



SECURITY  
COLOMBIA

Security Overview

***SAN JOSÉ***

October 2024

# CONTENTS

## 1. Situational Analysis

## 2. Crime Analysis

- 2.1 Theft from persons
- 2.2 Theft in different modalities
- 2.3 Land Piracy
- 2.4 Homicides
- 2.5 Extortion, kidnapping and threats



## 3. Risk Generating Factors

- 3.1 Micro-trafficking and criminal groups
- 3.2 Social Unrest

## 4. Risk Level

## 5. Foresight Design

## 6. Recommendations





“

The Security Overview-San José 2024 aims to conduct a statistically based analysis of the city's security situation in order to build prospective scenarios.

”

# 1. Situational Analysis

In this document, the Unidad de Análisis Político y Seguridad Corporativa (UAPSC) will carry out an Security Overview for the city of San José, Costa Rica, analysing the dynamics that impact security, the factors that generate risk and crime behaviour based on statistics, with the main objective of providing information on the city's security situation in order to establish prospective scenarios and recommendations that are useful for risk management, treatment and control.

In the last year, Costa Rica has experienced a 40% increase in the homicide rate, prompting an urgent government response. President Rodrigo Chaves announced a new National Security Plan that includes tougher penalties for adolescents and expanded use of preventive detention, making it easier to arrest suspects with limited evidence.

This plan reflects a response to the perception of insecurity that has altered the country's image as one of the safest in the region (El País, 2024). At the municipal level, the Municipality of San José has established strategic objectives to improve citizen security and reduce crime rates. This includes strengthening the citizen security service and implementing projects aimed at creating a safer and more sustainable urban environment. The local administration focuses on promoting cultural and recreational activities that foster social cohesion and reduce vulnerability in specific communities (Municipalidad de San José, 2024). In 2024, the perception of security in San José, Costa Rica, remains worrisome, according to the recent CIEP-UCR Survey conducted in September.



The survey also shows that:

65.8%

of participants perceive that the security situation has worsened in the last year.



Slightly lower than the 69% recorded in 2023.

17%

consider that it has improved.

15%

think that it has remained the same.

## 2. Crime Analysis

### High impact crimes in San José 2024

Increase:



Based on figures provided by the Poder Judicial de la República de Costa Rica, it is possible to show that between January and August 2024, three high impact crimes experienced an increase.

CRIME STATISTICS IN SAN JOSÉ	YEAR 2022	YEAR 2023	VARIATION % 2022 VS 2023	JAN-AUG 2023	JAN - AUG 2024	VARIATION % JAN - AUG 2023 VS 2024
Homicides	51	832	63%	56	63	13%
Theft from persons	2256	2173	20%	1701	1765	4%
Residencial Theft	596	486	-18%	329	283	-14%
Motor Vehicle Theft	1583	1623	3%	1133	1030	-9%
Retail Theft	949	879	-7%	636	570	-10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5435</b>	<b>5784</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>3855</b>	<b>3711</b>	<b>-4%</b>

**Resource:** Own elaboration with information from Poder Judicial de la República de Costa Rica.

**Note:** Figures subject to change based on updating processes of the source.



## 2.1 Theft from persons

This shows the great impact this crime is having on the security of the Costa Rican capital. In June, a man was injured after two criminals tried to rob him near the National Theatre in the city center. As a result, the Organismo de Investigación Judicial (OIJ) initiated an investigation into the repeated violent cases occurring in this critical sector of San José (CRHoy, 2024). According to the Fiscalía del Primer Circuito Judicial of San José, as of July 2024 in the Costa Rican capital there had been one assault against a tourist per day during the last six months, signifying a significant increase in this type of robbery.

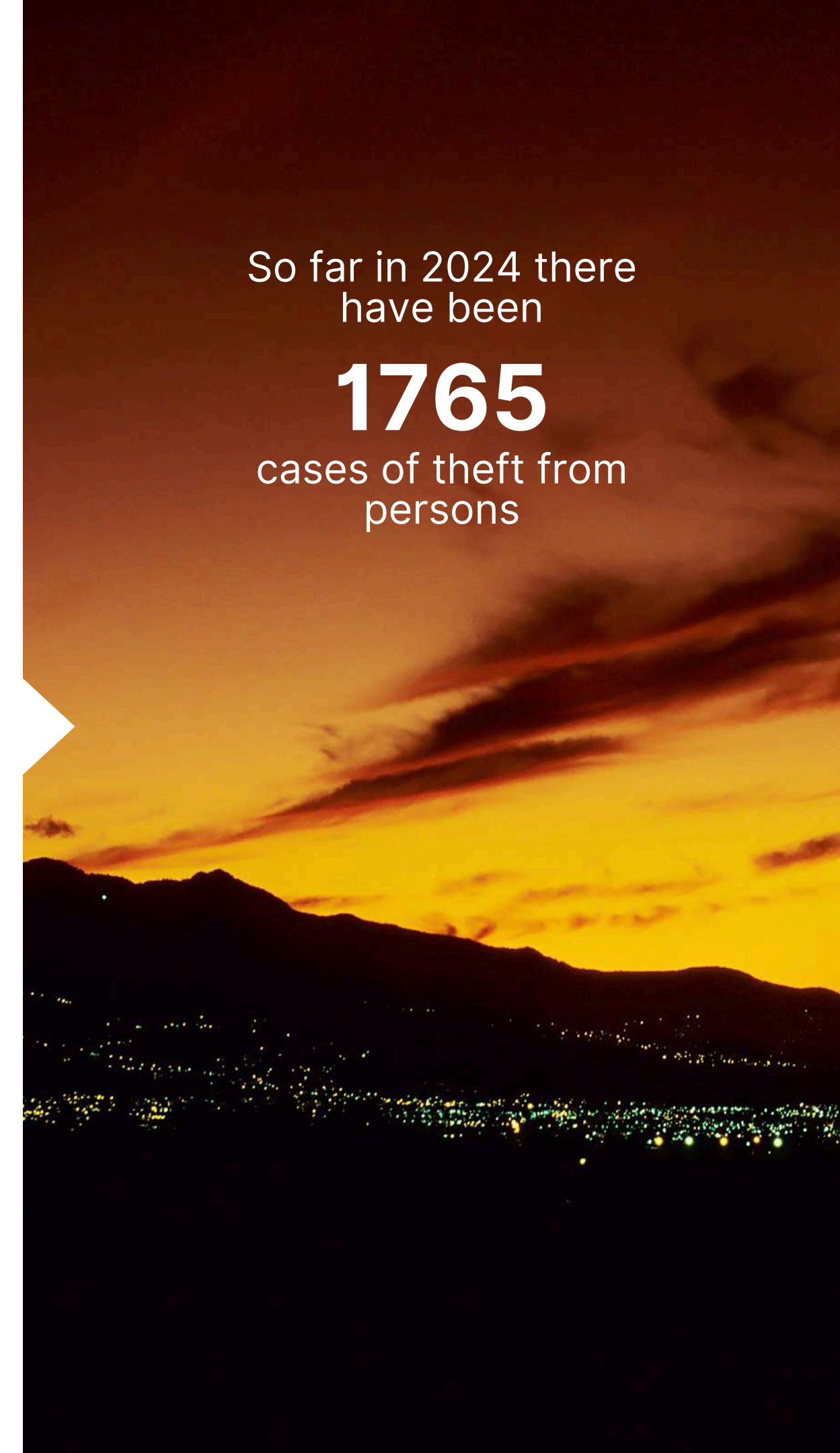
So far in 2024 there have been 1765 cases of theft from persons, a 4% increase compared to the same period in 2023.



So far in 2024 there have been

**1765**

cases of theft from persons



## 2.2 Theft in different modalities

### Crime variation 2023 vs. 2024

According to OIJ reports, in the province of San José, residential theft occurs most frequently on Mondays and Fridays in the early hours of the morning between 12 and 12 a.m., and the most common methods used are the so-called 'tacha', which consists of removing items from the home by forcing entry and leaving as quickly as possible before the owners can reach their residence (Monumental, 2024). According to data revealed by the OIJ in August 2024, the district of El Carmen, in the center of the capital, is the most affected by this crime. Specifically, the Escalante and La California neighborhoods are the most affected by the theft of motorized vehicles such as cars and motorbikes. This is due to the high number of people who come to this part of the city because of the many shops and restaurants that can be found in the area. (Amelia Rueda, 2024).



### Cases January to August:



**283**

Residential theft



**1030**

Motor vehicle theft



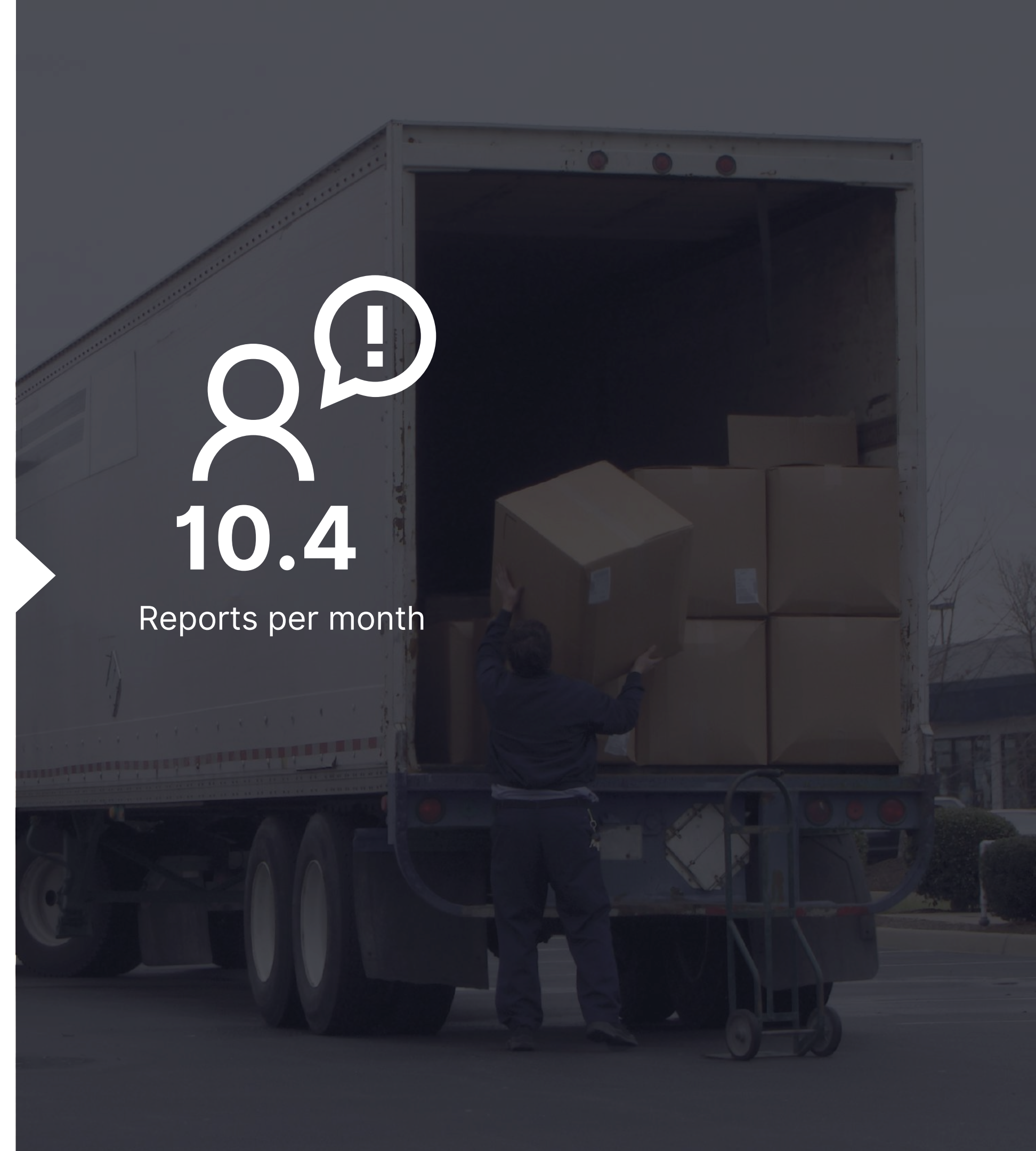
**570**

Retail theft

## 2.3 Land piracy

The theft of merchandise or land piracy is a problem that affects companies at a closer level, as criminals through this crime affect the productivity and logistics of thousands of products and processes carried by businessmen in the country. In the territory of the city of San José this problem is not so evident or present, however, in neighboring provinces close to the Costa Rican capital this is very relevant and a problem that the authorities have been trying to solve. According to the authorities' report, the Costa Rican provinces most affected by this event are Alajuela, Puntarenas and Limón, the first two being the neighboring provinces of San José. ([CRHoy](#), 2024).

According to the OIJ in 2023 there were 1.4 billion colones in stolen artifacts from cargo containers, averaging 10.4 reports per month, and between January and August 2024 there are 80 reports in the country.







**63%**

Variation in homicides  
2022 vs. 2023



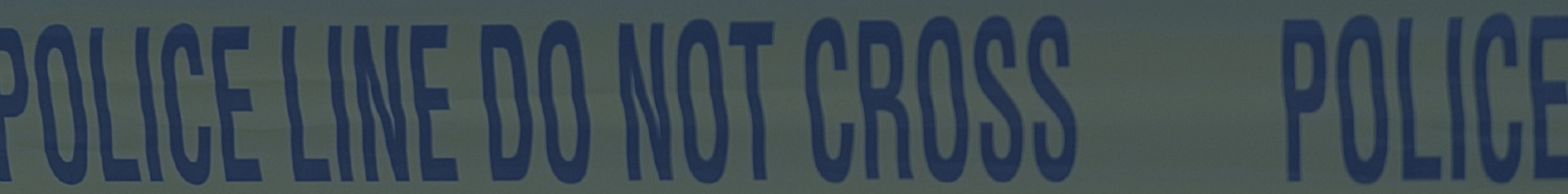
**13%**

Variation January-  
August 2023 vs.  
January-August 2024



**63**

Homicides 2024



## 2.4 Homicides

In January 2024, an attempt was made on the life of Nicaraguan opposition leader Joao Maldonado in the city of San Pedro, in the metropolitan area of San José, when two men intercepted the opposition leader near the Universidad Latina and shot at him and his wife, who were travelling in their car. The shots hit his thorax and head, seriously injuring him. According to information from the Organismo de Investigación Judicial (OIJ), one of those involved may be a Nicaraguan journalist named Daniel Aguirre, with whom he had contact in order to obtain a visa to migrate to the USA ([La Nación](#), 2024).

## 2.5 Extortion, threats and kidnapping

So far in 2024, a total of eight 'virtual kidnappings' have been registered in Costa Rica, four of which were reported in the San José metropolitan area. This extortive modality consists of contacting the victim by digital means, or by phone call, and then informing them that a loved one is being kidnapped and that a quick ransom must be paid so that nothing happens to them. All of this is an elaborate hoax, as the supposed kidnap victim is actually safe, and knows nothing of what is happening. This is why it is called 'virtual kidnapping', as it is an extortive method based on deception to terrorize the victim into paying what is demanded more quickly ([Prensa Latina](#), 2024). One form of extortion that has been occurring more constantly in San José is when criminals look for advertisements for businesses in order to find telephone numbers and the names of the people in charge of the business, and then contact them to threaten them. The criminals ask for money in exchange for not affecting their business or the physical integrity of anyone involved, so they demand that the payment be made quickly in order to avoid resorting to these instances ([Telediario](#), 2024).





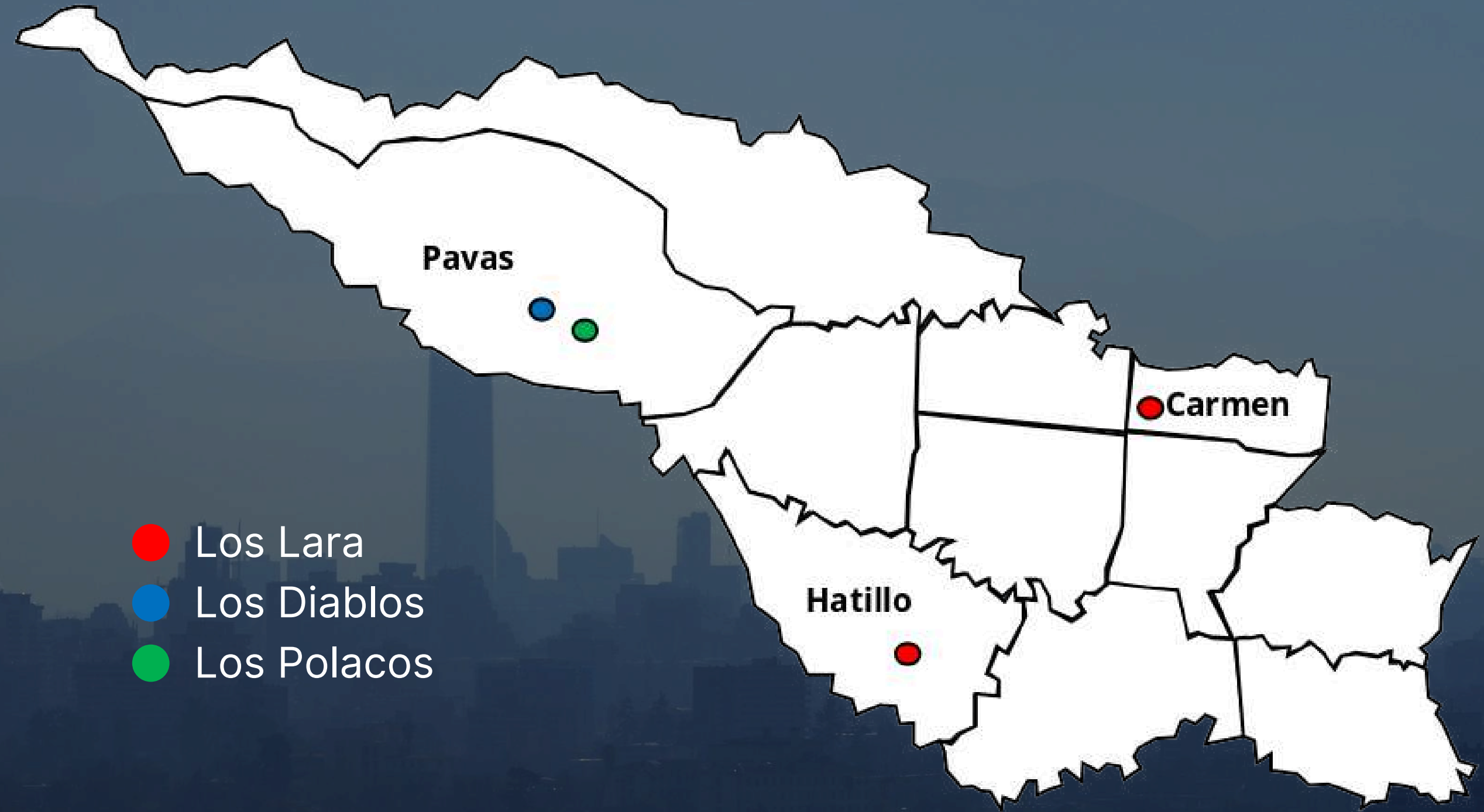
## 3. Risk Generating Factors

### 3.1 Micro-trafficking and criminal groups

## Distribution of the main criminal groups in San José

Drug trafficking has become a driver of crime and insecurity in Costa Rica and its capital, due to the increase in drug trafficking routes from South America to the United States, Mexico, Canada and Europe. Criminal groups arriving from Mexico, Colombia or Venezuela have some presence in the country's ports; however, in San José the presence of criminal groups still remains primarily locals who take advantage of illegal rents to profit. In the metropolitan area of San José, one of the most prevalent criminal gangs is called Los Lara, which has more than 15 years of crime in the Costa Rican capital, having as its main base of operations sectors in the south of the city, from which they organize all drug trafficking and micro-trafficking operations in San José and the country. In 2018 their main leaders were captured by the OIJ, however, in 2022 they were released again due to procedural failures on the part of the prosecutor following the trial against these individuals ([AM Prensa, 2022](#)). In the Las Pavas district of San José there have been recent cases of violence that were not seen before in the country, such as continuous cases of hired killings, ex-tortion or “settling of scores”, in most cases related to criminal gangs and drug trafficking, which has led the authorities to take special care in this sector to prevent these crimes. Intelligence conducted by the OIJ in Las Pavas detected that two of the main criminal groups present in the district are Los Polacos and Los Diablos, who are fighting for territories where they exploit illicit rents throughout the city of San José. At the beginning of August 2024, a man was shot in the Lomas del Río neighborhood, district of Las Pavas, leaving him dead in the street, but with all his personal belongings, suggesting a settling of scores by one of the gangs present in the territory ([La Nación, 2024](#)).

# Distribution of the main criminal groups in San José



- Los Lara
- Los Diablos
- Los Polacos

## 3.2 Social Unrest

Social protest in San José, as well as in the rest of the country, has been a tool for the population to express their dissatisfaction and discontent with certain situations. This is partly why Costa Rican democracy has been categorized as one of the best in Central and Latin America. Although protests generally do not result in large-scale riots or vandalism, it is an unpredictable factor that can change suddenly. In recent times there have been massive protests by social sectors such as unions, students, educators and political sectors, demanding that the country's education budget be respected. This is because the current government of Rodrigo Chaves intends to reduce it in order to increase the defense budget in response to the growing criminality in the country. University associations and students led this great movement, as they demanded that the resources for education not be reduced in 2025, as this would generate great problems for an important part of the student population ([La República, 2024](#)).



# 4. Risk Level

### Map of San José Risk Level by districts

## Risk Analysis




The objective of the risk level analysis is to identify the areas where, according to institutional statistics, there is a greater possibility that scenarios of violence and high impact crimes will occur. In the case of this Security Overview-San José, the characterization will be based on security and crime statistics from the Organismo Judicial (OIJ) and the Observatorio de Violencia de Costa Rica. The most problematic areas of the city will then be identified through two indicators: homicide and robbery.

- HIGH
- MEDIUM/HIGH
- MEDIUM



Resource: Organismo Judicial (OIJ) and Observatorio de Violencia de Costa Rica, 2024.

## Analysis of the dynamics of risks in the city of San José so that companies can evaluate their operations (qualification based on ISO 31000 and quantitative risk analysis).

Risk	Main factors that generate risk	Consequences	Implications for private companies	Risk Level
 <p><b>Deterioration in the security situation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unemployment.</li> <li>• Presence of transnational criminal groups</li> <li>• Influence of the micro-trafficking phenomenon in common and organized crime, developing networks of hired killings and their strengthening.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen distrust</li> <li>• Decrease in local and foreign investment in the city.</li> <li>• Affectation of small and medium-sized businesses.</li> <li>• Decrease in tourism potential.</li> <li>• Increase in complaints of extortion, threats and homicides.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential impact on the supply or value chain due to the permeability of crime.</li> <li>• Non-fulfillment of services or commitments.</li> <li>• Leakage of personnel with intentions of harming companies.</li> <li>• Fear of market expansion due to criminal networks.</li> </ul>	<p><b>High</b></p>
 <p><b>Impact on the economic and financial system</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corruption in the public and private sector.</li> <li>• Increasing poverty and inequality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease in foreign investment in the city.</li> <li>• Low wages.</li> <li>• Labor informality.</li> <li>• Limitation and inadequate use of public space.</li> <li>• Low business generation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced demand for services and products.</li> <li>• Decrease in revenues.</li> <li>• Increased costs due to phenomena such as inflation.</li> <li>• Limitation of operating capacities.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Medium-High</b></p>
 <p><b>Social protest</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissatisfied communities</li> <li>• Failure to comply with agreements between citizens and the government.</li> <li>• Insufficient government management and lack of public resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governmental destabilization.</li> <li>• Interruption of economic activities.</li> <li>• Increase in public spending.</li> <li>• Possible violence increase</li> <li>• Resurgence of social conflicts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial losses.</li> <li>• Affectations in the supply chain.</li> <li>• Unfavorable business climate.</li> <li>• Loss of business opportunities.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Medium</b></p>

## 5. Foresight Design



**María Alejandra Rivera**

Political scientist and historian  
Unidad de Análisis Político y  
Seguridad Corporativa  
(UAPSC) 3+SC



**Alejandro Cárdenas**

Political scientist  
Unidad de Análisis Político y  
Seguridad Corporativa  
(UAPSC) 3+SC

The security situation in San José, Costa Rica, is characterized by an increase in crime and the presence of organized groups that have generated a climate of insecurity. The most affected districts include Carmen, Catedral, Hospital, Merced, and Hatillo, where high rates of crime such as robberies, assaults, and drug trafficking are reported. Organized crime has taken control of certain areas, creating an environment similar to a “war zone” in some neighborhoods, especially in the southern arc of the city, where the presence of criminal groups is notable. This has led to a loss of confidence in security institutions and a general sense of vulnerability among citizens.

In the short term, the insecurity situation is likely to remain critical if effective measures are not implemented by the government and law enforcement.

Lack of resources and corruption within police institutions may hamper efforts to combat crime. However, community initiatives such as the recovery of public spaces and collaboration between neighbors and authorities can contribute to improving security in specific areas. The implementation of strategies such as the “Sembremos Seguridad” program seeks to encourage citizen participation in policing and crime prevention, which could have a positive impact in the short term. In the medium term, if the authorities manage to establish a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to address insecurity, there could be a gradual improvement in the situation. This would include the strengthening of public policies focused on crime prevention, as well as investments in infrastructure and basic services that foster a safer environment.

The recovery of public spaces and the promotion of cultural activities could help restore a sense of community and reduce violence. However, success will depend on the state's ability to regain its authority and presence in the neighborhoods most affected by organized crime. In summary, although San José faces significant challenges in terms of security, there are opportunities to improve the situation through community efforts and effective public policies. Collaboration between citizens and authorities will be key to reversing current trends and building a safer environment in the future.

**Find the full  
version of this  
document here:**





# 6. Recommendations

- 1** Always maintain a high degree of situational awareness, which allows you to identify risks or threats derived from situations external to the place or areas where you travel.
- 2** Taking into account the description of the Risk Level provided in this document, identify the neighborhoods and districts with a high risk level. This in order to foresee safety and self-care plans.
- 3** In case of travel in a private vehicle, perform a route analysis and have alternate routes that allow you to resolve any new developments on the route.
- 4** Do not transit or travel late at night.
- 5** For the movement of expatriates or foreigners within San José, evaluate the likelihood of having systems to monitor their movements remotely from a Command Center.

- 6** For the movement of expatriates or foreigners within San José, evaluate the likelihood of having systems to monitor their movements remotely from a Command Center.
- 7** If you are in crowded places such as restaurants, shopping malls or bars, always take care of your personal belongings and avoid conversations with people who suddenly ask for favors or want to approach you.
- 8** Avoid having detailed or sensitive information about your family members, as well as the organization you work for, on your cell phone.
- 9** Be careful with the information you publish through your social networks, taking into account that the less privacy you have, the greater the exposure to the risk of extortion or kidnapping.

- 10** If you are a victim of telephone extortion, do not hang up, try to take notes, do not give your name or your identity number and, if possible, record the call. If you are a victim of threats in any of its modalities, contact the authorities immediately and do not give in to the requests of the criminals.
- 11** If possible, train yourself in defensive and evasive driving to increase your ability to save your life or that of your family in the event of an assault on public roads.
- 12** If you are in a highly vulnerable situation and are likely to be a victim of robbery, mugging or carjacking, do not put up any resistance.

**Note.** The investigative work and analysis recorded in this security assessment is exclusive to **3+ Security Colombia**. Therefore, it is recommended not to disclose the document in question.





# SECURITY COLOMBIA

## Let us accompany you with the service you deserve.



RESOLUCIÓN:  
No. 20204100025717



BUSINESS ALLIANCE FOR SECURE COMMERCE  
CERTIFICADO BASC  
COLBOG01083-1-1



[www.3securitycol.com](http://www.3securitycol.com)

[in](https://www.linkedin.com/company/3securitycolombia) 3securitycolombia

[@3securitycol](https://www.instagram.com/3securitycol)

[f](https://www.facebook.com/3seguridadcol) @3seguridadcol