that communities with strong social bonds are less prone to violence and crime. These initiatives include community-based activities that foster a sense of belonging and cooperation among neighbors, conflict mediation programs, and local support networks. By fostering social cohesion, CAF supports the creation of environments where security challenges can be addressed collaboratively, with communities actively engaged in identifying and solving the problems that affect them.

A core commitment for CAF in this area is the implementation of preventive public policies grounded in evidence and international best practices. This involves developing policies informed by research and successful global experiences, ensuring that strategies applied in the region are both effective and adapted to local contexts. The collection and analysis of reliable data allow CAF to design preventive interventions that address the specific needs of each community, with a focus on high-risk areas where the impact of intervention can be greatest.

The bank will also foster the use of results indicators and monitoring and evaluation tools to measure the effectiveness of implemented prevention policies. These tools enable real-time adjustments to interventions and ensure that resources are directed toward programs that demonstrably contribute to reducing crime. This approach not only supports more efficient resource management but also builds a robust evidence base that can be shared and replicated across other areas or countries in the region—promoting a culture of informed and proactive prevention.

CAF's prevention-focused interventions are essential not only for reducing crime, but also for fostering human development and community well-being. By acting before crime occurs, the bank not only contributes to greater safety across communities in LAC, but also supports the construction of a more inclusive, just, and resilient society. This prevention and protection approach leads not only to lower crime rates, but also to community growth and stability by creating a safe environment that supports both social and economic development.

Policing and criminal investigation

The second area of intervention—focused on policing and criminal investigation—forms a fundamental pillar of CAF's security strategy. It centers on strengthening and modernizing the capacities of the institutions responsible for upholding the law, particularly police forces and criminal investigation bodies. This component is designed to improve the operational efficiency and responsiveness of these institutions in the face of growing security challenges, especially those arising from international organized crime, which requires a comprehensive and adaptive response.

Significant support will be directed toward security institutions through the implementation of advanced technologies. These include technological tools, surveillance systems, high-tech balloons and drones, data analytics platforms that leverage artificial intelligence and neuroscience to identify complex criminal patterns, and geolocation systems that enable real-time tracking of suspicious activity. The adoption of these technologies will allow for faster and more precise responses to incidents, optimizing resources and maximizing the effectiveness of operations. At the same time, analytical and investigative capacities will be enhanced, and secure information-sharing between agencies and countries will be facilitated—improving coordination and cooperation at both national and international levels.

Institutional modernization is a central focus of this area. The bank will promote the updating of training programs, protocols, and practices within police forces and criminal investigation bodies, encouraging comprehensive management of human, technological, and operational resources. This involves continuous training of personnel in the use of new technologies and advanced investigative methodologies, optimizing intelligence processes, and strengthening logistical capabilities for complex operations. By backing a model of ongoing professionalization and capacity-building, CAF seeks to ensure that these institutions are properly equipped to meet evolving security threats in an increasingly dynamic environment.

A key component of policing and criminal investigation efforts is **domestic and international coordination**, which is indispensable for confronting threats that transcend national borders—such as organized crime.

Organized crime in the region operates through sophisticated networks that span multiple illicit markets, from drug and human trafficking to cybercrime, contraband, and environmental exploitation. In response, CAF will promote a multi-level security approach that integrates local and national governments in close collaboration with international actors, enabling a broad and shared understanding of threats that go beyond national boundaries.

Transnational organized crime not only involves complex and evolving dynamics but also encompasses a wide array of illicit markets that significantly undermine the region's security and stability. In this context, **CAF's support for security forces goes beyond strengthening institutional response capacity—it also includes equipping these institutions with the tools needed to understand the structures and dynamics of criminal organizations, addressing both their root causes and operational methods. This includes the investigation and analysis of the criminal markets in which they operate, such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, illicit arms trade, money laundering, and cybercrime, among others.**

CAF will also support the implementation of preventive and deterrence-based strategies to reduce the incidence and spread of organized crime across the region. This will be achieved by fostering strategic alliances among governments, international organizations, and the private sector—promoting shared objectives and reducing duplication of efforts. Such alliances will enhance cooperation in information-sharing, training of security personnel, and the development of joint operations that more effectively target the operational and financial foundations of criminal organizations.

Ultimately, the control-focused intervention area within CAF's strategic framework provides a strengthened and comprehensive response to contemporary security challenges. **By supporting the institutional strengthening of police forces and criminal investigation bodies, promoting the adoption of advanced technologies, and fostering multi-level cooperation, CAF positions itself as a key ally in the fight against organized crime in LAC. This intervention not only addresses current threats but also lays the groundwork for sustainable security in the region, equipping security institutions with the tools they need to adapt and respond effectively to an increasingly sophisticated and transnational criminal landscape.**

Justice system

This pillar is fundamental to building a system capable of prosecuting and sanctioning offenders in a fair, effective manner, consistent with the principles of legality and respect for human rights. It focuses on strengthening the operational and functional capacity of judicial systems with the goal of reducing the levels of impunity that undermine public confidence in justice across the region. **A justice system's capacity to respond appropriately to criminal offenses is crucial for fostering a society where the rule of law is upheld, the law is respected, and future crimes are deterred.**

CAF will promote the modernization of justice systems through the implementation of practices and procedures that make judicial processes more efficient and transparent. This support includes the development and deployment of technologies to streamline case management, monitor proceedings, and expedite judicial procedures—allowing courts to act in a more timely and effective manner. Transparency in the justice system is a key component, as it allows citizens to observe how cases are handled and how decisions are made, thereby strengthening accountability and access to justice.

A central aspect of CAF's support is the training of justice system actors. **Legal professionals—from judges to prosecutors and public defenders—must receive ongoing training to align with international best practices while upholding human rights standards and due process.** CAF will promote access to resources and training opportunities to ensure that justice system actors are equipped to address the complexities of modern legal systems. This approach aims to build professional competencies that guarantee fair proceedings based on solid evidence and the protection of all parties' rights.

CAF will also support the development of differentiated judicial procedures to appropriately address crimes based on their severity and context, promoting a more equitable and just administration of justice. This includes implementing alternatives to incarceration for minor offenses—such as community service programs, restitution measures, or targeted treatments for offenses linked to addiction issues. In doing so, the justice system can prioritize the rehabilitation and reintegration of low-risk offenders while reserving custodial sentences for

cases that pose a genuine threat to society. Differentiated treatment of offenses not only helps reduce prison overcrowding but also enables judicial resources to focus on the most complex and serious crimes.

The capacity to effectively prosecute serious crimes is essential for protecting victims and reinforcing society's commitment to the rule of law. At the same time, the justice system pillar extends beyond the mere imposition of penalties to fostering a broader culture of legality—where citizens recognize and respect the authority of the law. A justice system that is fair, reliable, and fully respects human rights acts not only as a deterrent to potential offenders but also sets a standard of integrity that inspires broader societal trust. Accordingly, this punitive function seeks to establish a justice system that not only punishes but is also seen as legitimate, effective, and committed to fairness.

Prison system

The enforcement of sentences focuses primarily on rehabilitating the prison system and supporting the reintegration of people deprived of liberty into society. This component aims to transform prisons into environments that not only fulfill a punitive function, but also serve as spaces for rehabilitation, human development, and the eventual reintegration of incarcerated individuals into community life.

CAF recognizes that in order to effectively reduce recidivism and promote social cohesion, prison institutions must adhere to standards that uphold the dignity and human rights of people deprived of liberty. **To this end, CAF will promote the modernization of prison infrastructure across the region by supporting projects that aim to improve physical conditions in detention centers and adapt them to standards that ensure safe, healthy, and rehabilitation-oriented environments.** This includes the effective segmentation of the prison population and the isolation of high-risk and repeat offenders associated with criminal organizations. The renovation of facilities is not only intended to alleviate issues such as overcrowding and lack of hygiene but also to create spaces that support learning, training, and the

development of skills that foster reintegration and help prevent recidivism.

A key element is the training of prison staff. The bank will promote the development of continuous training programs for personnel responsible for managing detention centers, equipping them with the skills necessary to understand and implement effective rehabilitation methods that respect inmates' rights and promote humane treatment. This training will cover both safety and conflict management, as well as human rights approaches and strategies for supporting rehabilitation, helping to build a prison workforce capable of fostering a constructive environment inside detention facilities.

CAF will also support the implementation of education and training programs within prisons, recognizing that access to learning opportunities is one of the main pathways to successful reintegration. These programs will include educational activities, job skills development, and technical training to ensure that inmates gain knowledge and competencies that will be useful when reentering society.

In addition, CAF will lead efforts to create post-release reintegration programs that accompany formerly incarcerated individuals through their transition back into society. In partnership with community organizations and local authorities, these programs will provide support in areas such as job placement, access to housing, rebuilding family ties, and connecting with support networks. By providing adequate follow-up for those who have served their sentences, these initiatives help reduce the risk of recidivism and facilitate a smoother transition into a productive, law-abiding life.

The bank's focus on rehabilitation and social reintegration is rooted in the recognition that punishment is not the sole purpose of incarceration. It is equally important to create conditions that allow individuals to rebuild their lives and rejoin society in a constructive way. A prison system that prioritizes rehabilitation contributes to social cohesion by enabling former offenders to become productive citizens, thus reducing the negative impact of recidivism on communities.

Finally, CAF will also promote the adoption of international standards and best practices in prison management, ensuring alignment with human rights principles and global norms. **This comprehensive approach to the enforcement of sentences—combining adequate infrastructure, trained personnel, education programs, and reintegration policies—positions CAF as a key actor in the transformation of prison systems in LAC, advancing a model of justice that goes beyond punishment and centers on restoration and the strengthening of the social fabric.**

Support and rehabilitation

This final pillar represents a comprehensive dimension of CAF's security strategy, focusing on both victim support and the rehabilitation and social reintegration of offenders. It also underscores the importance of interventions that foster social cohesion and strengthen community resilience, contributing to a safer, more equitable, and more stable society. **By prioritizing both victims and offenders, this integrated approach aligns with the principles of restorative justice, which aim to address the harm caused by crime while reducing the risk of recidivism.**

A core emphasis of this approach is the comprehensive assistance provided to victims of crime, who often experience deep and lasting consequences as a result of their victimization. Recognizing that the impact of crime can be physical, psychological, and social, CAF will promote programs offering psychological, social, and legal support to help victims recover and rebuild their lives. These programs will include psychological counseling to address trauma, legal support services to ensure access to justice, and social assistance to help victims strengthen their support networks. **Victim services will be based on evidence and international best practices to ensure interventions are both effective and respectful of the rights and needs of those affected by crime.**

CAF will also promote the development of rehabilitation and reintegration programs for offenders with the aim of breaking the cycle of violence and promoting social cohesion. These programs will be designed to provide offenders with the tools needed to reintegrate into society and make a positive contribution to their communities. **Rehabilitation efforts will be based on evidence-based practices, including vocational training, formal education, and access to addiction treatment programs, all of which have been shown to significantly reduce recidivism.**

CAF will further support the creation of community-based support networks that facilitate both the recovery of victims and the reintegration of offenders. These networks will help foster an environment of support and collaboration, where the community plays an active role in monitoring and accompanying individuals through their reintegration process. These networks will also reinforce community engagement in crime prevention, promoting values such as solidarity, inclusion, and mutual respect. Community participation in these networks will help reduce the stigma faced by former offenders, easing their reintegration and preventing the social exclusion that can lead to recidivism.

By integrating the pillar of support and rehabilitation into its security strategy, CAF reaffirms its commitment to inclusive security—one that acknowledges and addresses the multiple dimensions of crime, from victim assistance to offender rehabilitation. **This integrated approach not only helps break the cycle of violence, but also fosters an environment in which both victims and offenders are supported in building new lives and contributing positively to their communities.** By meeting the needs of those affected by crime and offering second chances to those seeking reintegration, CAF contributes to a more just, cohesive, and resilient society—one in which security is understood as a shared responsibility and a core value for social and economic development.

Conclusion —

The Strategic Framework for Security and Justice for Development (SFSJD) offers a comprehensive, multidimensional roadmap that aims to position CAF as a key actor in strengthening security and justice in LAC. In a context of critical levels of insecurity, criminality, and institutional distrust, this framework serves as a structured response to the region's most pressing challenges. Its strategic approach aligns with regional priorities, establishing itself as a vital tool for the bank and its member countries.

Crime and violence in LAC are not only threats to public safety, they also undermine the fundamental pillars of sustainable development, affecting economic growth, the rule of law, and democratic legitimacy. The framework highlights critical interconnections and promotes an integrated approach that combines local-level actions with broader national and transnational strategies. In this regard, the SFSJD acknowledges both the tangible costs of crime—including the loss of human capital and impacts on GDP—and the intangible costs—such as the erosion of public trust, heightened fear, and worsening structural inequalities exacerbated by insecurity.

A central focus is the strengthening of institutions tasked with upholding the rule of law. In many countries across the region, these institutions face structural limitations that hinder their ability to meet public demands and address criminal dynamics effectively. The framework calls for cooperation to modernize these institutions by promoting transparency, efficiency, and accountability. It also emphasizes the integration of inclusive approaches that consider gender perspectives, cultural diversity, and social justice—not only as an operational necessity but also as an ethical commitment to the most vulnerable populations.

The prevention and protection of vulnerable groups is a strategic pillar—not only as a means of reducing crime and violence, but also as a tool to strengthen the social fabric and promote more equitable and inclusive development. Preventive programs grounded in evidence are essential

to addressing risk factors at their root. These initiatives must be implemented across all levels of public policy—from local communities to national platforms—ensuring that prevention strategies are coherent, sustainable, and tailored to each specific context.

One of the framework's most innovative features is its shift from a predominantly local focus to a broader vision that connects the urban, national, and transnational levels. This paradigm shift responds to the evolving nature of TOC, which operates through complex, cross-border networks. The SFSJD highlights the need for coordinated strategies that bring together governments, civil society, multilateral organizations, and the private sector in a collaborative network aimed at prevention, deterrence, and mitigation of criminal threats.

The framework also underscores the importance of data and evidence as cross-cutting elements for planning, implementing, and evaluating public security policies. The generation of reliable information—supported by advanced monitoring and analytical systems—is essential to ensure that interventions are effective, adaptive, and sustainable. An evidence-based approach enables the identification of trends, prioritization of actions, and objective measurement of results, equipping decision-makers with robust tools to drive meaningful change.

One of the most significant advances proposed is the explicit recognition that criminal dynamics are not confined to urban areas. While cities remain hotspots for crime and violence, the framework emphasizes that criminal activity also impacts rural communities, border corridors, and transnational spaces. This recognition calls for a comprehensive approach that transcends local boundaries and integrates national and regional policies. This shift in scope may be the SFSJD's most transformative change, as it redefines how CAF and its member countries address the phenomenon of crime.

The economic and social costs of crime and violence in LAC are also addressed directly. It is estimated that the direct and indirect costs of crime in the region represent approximately 3.44% of regional GDP—double the amount allocated to social assistance and greater than the investments made in education and research. These costs range from the loss of productivity due to homicides and non-lethal crimes to expenditure on private security and public resources allocated to law enforcement and the justice system. This financial analysis underscores the urgency of implementing more effective strategies to reduce these costs and free up resources for other critical development priorities.

One of the framework's defining features is its integrated approach to the various types of crimes affecting the region—from organized crime and drug trafficking to sexual violence, homicides, and kidnappings. Each type of crime has its own dynamics and challenges that require specific responses, but they also share common roots in inequality, corruption, and institutional weakness. By proposing integrated strategies, the SFSJD aims not only to mitigate the effects of crime but also to address its underlying causes and foster long-term structural change.

A fundamental innovation of the SFSJD is its integrated and coordinated approach across all dimensions of the security and justice system chain. The specific SFSJD chapter presents a strategic vision that acknowledges the need to intervene at every link in this complex chain to achieve sustainable results. As such, it supports key areas ranging from prevention and protection to rehabilitation, ensuring a coherent and holistic response to criminal phenomena across LAC.

Prevention and protection are essential pillars for reducing opportunities for crime and strengthening the social fabric. This approach aims not only to reduce risk factors but also to bolster protective factors, thereby promoting communities that are more resilient to criminality. Complementing this work, the SFSJD prioritizes the strengthening of police and criminal investigation institutions, recognizing that their effectiveness is critical for deterrence and response. This includes training, technological modernization, and the promotion of ethical standards that enhance public trust in law enforcement.

The justice system also features prominently, with initiatives aimed at improving the efficiency and transparency of judicial processes, ensuring that legal responses are timely and fair. The SFSJD also addresses the transformation of the prison system, proposing reforms that go beyond incarceration conditions to promote effective reintegration models that reduce recidivism.

Rehabilitation closes the loop of this comprehensive strategy, with interventions designed to reintegrate offenders into society and disrupt cycles of violence. This component is complemented by support for victims, whose well-being and reparation are essential to restoring confidence in the justice system.

This multidimensional approach—linking prevention, intervention, and recovery—is innovative not only in its scope but also in its ability to align public policy with citizens' demands. By addressing security from an integrated perspective, the SFSJD sets a new standard for action that goes beyond traditional approaches, promoting sustainable structural change across the region.

The SFSJD is envisioned as much more than an operational instrument for CAF. Its design and scope position it as a roadmap for the bank and a foundation for supporting member countries in developing effective and sustainable public policies. By aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and international best practices, it becomes a catalyst for deep reforms in security and justice—advancing inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development.

It is essential to note that while there are numerous promising initiatives, robust evidence remains limited. For this reason, CAF's strategy for security and justice in LAC proposes co-created solutions with governments, tailored to their specific needs and designed with the flexibility required for effective implementation. In this context, adopting an agile response model aligned with CAF's vision is crucial to addressing security and justice challenges in a timely manner.

Finally, the SFSJD reflects CAF's institutional commitment to a critical issue for the region. By offering a comprehensive, evidence-based, and sustainability-oriented vision, the framework not only provides a clear path forward for CAF's action—it also inspires countries to adopt more ambitious and coordinated approaches to address the challenges of security and justice. The SFSJD is not merely a response to present needs; it is an investment in the future of LAC—one aimed at building a region that is safer, more equitable, and more prosperous for future generations, grounded in the understanding that without security and justice, there can be no development.

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Annexes —

— Annex 1 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and international treaties (ITs) related to the security sector

As a cross-cutting agenda, the Strategic Framework for Security and Justice for Development (SFSJD) must align with the SDGs, ITs, and official documents related to the security sector to which the member countries are signatories (see Tables A1.a and A1.b).

The SDGs address security from three perspectives that link it to economic and social development: physical security (violence, human trafficking), urban security (safe public spaces), and public health security (mortality due to violence).

International treaties and official documents address specific security-related issues, such as the fight against terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms trafficking, among others. In doing so, they establish binding commitments for signatory countries, requiring the adoption of domestic legislation and international cooperation to improve security.

— Table A1.a
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to security

SDG	Description	Related Targets / Homicide Rate
SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	Aims to reduce violence, promote justice, and strengthen inclusive institutions.	16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children.
SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	Advocates for making cities and human settlements safe, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable.	11.7 Provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible green and public spaces, particularly for women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.
SDG 5: Gender Equality	Focused on eliminating gender-based violence, particularly against women and girls.	5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.
SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being	Includes reducing mortality from violent causes, such as road traffic accidents, and promoting public health safety.	3.6 By 2030, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents.

Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

These instruments—the SDGs, ITs, and official documents—are complementary and serve to guide the actions of member countries, as well as regional and extra-regional development partners, in implementing

public policies, initiatives, and projects aimed at achieving national and international goals for sustainable and inclusive development.

— Table A1.b
International Treaties Referencing Security

Treaty	Description	Year of Adoption
United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances	Provides a legal framework for global cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking.	1988
Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials (CIFTA)	This is the region's primary instrument for addressing the illicit trafficking and proliferation of firearms through a coordinated, transnational approach.	1997
International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism	Establishes measures to prevent and sanction the financing of terrorist acts.	1999
United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Convention)	The main treaty for combating transnational organized crime. Includes protocols on human trafficking, smuggling of migrants, and firearms trafficking.	2000
Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention)	The first international treaty addressing cybercrimes such as fraud, child pornography, and misuse of computer systems.	2001
Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture (OPCAT)	Strengthens the fight against torture and ill-treatment through regular visits to places of detention.	2002
Inter-American Convention against Terrorism (OAS)	Provides a regional framework to prevent, combat, and eradicate terrorism in the Americas.	2002
United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)	The only global instrument addressing corruption in all its forms, from prevention to international cooperation.	2003
Inter-American Convention against Trafficking in Persons (OAS)	A regional treaty combating human trafficking, protecting victims, and promoting international cooperation.	2005
Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings	Seeks to protect victims, prevent human trafficking in Europe, and ensure international cooperation.	2005
Official documents approved by OAS member states that reference security		
Document		
Hemispheric Action Plan against Transnational Organized Crime		2006
Hemispheric Strategy against Transnational Organized Crime		2021
Third Work Plan for Comprehensive Responses to Trafficking in Persons in the Western Hemisphere (“Third Work Plan on Trafficking in Persons”)		2023–2028

Sources: United Nations International Treaties; Organization of American States (OAS) Conventions and Treaties on Crime and Security; Council of Europe Conventions on Security and Criminality.

The SFSJD stems from the cross-cutting institutional strengthening initiative set out in CAF's Institutional Strategy. Table A1.c summarizes the intersection between the SDGs, institutional strengthening, and security, highlighting the cross-cutting nature of security and its relevance for achieving broader development goals.

The SFSJD will support progress toward the SDGs and the objectives established in international treaties, official documents, and other cooperation mechanisms by fostering collaboration with development partners,

advancing cooperation platforms, and monitoring progress toward agreed goals. In this context, CAF will aim to enhance its participation in existing hemispheric security mechanisms and support the creation of new ones as needed. As an observer and through its technical and financial cooperation capacities, the bank can contribute to the development and consolidation of these platforms by facilitating coordination among stakeholders, promoting the exchange of best practices, and supporting initiatives aligned with its strategic priorities in the areas of security and justice.

— Table A1.c

The interconnection between institutional strengthening, security, justice, and sustainable development

SDG		Interaction
	Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	Strengthens governance and reduces violence through solid and transparent institutions.
	Partnerships for the Goals	Strengthens capacities and international cooperation to address complex security issues.
	Sustainable Cities and Communities	Supports crime prevention in the design and governance of communities.
	Reduced Inequalities	Igualdad ante la ley y justicia inclusiva como base de seguridad y equidad.
	Gender Equality	Gender equality in public institutions and a focus on eradicating gender-based violence.
	Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	Use of technology to modernize security and justice.
	Quality Education	Development of technical skills among security and justice actors.

— Annex 2

Update of CAF's Urban Security Strategy

The updated *Safer Cities Strategy* (ECMS) from CAF seeks to tackle the growing challenge of insecurity in LAC by integrating citizen security into sustainable urban development. This update is grounded in four key pillars and promotes a comprehensive approach encompassing several core components:

First, **urban development and security**: Incorporating security considerations into urban planning makes it possible to design public spaces that are safe, accessible, and free from fear, thereby discouraging criminal activity and fostering social inclusion. Local and community-level action is also a vital pillar, as local governments, municipalities, and communities play a critical role in implementing prevention measures and responding effectively to violence and crime.

Second, the strategy centers on a **preventive approach**, implemented through evidence-based public policies and programs that leverage technology—such as video surveillance and emergency response systems—to improve incident response and reduce crime rates. A **gender and ethnic-racial diversity** perspective is also essential to ensure that interventions reflect the specific needs of different groups.

CAF is also committed to **strengthening institutions** by supporting training and capacity-building for local and regional authorities responsible for public safety. Collaboration among the police, the community, and other key stakeholders helps build a stronger, more coordinated support network.

Finally, the development of **evidence-based public policies** enables continuous monitoring and adjustment of interventions based on their effectiveness.

The implementation of this strategy aims to reduce violence, improve perceptions of safety, and foster an environment conducive to socioeconomic development in cities across the region, in line with international commitments to achieve lasting impact.

Although this strategic and operational update for cities is fundamental, it represents just one part of the broader transformation proposed in the SFSJD. Urban interventions are undoubtedly essential to address criminal dynamics at the local level, but this perspective alone falls short given the growing complexity of crime in LAC.

As outlined in the section “Broadening the strategic and operational focus of the security and justice sector,” this new framework positions the bank’s security and justice agenda within a broader policy landscape—one that integrates national-level public policies and connects local, national, and transnational efforts. This paradigm shift is a core contribution of the framework: moving from an exclusively local approach to a holistic strategy capable of addressing criminal dynamics through the design and implementation of coordinated, sustainable public policies at the regional level.

Context for the 2024 update of the Safer Cities Strategy

This update takes place within the framework of the 2023–2026 Strategic Urban Development Guidelines, designed to harmonize CAF’s comprehensive urban development offering and strengthen dialogue with subnational clients to promote high-value projects and programs. Within this integrated vision, the bank has identified citizen security as a critical component of the region’s sustainable urban development agenda.

The update highlights how the sharp rise in violent crime and organized criminal activity¹⁷—and their socioeconomic repercussions—undermine personal development, social inclusion, and urban progress. Guided by Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) and the New Urban Agenda (NUA), the strategy emphasizes the need to integrate security into urban planning to address these challenges effectively.

This update is grounded in three guiding principles:

A shifting crime paradigm in the region: The growth of organized crime and the domestic expansion of its operations have significantly changed the types of crimes being committed and the associated levels of violence.

2023–2026 Strategic Urban Development Guidelines:

In 2023, CAF published its strategic guidelines, which include a dedicated focus on citizen security.¹⁸

Mainstreaming a gender and ethnic-racial diversity perspective: Urban security strategies must adjust all lines of action to reflect gender and ethnic-racial diversity, recognizing how dynamics of (in)security impact men and women differently through an intersectional lens, and accounting for the region’s diverse population to ensure effective interventions.

¹⁷ Article 2(a) of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime defines an “organized criminal group” as a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offenses established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.

¹⁸ Guideline No. 6: Create safe and fear-free spaces from a local, preventive, and community-based perspective, with a gender and diversity approach.

