

COSTA RICA

Analysis of intentional homicide

January-December 2022

Highlights

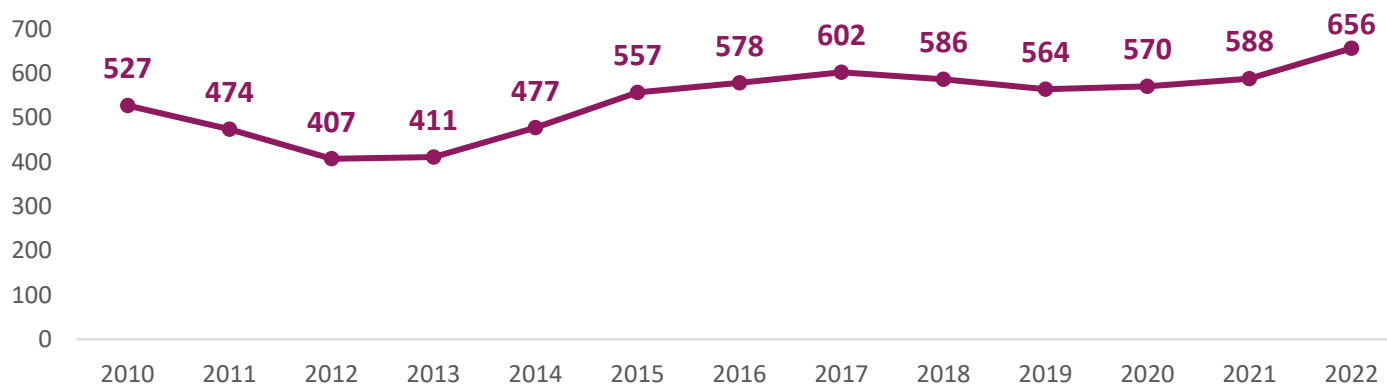
- There are 656 victims of intentional homicide on record. That is 68 more victims than the same period in 2021. The total rate is 12.6 intentional homicides per 100,000 population.
- On average, there are 55 victims of intentional homicide registered per month, six more victims per month compared to the same period in 2021.
- As for the motive, 63% of intentional homicides are linked to organized crime, that is 62% score settling or revenge¹ and 1% professional motive².
- Out of this total, 608 victims were male (77 more victims than in 2021), 47 were female (8 fewer victims than in 2021), and one victim of unknown sex.
- As for the profiles of all victims of intentional homicide, one in two victims were young males ages 20 to 34, and nine in ten victims were Costa Rican nationals.
- Limon (168 victims), San José (118 victims), Puntarenas (111 victims) and Alajuela (109 victims) are the provinces with the highest incidence.
- Rates by sex of victim are 23.2 intentional homicides per 100,000 men, and 1.8 intentional homicides per 100,000 women.
- In terms of method or weapon used, 72% of intentional homicides were committed with a firearm, 16% a sharp weapon, and 12% by other means.
- Cantons from highest to lowest occurrence: Limon, San José, Alajuela, Pococí, Puntarenas and Matina account for 41% of all victims of intentional homicide.

Evidence

I. Introduction

From January to December 2022, 656 intentional homicides have been registered. This sets a historical record in Costa Rica. It is the highest number of victims since this offense has been recorded in the country, according to Judicial Investigation Department (OIJ) data.

Victims of intentional homicide by year of occurrence, 2010-2022



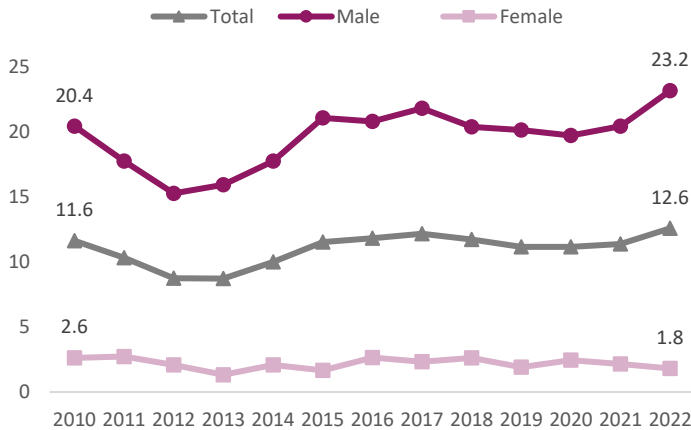
Source: Judicial Investigation Department, 2010-2022.

¹ These cases may involve circumstances that have to do with drugs or to organized criminal groups.

² These are cases where the perpetrator charges a fee for taking the life of the victim, known as contract killing.

Considering demographic projections by the National Statistics and Census Institute (INEC) and the number of intentional homicides registered the rate is 12.6 intentional homicides per 100,000 population. By sex, it is 23.2 intentional homicides per 100,000 men and 1.8 intentional homicide per 100,000 women.

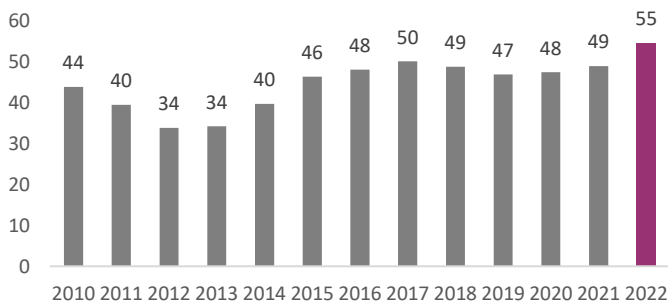
Intentional Homicide Rate by year of occurrence, by sex, 2010-2022
(100,000 population)



Source: INEC and Judicial Investigation Department, 2010-2022.

The monthly average of intentional homicide victims has increased over the last four years (47 victims in 2019, 48 victims in 2020, 49 victims in 2021 and 55 victims in 2022), adding eight more victims per month from 2019 to 2022.

Monthly average number of victims of intentional homicide by year of occurrence, 2010-2022



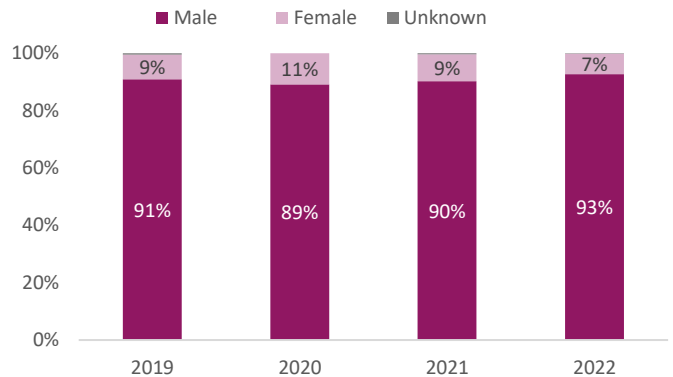
Source: Judicial Investigation Department, 2010-2022.

Approximately four in ten intentional homicides in 2022 are registered as taking place on a weekend. In 18% (116 victims) of the cases, it took place on a Saturday, and 18% (120 victims) on a Sunday. Moreover, on weekdays (Monday to Friday) the average was 13% per day.

II. Victim profiles

Disaggregating the occurrence of intentional homicides in 2022 by sex, reveals that in 92.7% (608 victims) were male, in 7.2% (47 victims) female, and in 0.2% (one of the victims) the sex was unknown. This proportion is similar to previous years (2019, 2020 and 2021 to compare with pre-pandemic figures).

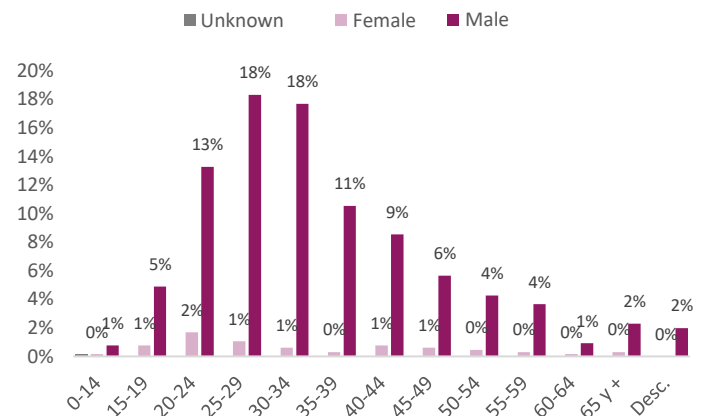
Percentage distribution of intentional homicide victims by year, by sex, 2019-2022



Source: Judicial Investigation Department, 2019-2022.

By disaggregating the intentional homicides in 2022 by sex and age of victims, the main victims are revealed to still be young people, with 53% of them between 20 and 34 years of age at the time of death.

Percentage of intentional homicide victims by age, by sex, 2022



Source: Judicial Investigation Department, 2022.

As for the nationality of victims of intentional homicide in 2022, some 87% were Costa Rican nationals (569 victims), 9% were Nicaraguan (62 victims) and the remaining 4% correspond to other nationalities registered in the OIJ statistical records.

In general terms, profiles of all victims of intentional homicide in 2022 show that approximately half were

young males from 20–34 years of age (49%–323 victims) and that nine in ten were Costa Rican nationals (87%–569 victims).

III. Characterization of offenses

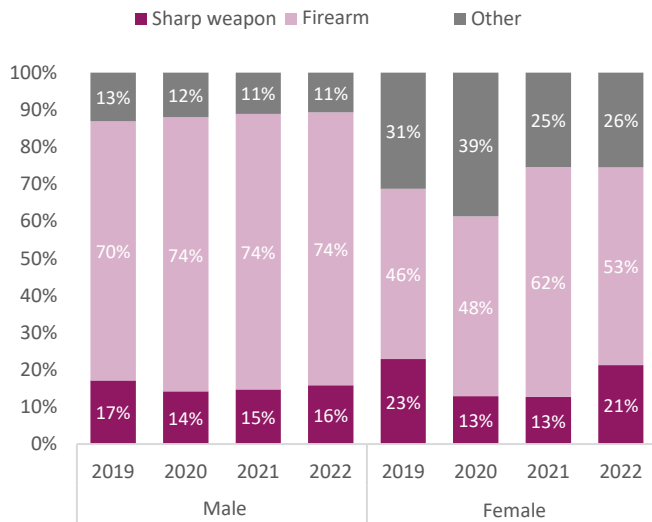
- **Methods used**

Considering the total number of intentional homicides in 2022, 72% of cases (472 victims) involved a firearm, 16% (106 victims) a sharp weapon, and 12% (78 victims) other methods were used.

More specifically, with regard to type of weapon used and sex of the victim, 74% of male victims (447 victims) died due to firearm related injuries, 16% (96 victims) sharp weapon, and 11% (65 victims) by other means. In the case of females, 53% (25 victims) died of firearm related injuries, 21% (10 victims) sharp weapon, and 26% (12 victims) by other means.

That is to say, intentional homicides linked to firearm use continue to predominate among males. In the case of females one in four victims died by other means. This suggests differentiated violence by the method employed, according to the sex of the victim.

Percentage distribution of intentional homicide victims by sex and year, according to methods used, 2019-2022



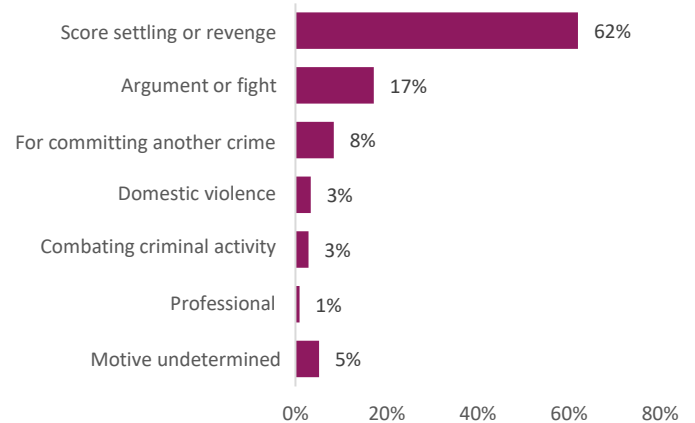
Source: Judicial Investigation Department, 2019-2022.

³ In these cases, there are intimate family bonds between the victim and perpetrator, suggesting a certain degree of domestic coexistence, prior to- or when the offense took place (whether or not marriage).

- **Motive**

As for the motive, 63% of intentional homicides are linked to organized crime (407 victims of score settling or revenge and 6 victims for professional motive). The remaining 37% had to do with other types of motive.

Percentage Intentional homicide victims by motive, 2022

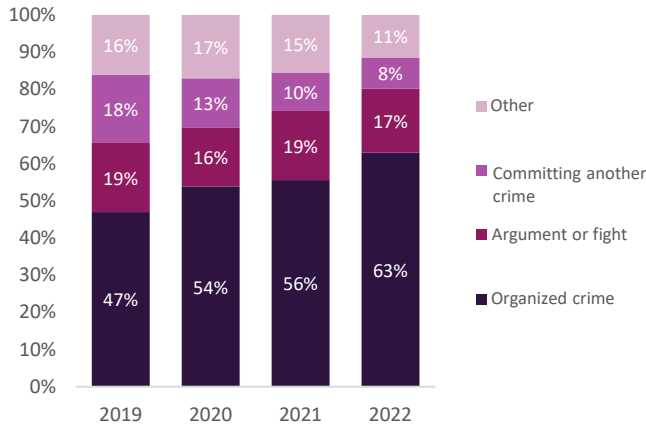


Source: Judicial Investigation Department, 2022.

A disaggregation by type of motive and sex of the victim shows that the motive in 65% of male deaths is associated with organized crime. In the case of females just 40% died due to this type of motive. Among female victims, a significant proportion of homicides is linked to "domestic violence"³ (32% or 15 victims). In the case of males, only 1% of all deaths in 2022 had to do with domestic violence.

During recent years, the proportion of victims of intentional homicide linked to con la organized crime has been on the rise. Consider the period 2019-2022 for a pre-pandemic comparison. In 2019, 47% of all intentional homicides had to do with organized crime. In 2022, the percentage was 63%, or 148 more victims from 2019 to 2022.

Percentage distribution of victims of intentional homicide by motive, 2019-2022



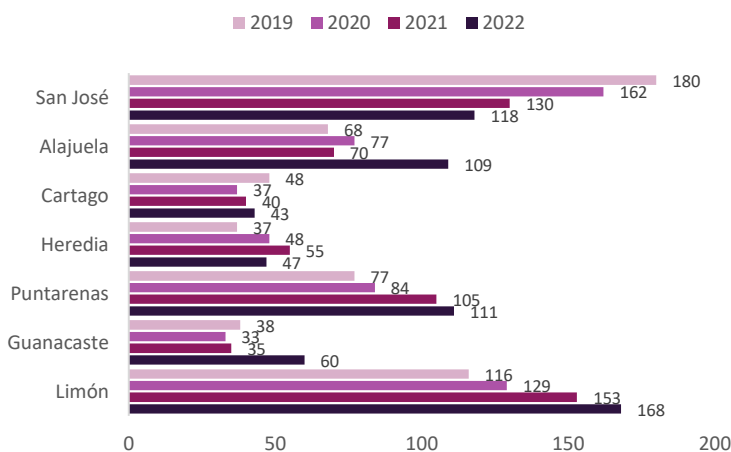
Note: The category "Other" covers motives such as femicide, ideological, combating crime, sexual abuse, mental disorder, domestic violence, unspecified, and more. These are grouped together given the very low percentage in relation to the three primary categories illustrated.

Source: Judicial Investigation Department, 2019-2022.

Place of occurrence

Regarding the location the incidents took place, the provinces of Limon (168 victims), San José (118 victims), Puntarenas (111 victims) and Alajuela (109 victims) had the highest number of incidents. The other provinces recorded lower rates over the same time period. The sum total of deaths in Guanacaste (60 victims), Cartago (43) and Heredia (47) is not greater than the number of victims registered in Limon with 26% of all victims in 2022.

Victims of intentional homicide by province, 2019-2022



Source: Judicial Investigation Department, 2019-2022.

The 2019-2022 comparison shows that:

- San José is the province with the highest occurrence in 2019 and 2020. However, starting in 2021, it is Limon.
- Alajuela (60%), Guanacaste (58%), Limon (45%) and Puntarenas (44%) experienced a rise in intentional homicide in 2022 as compared to 2019.
- Guanacaste, Heredia and Cartago, despite fluctuations over time, register a lower number of victims as compared to the other provinces.

As for the cantons with the highest occurrence of intentional homicide in 2022, at the top of the list (cantons listed from lowest to highest occurrence): Limon (62 victims), San José (50), Alajuela (47), Pococí (44), Puntarenas (44) and Matina (25).

These six cantons registered 25 or more victims during 2022, and together account for 41% of all registered victims. This means that four in ten deaths took place in one of these six cantons.

The following is a profile of each of these cantons:

- San José is the number one canton in the province of San José (capital of Costa Rica). It is the most populated canton in both province and country with 351,958 inhabitants in 2022 according to INEC. The level of human development is very high (Human Development Index⁴ was 0.83 in 2019) and a medium level of multidimensional poverty, according to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (IPM)⁵ in 2020.
- Alajuela is the number one canton in the province of Alajuela, the most populated canton in the province and the second most populated canton in the country (321,872 inhabitants in 2022). There is a very high level of human development, as in the central canton in San José (2019 HDI was 0.83) and a medium level of multidimensional poverty (2020 MPI was 0.04).

⁴ The canton Human Development Index measures the average achievements of a specific geographic area in three key dimensions of human development: A long and healthy life (life expectancy at birth), being knowledgeable (expected years of schooling and average years of schooling), and

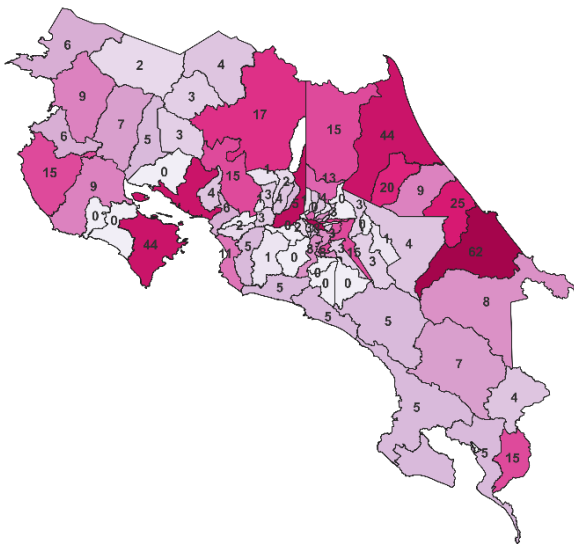
a decent standard of living (Material Welfare Index based on residential electricity consumption per customer).

⁵ The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) identifies multiple individual deprivations in education, housing and internet use, health and social protection.

- Puntarenas is the number one canton in the province of Puntarenas. It borders the Pacific coast of Costa Rica and is the most populated canton in the province (population 143,875 in 2022), with a very high level of human development (2019 HDI was 0.80) and a medium level of multidimensional poverty (2020 MPI was 0.08).
- Limon is the number one canton in the province of Limon (central canton), while Matina and Pococi (the most populated in the province with population 154,674) are the number three and four cantons in the province of Limon. This is the seventh province in Costa Rica. It borders to the north with Nicaragua and to the northeast the Caribbean Sea.

Limon and Pococi have a high level of human development (2019 HDI were 0.77 and 0.78 respectively) whereas in Matina it was medium (2019 HDI was 0.69). In terms of poverty, the level in Pococi is medium (0.08) while Limon and Matina have a high level according to the 2020 MPI (0.10 respectively).

Victims of intentional homicide in Costa Rica by canton of occurrence, 2022

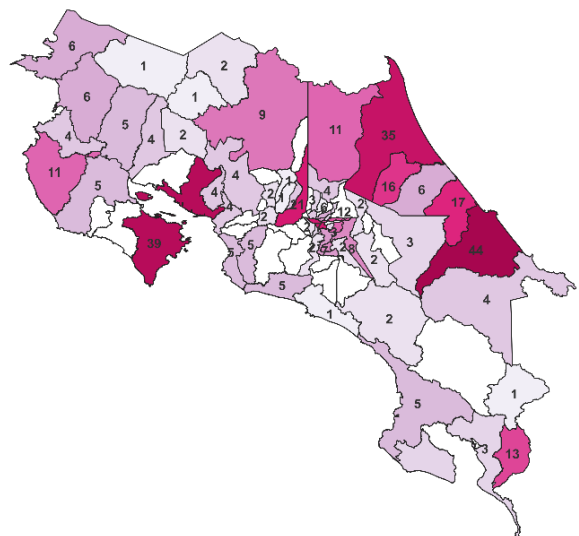


Source: Judicial Investigation Department, 2022.

It was also possible to analyze place of occurrence of intentional homicide linked to organized crime in 2022, revealing that:

- The provinces of Limon (122 victims), San José (80 victims), Puntarenas (67 victims) and Alajuela (48 victims) have the highest incidence. Together they account for 77% of overall victims. This is to say that eight in ten deaths took place in one of these six provinces.
- Cantons where occurrence is highest are: Limon (44 victims), Puntarenas (39 victims), Pococi (35 victims), San José (21 victims) and Matina (17 victims). As in the general profile, they are in the top tier for occurrence. In all, they accounted for 43% of all victims of intentional homicides.

Victims of intentional homicide in Costa Rica by canton of occurrence, 2022 (only organized crime)



Source: Judicial Investigation Department, 2022.

This analysis was carried out with data provided by the Judicial Investigation Department (OIJ) on January 13, 2023 to the Violence Observatory at the Vice Ministry of Peace of the Ministry of Justice of Costa Rica.