

COSTA RICA

Analysis of intentional homicide

January–June 2023

Overview

- 442 intentional homicides, 133 more victims compared to the same period in 2022, reported by the OIJ, January to June 2023.
- 405 victims were male (up 118 compared to the same period in 2022) and 37 were female (up 16 from same period in 2022).
- 74 intentional homicides were registered on average per month, that is 22 more victims per month compared to the same period the previous year.
- One out of every two victims were young people ages 15 to 34, and eight in 10 were Costa Rican nationals in the first half of 2023.
- Eight in 10 intentional homicides were committed with a firearm. As for other weapons: In one out of 10, a sharp weapon was used and in one out of 10, other.
- 63 per cent involved settling a score or a reprisal as the motive, 14 per cent an argument or quarrel, nine per cent were done to commit another crime, five per cent for other motives and in nine per cent of the cases, the motive was unknown.
- In six out of 10 cases, the homicide had to do with other motives, including drug-trafficking or organized crime.¹
- The provinces of Limon and San Jose—where the Costa Rican capital city is—have the highest rate of occurrence. Half of all incidents in the first half of the year took place there.
- Fifty per cent of the victims were female in the following cantons: Limon, San Jose, Puntarenas, Alajuela, Matina, Siquirres, Santa Cruz, Alajuelita and Desamparados.

Evidence

I. Introduction

From January to June 2023, 442 intentional homicides were registered. That is 133 (+43%) more than in the same period in 2022. In all, 405 victims were men and 37 women.

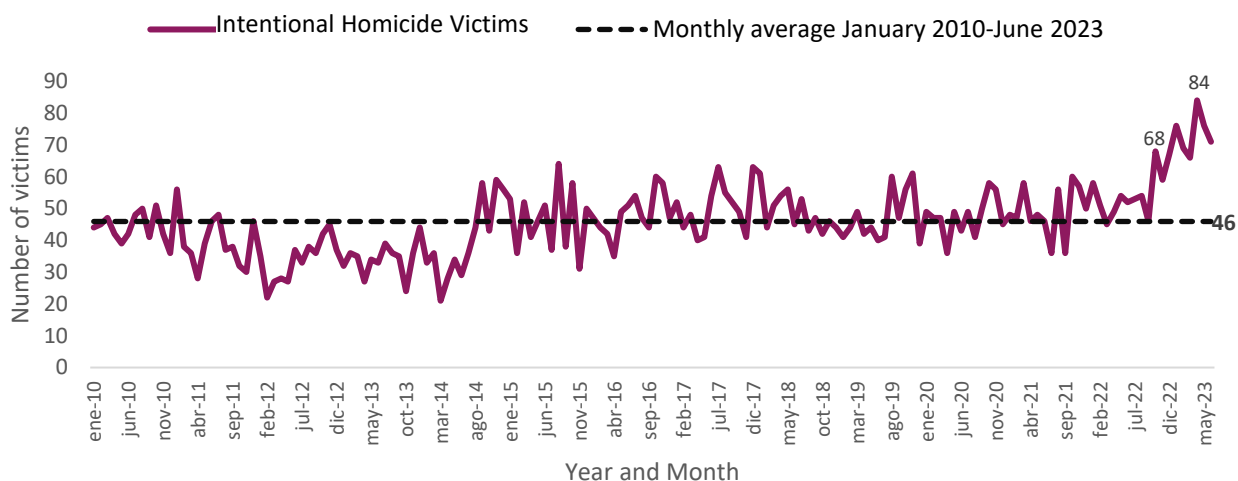
In the case of the men, there were 118 (+41%) more victims than in the same period in 2022. As for the women, there were 16 (+76%) more victims compared to the same period in 2022.

By month of occurrence, records show 76 victims in January, 69 in February, 66 in March, 84 in April, 76 in May and 71 in June. The figure in April marks a record in Costa Rica, as the largest number of victims in a single month since homicide records started in this country.

Analysis of the monthly number of victims of intentional homicide by year and month of occurrence from January 2010 through June 2023 (162 months), reveals an average of 46 victims monthly. Since October 2022, the number of monthly casualties tends to move away from the average during the last months of the series (October 2022-June 2023).

¹ The motives linked to drug-trafficking or organized crime, "contract kill" category, where the perpetrator is paid to kill the victim, has been on the rise in recent years. include: "Score settling or revenge", which are cases that may be drug-related or involve organized criminal groups. The

Number of victims of homicide by year and month of occurrence, January 2010–June 2023



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

Furthermore, an analysis of the first half of the period 2010-2023 by year of occurrence, the number of victims of intentional homicide is highest in the first half of 2018, 2022 and 2023.

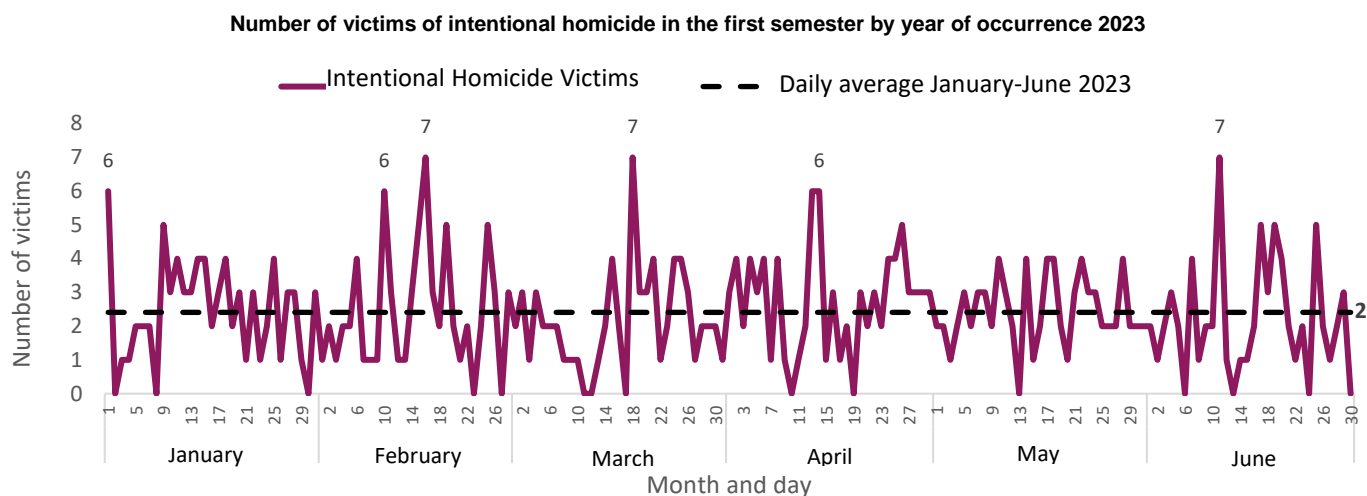
In the first half of 2018 and 2022, there were—on average—52 intentional homicides per month, respectively. However, in the first half of 2023, the average monthly number of victims of intentional homicide was 74. That is 22 more victims than the same period in 2022.

Victims of intentional homicide in the first semester by year of occurrence and monthly average, 2010–2023



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

This 74-victim monthly average during the first half of 2023 is the equivalent of two victims per day during the first 181 days in 2023. The daily number of victims registered from January to June 2023 is between zero to seven victims per day. This means that victims were not recorded every day. The days with the highest number of victims were February 16, March 18 and June 11, with seven victims.



Source: Judicial Investigation Department, first half of 2023.

Analysis of the behaviour of intentional homicide victim figures from 2010 to 2022 by semester of occurrence shows that on average 47 per cent of homicides occurred in the first semester and the remaining 53 per cent in the second semester.

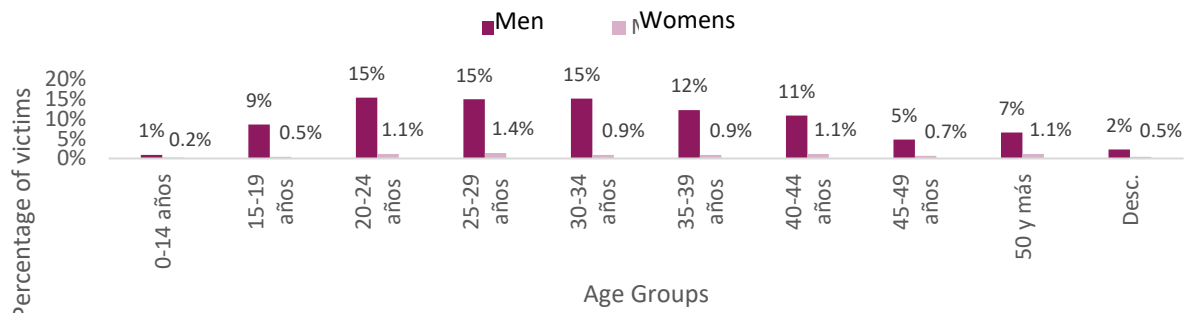
Should this trend continue, 2023 might be expected to close with some 940 victims of intentional homicide, which is a rate of 17.87 intentional homicides per 100,000 population.

II. Victim characterization

Disaggregating the number of intentional homicides in the first half of 2023 by sex reveals that 92 per cent (405 victims) were men and eight per cent (37 victims) were women. By age, records show there were victims from age zero² to 90 years old. By sex and age, 54 per cent were young men ages 15 to 34 years old.

² One record is of a two-month-old infant.

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



Source: Judicial Investigation Department, first half of 2023.

In relation to victim nationality in the first half of 2023, 84 per cent (372 victims) were Costa Rican, 10 per cent (44 victims) were Nicaraguan and the remaining six corresponded to other nationalities.

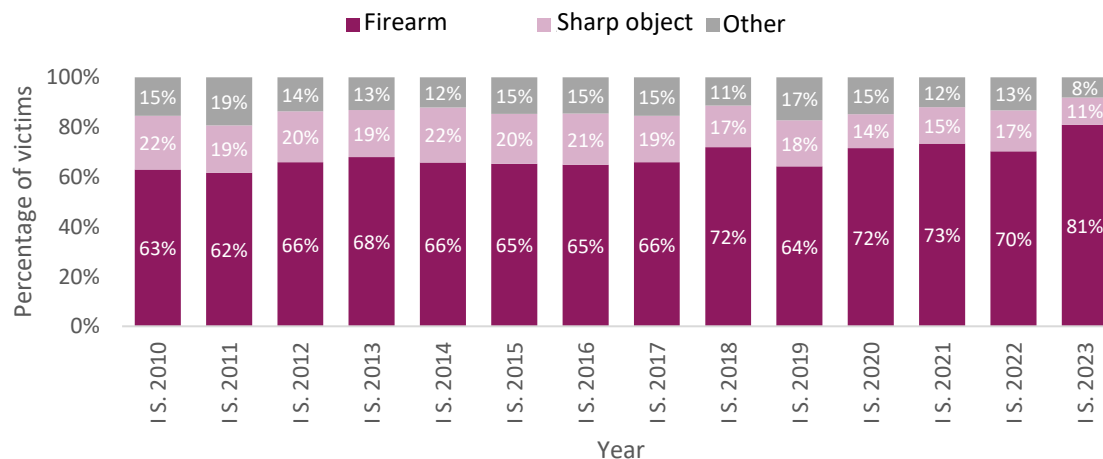
III. Describing the facts

- **Method or weapon:**

From 2010 to 2017, six in 10 homicides were committed with a firearm. In the last five years, however, the proportion of firearm-related homicides rose 15 percentage points.

In the first half of 2023, 81 per cent (162 victims) of all intentional homicides involved firearms, 11 per cent (28 victims) sharp weapon and eight per cent (22 victims) were committed using other methods.

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



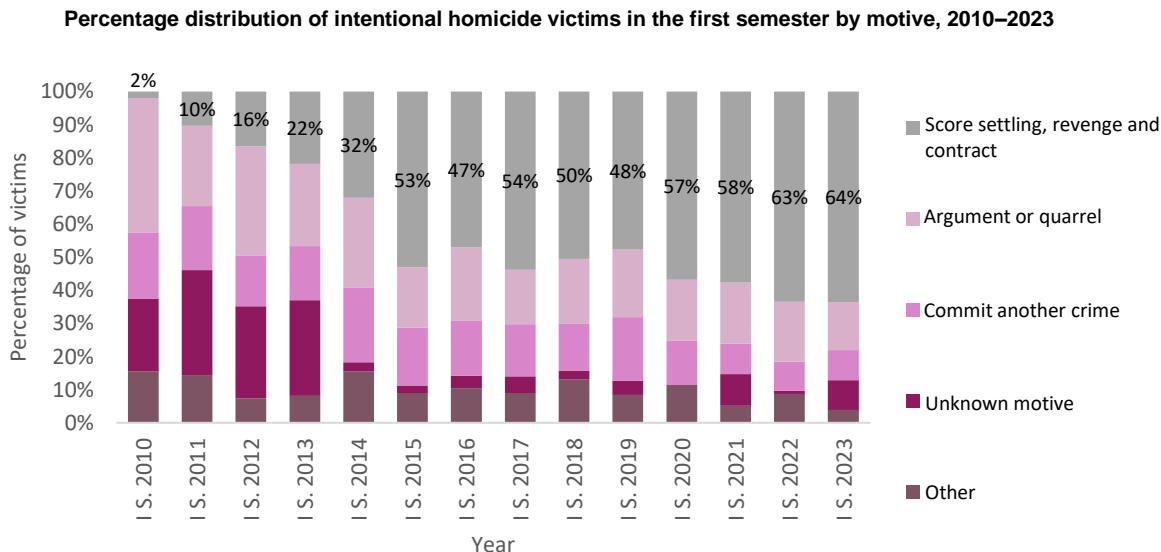
Source: Judicial Investigation Department, first semester of the period 2010–2023.

- **Motive**

During the first half of 2023, the motive in 63 per cent of recorded intentional homicides (279 victims) had to do with score settling or revenge, 14 per cent (64 victims) argument or quarrel, nine per cent (40 victims) to commit another crime, three per cent (12 victims) domestic violence, one per cent (5 victims) repelling criminal activity, half of one per cent (2 victims) contract killing³ and in nine per cent of the cases (40 victims) motive was unknown.

Analysis of the percentage distribution of intentional homicide victims by motive, comparing the first semesters of the period 2010–2023, it emerges that homicides involving drugs or organized criminal groups rank at the top in the last decade. They have gone from two per cent in 2010 to 64 per cent in the first half of 2023.

It is also important to note that the proportion of homicides with unknown motives represented 22 per cent of instances in 2010 and has dropped to nine per cent in 2023.



Note: The category “Other” includes motives registered with lower frequency such as femicide, ideological, combating crime, sexual, mental disorder, domestic violence and others.

Source: Judicial Investigation Department, first semester of the period 2010–2023.

- **Place of occurrence**

Province

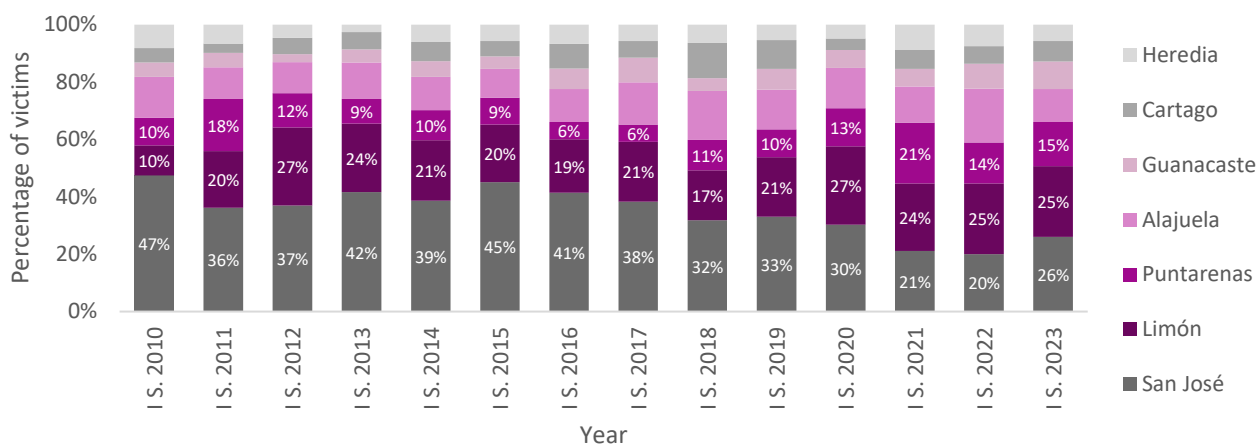
Comparison of first semester data in the period 2010–2023 by province shows that San Jose has the highest proportion of occurrences from 2010 to 2020. As of 2021, the proportion of intentional homicide in the Province of Limon (24%) is higher than San Jose (21%) and Puntarenas (21%).

³ In these cases, the perpetrator charges a fee for taking the victim's life. This has exhibited a rising trend in recent years.

During the first half of 2023, the provinces of San Jose (26%) and Limon (25%) are practically even in terms of percentages, with one fourth of all intentional homicide victims in each. This means, half of all intentional homicides were committed in San Jose or Limon.

The third and fourth ranked in terms of percentages are the provinces of Puntarenas (15%) and Alajuela (12%). In the rest—namely Guanacaste, Cartago and Heredia—occurrence equals 10 per cent or lower.

Percentage distribution of intentional homicide victims, first semester, by province of occurrence, 2010–2023

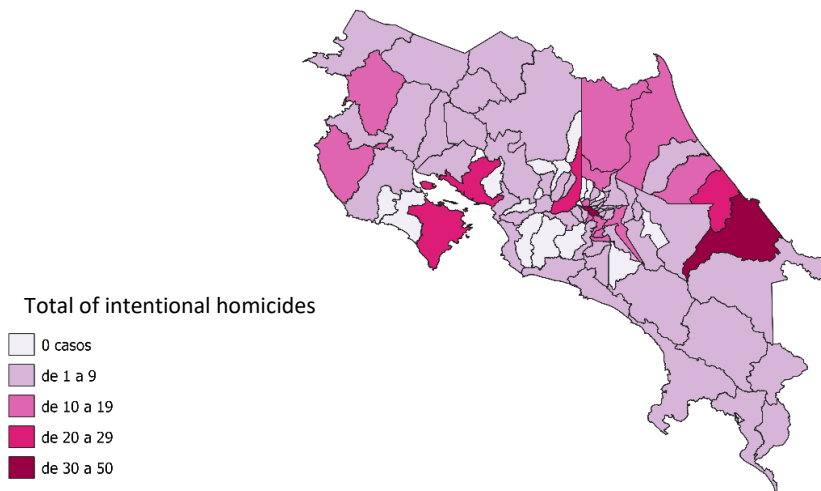


Source: Judicial Investigation Department, first semester of the period 2010–2023.

Canton:

In the first half of 2023, Limon (49 victims), San Jose (46 victims), Puntarenas (29 victims), Alajuela (23 victims), Matina (21 victims), Siquirres (15 victims), Santa Cruz (14 victims), Alajuelita (13 victims) and Desamparados (13 victims) are the cantons with the highest incidence of intentional homicides, accounting for 50 per cent of all victims.

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



Source: Violence Observatory based on data for the first half of 2023 provided by the Judicial Investigation Department.

These are densely populated cantons, provincial capitals, coastal and border areas, with the following conditions:

❖ Location

Limon, San Jose, Puntarenas and Alajuela. are eponymous province capitals. Siquirres and Matina are cantons number three and five in the Province of Limon, which borders on the north with Nicaragua and in the northeast with the Caribbean. Santa Cruz is canton number three in the Province of Guanacaste, located in the far northeast of the country. Alajuelita and Desamparados are cantons 3 and 10 in the centre of San Jose Province.

❖ Population⁴

San Jose is the most populated canton in the country with 354,025 residents, followed by Alajuela with a 325,567 residents. Desamparados is not the province capital. With 251,324 inhabitants, it is the third most populated canton, though. The population density in the remaining canton capitals is high: Puntarenas (population 145,711) and Limon (100,401). The population in the rest of the cantons is under 100,000 residents: Alajuelita (population 98,409), Santa Cruz (72,412), Siquirres (66,036) and Matina (47,894).

❖ Human development

The canton Human Development Index (HDI) measures the average in that specific geographic area in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, as measured by life expectancy at birth, knowledge, as measured by mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling; and a decent standard of living measured by the Material Welfare Index based on average household per capita income.

Human development levels are high in Alajuela (0.784), San Jose (0.758), Desamparados (0.743), Siquirres (0.723) and Alajuelita (0.712), according to the 2020 canton Human Development Index. Human development levels are medium in Santa Cruz (0.693), Puntarenas (0.692), Limon (0.688) and Matina (0.579).

❖ Organized Crime

Limon (36 victims), San Jose (24 victims), Puntarenas (22 victims), Matina (17 victims), Siquirres (12 victims), Alajuelita (10 victims), Alajuela (9 victims), Santa Cruz (8 victims) and Desamparados (7 victims) are the cantons with the highest incidence of intentional homicides linked to organized crime, accounting for 52 per cent of the total number of victims in the first semester of 2023.

Metadata: This report was prepared with data provided by the Violence Observatory at the Vice Ministry of Peace, based on databases of the Judicial Investigation Department (OIJ) as of semester one 2023.

⁴ Population as of June 30, 2023 according to the demographic projections by the National Statistics and Census Institute (INEC).