

ANNUAL REPORT

VIOLENCE

2023

VENEZUELAN OBSERVATORY OF VIOLENCE
SOCIAL SCIENCES LABORATORY



LACSO

CARACAS, LACSO, 2023

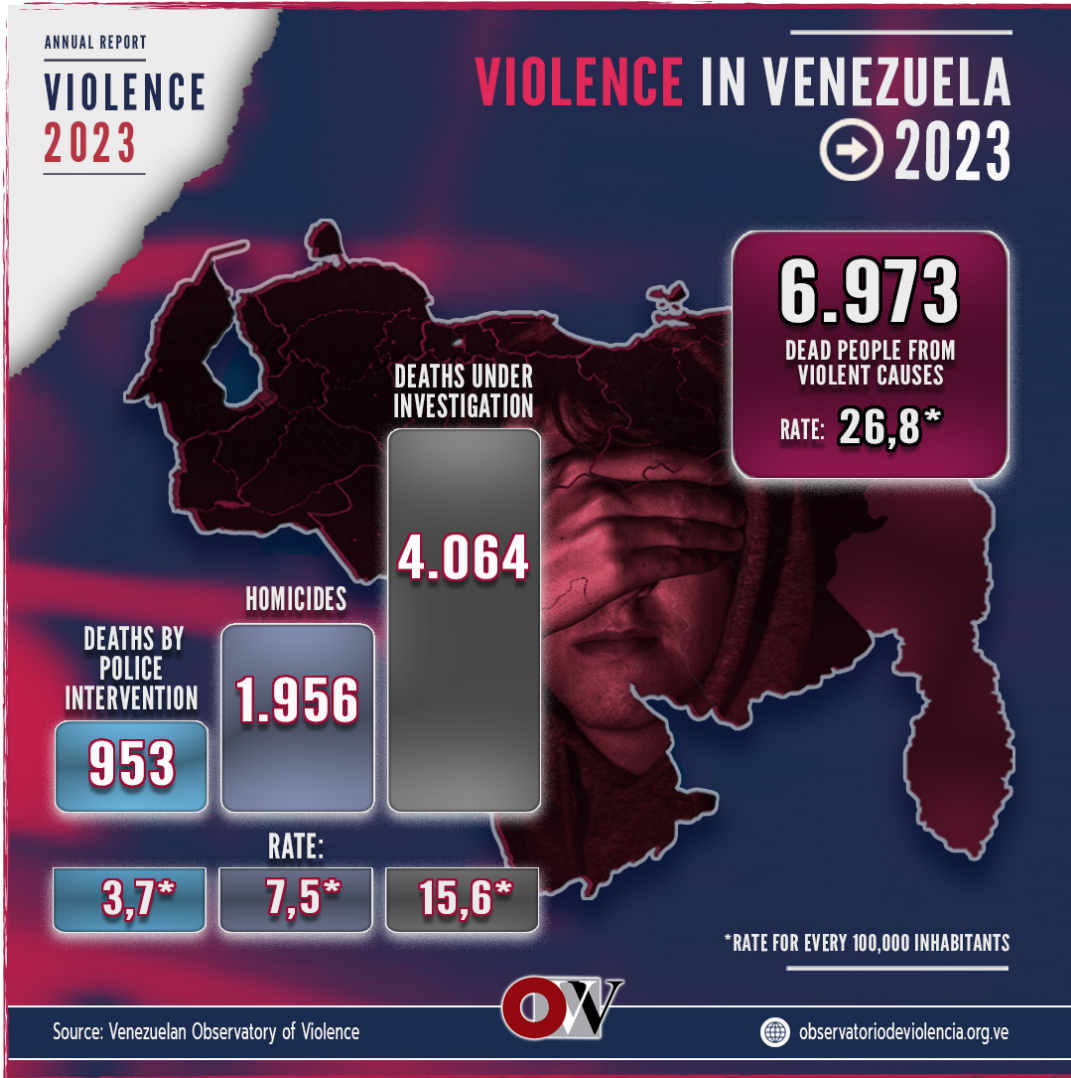


- 1- By the end of the year 2023, there were 6,973 cases of violent deaths reported. Out of these, 1,956 were homicides committed by criminals, 953 were deaths resulting from police intervention actions, and 4,064 deaths were classified as violent, the cause and intentionality of which are still under investigation.
- 2- The figures indicate a shift in the recent trend, as there was a 25% decrease in violent deaths when compared to the years 2021 and 2022. The total number of violent deaths in those years was 9,447 and 9,367, respectively, which were very similar to each other. These figures showed stagnation without any reduction or increase in relation to violent deaths in the previous two years.
- 3- After converting the raw count of violent deaths that occurred in the year 2023 into rates and adjusting it with the estimated population count of 26 million inhabitants, we have obtained a rate of 26.8 deaths per hundred thousand individuals. This signifies a noteworthy decrease of 8.5 points in comparison to the rates reported for the years 2021 and 2022, which were recorded as 34.9 and 35.3 deaths per hundred thousand inhabitants, respectively.
- 4- The decrease was uneven in the three categories of violent deaths. Homicides experienced the smallest reduction with 15.9%, registering 372 fewer victims. Deaths due to police intervention fell by 23.1%, with a decrease of 287 deaths. Deaths under investigation showed the greatest decline, with a decrease of 1,735 registered cases, representing a decrease of 29.9% compared to 2022.
- 5- Although the absolute numbers presented a reduction as a whole, the internal composition of the causes of violent deaths remained quite similar to those observed in 2022. Deaths occurring due to police intervention accounted for 13.7% of total violent deaths, very similar to the 13.2% in 2022. The participation deaths under investigation decreased by 3.7%, falling from 61.9% in 2022 to 58.3% in 2023. And homicide victims increased by 3.2 percentage points as their share grew from 24.9% last year to 28.1% this year.
- 6- The sum of homicides and deaths due to police intervention total 2,909 victims, while deaths whose cause of violent death is under investigation totaled 4,064 cases, which means that deaths that are in that black box called "under investigation" represent more than two quarters -58.3%- of violent deaths in the country. This is an extremely high figure, especially if one takes into consideration the agreements on international standards in this matter, such as the Bogotá Protocol of 2015, where it was established that deaths due to undetermined causes should not exceed 10% of those killed in homicides due to police interventions. That 10% in Venezuela during the year 2023 would be 290 cases, while the estimated number was 4,064 victims, which is 14 times higher than the limit established as acceptable for this category of violent deaths at the international level.
- 7- In the year 2023 there was an average of 581 deaths per month, 134 per week and 19 per day.
- 8- Police-involved deaths averaged 79 per month, 18 per week, and 3 per day of the year.

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Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Violence



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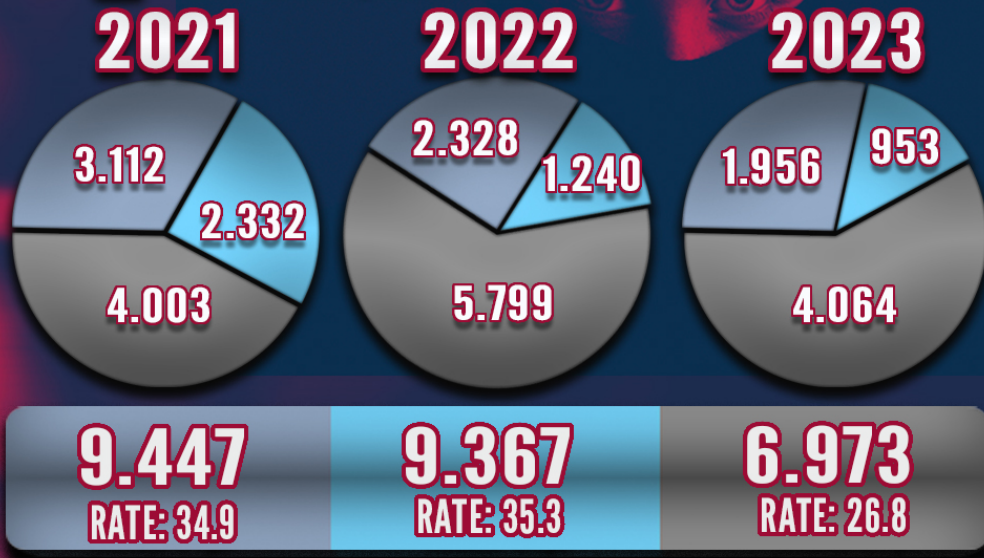
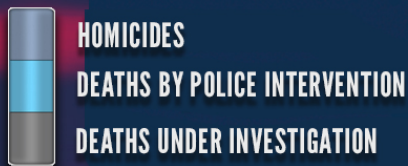
- 9- Two-thirds (66%) of homicide victims were between 15 and 44 years of age.
- 10- According to available information, the age group with the highest participation as victims of homicides is between 15 and 29 years of age, where 37% of the deaths were concentrated.
- 11- The occurrence of violent events was distributed fairly homogeneously during all months of the year with an average of around 600 violent events per month.. A slight increase could be observed during the month of March 2023, but overall, it can be said that there is a regularization and stabilization of violent events, typical of this new phase of chronic violence in the country.
- 12- The occurrence of victimization among citizens with no police record and those who did have a police record shows a significant and inverted difference when it comes to typical homicides or deaths due to police intervention. In homicide deaths, 71% of the victims had no police record, while among those who died in police interventions, 64% did have a police record.
- 13- The number of missing persons continues to be high, with an estimated total of 1,443 persons in 2023, which represents a rate of 5.5 missing persons per hundred thousand inhabitants. We do not include these cases among violent deaths, as the absence of a body does not allow us to state conclusively whether the missing person is alive or dead. However, this category represents an unknown about the real magnitude of violent deaths that, with the bit of information available, is impossible to clarify.



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VIOLENCE IN VENEZUELA → COMPARATIVE 2021-2023 (DEAD PEOPLE FROM VIOLENT CAUSES)



*RATE FOR EVERY 100,000 INHABITANTS

Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Violence



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VIOLENCE AT THE TERRITORIAL LEVEL OF THE FEDERAL ENTITIES

- 14- In the year 2023, two federal entities had a violent death rate higher than 40 deaths per one hundred thousand inhabitants: the Capital District with 50.8 and the state of Miranda with 41 victims per hundred thousand inhabitants.
- 15- The five most violent entities in the country in 2023 were the Capital District (50.8), Miranda (41), Bolivar (38.5), La Guaira (36.4) and Amazonas (33.4).
- 16- A total of eight federal entities had a rate of violent deaths higher than the national average of 26.8, in addition to the five mentioned above are Yaracuy (27.5), Delta Amacuro (27.4), and Aragua (27.2).
- 17- Three federal entities had a rate similar to the national average: Guárico (26), Falcón (25.5), and Carabobo (25.3).
- 18- Out of the 24 states in the country, 19 of them have reported a decrease in the number of violent deaths in comparison to the previous year. The number of violent deaths in three states remained the same, namely Amazonas, Falcón, and Sucre. However, two states experienced an increase in violent deaths: Cojedes and Lara.
- 19- The five entities with the lowest rate were Mérida (17.9); Apure (15.1); Portuguesa (914.9), Nueva Esparta (14) and Táchira, which had the lowest rate with 11.3 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants.
- 20- It's worth noting that even though violent deaths have gone down, the number of such deaths per 100,000 people is still higher than ten, the limit at which it's considered an epidemic.



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VIOLENCE IN VENEZUELA 2023

➔ RATES OF VIOLENT DEATHS BY ENTITY

1	CAPITAL DISTRICT	50,8	13	TRUJILLO	23,8
2	MIRANDA	41,0	14	SUCRE	23,6
3	BOLÍVAR	38,5	15	COJEDES	22,7
4	LA GUAIRA	36,4	16	ZULIA	22,4
5	AMAZONAS	33,4	17	BARINAS	21,4
6	YARACUY	27,5	18	LARA	19,2
7	DELTA AMACURO	27,4	19	MONAGAS	18,5
8	ARAGUA	27,2	20	MÉRIDA	17,9
9	GUÁRICO	26,0	21	APURE	15,1
10	FALCÓN	25,5	22	PORTUGUESA	14,9
11	CARABOBO	25,3	23	NUEVA ESPARTA	14,0
12	ANZOÁTEGUI	23,8	24	TÁCHIRA	11,3

*RATE FOR EVERY 100,000 INHABITANTS

Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Violence



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→ VIOLENT DEATHS

STATES WITH HIGHER RATES

1	CAPITAL DISTRICT	50,8
2	MIRANDA	41,0
3	BOLÍVAR	38,5
4	LA GUAIRA	36,4
5	AMAZONAS	33,4



*RATE FOR EVERY 100,000 INHABITANTS

Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Violence



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VIOLENCE AT THE TERRITORIAL LEVEL OF MUNICIPALITIES

- 21- Three of the ten most violent municipalities in the country are in Bolivar (El Callao, Sifontes and Roscio), four in Miranda (Paz Castillo, Brion, Sucre and Lander) and the remaining are located in Yaracuy (Bruzual), Zulia (La Cañada de Urdaneta) and Carabobo (Juan José Mora).
- 22- The three municipalities with the highest violence in 2023 were located in the mining area of Bolivar state, being the municipality of El Callao with a rate of 424.7 victims per one hundred thousand inhabitants, the most violent in the country. It is followed in violence by the municipality of Sifontes (Tumeremo), with a rate of 151 victims, and the municipality of Roscio (Guasipati), with 134.3 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants.
- 23- In the state of Miranda, the municipality with the highest rate of violence per one hundred thousand inhabitants was Paz Castillo (Santa Lucia del Tuy) with 75.7, followed by Brion (Higuerote) with a rate of 62.7 and then Sucre (Petare) with 61.1 and finally Lander (Ocumare del Tuy) with 60.5.
- 24- The following ten municipalities in the list (position 11 to 20) include two in the state of Carabobo: Diego Ibarra (Mariara) with 47.5 and Libertador (Tocuyito) with 47.1; two in the state of Sucre: Arismendi with 46.4 and Montes de Oca with 40.9; two municipalities in the state of Miranda: Acevedo (Caucagua) with 44 and Guaicaipuro (Los Teques) with 39.4. The other four remaining municipalities are located, one in the state of Zulia, the municipality of Jesús Enrique Lossada (55.5); one in Guárico state, the municipality of Zaraza (53.6); one in the Capital District, the municipality of Libertador (50.8); and one in Bolívar state, the Bolivarian municipality of Angostura (45.5).
- 25- Out of the 335 municipalities in the country, 42 of them registered violent death rates higher than the country's average (26.8), while 83 municipalities had a stable rate higher than 10 per one hundred thousand inhabitants, being at the level considered an epidemic of violence.



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→ VIOLENT DEATHS ACCORDING TO MUNICIPALITIES

	ENTITY	MUNICIPALITY	VIOLENT DEATHS	RATE
1	BOLIVAR	EL CALLAO	91	424,7
2	BOLIVAR	SIFONTES	80	151
3	BOLIVAR	ROSCIO	31	134,3
4	YARACUY	BRUZUAL	62	90,2
5	MIRANDA	PAZ CASTILLO	78	75,7
6	ZULIA	LA CAÑADA DE URDANETA	53	69,7
7	CARABOBO	JUAN JOSÉ MORA	40	64,3
8	MIRANDA	BRIÓN	35	62,7
9	MIRANDA	SUCRE	350	61,1
10	MIRANDA	LANDER	86	60,5
11	ZULIA	JESÚS ENRIQUE LOSSADA	60	56,5
12	GUÁRICO	ZARAZA	33	53,6
13	CAPITAL DISTRICT	LIBERTADOR	847	50,8
14	CARABOBO	DIEGO IBARRA	44	47,5
15	CARABOBO	LIBERTADOR	72	47,1
16	SUCRE	ARISMENDI	21	46,4
17	BOLIVAR	BOLIVARIAN ANGOSTURA	20	45,5
18	MIRANDA	ACEVEDO	35	44
19	SUCRE	MONTES	21	40,9
20	MIRANDA	BOLIVARIAN GUAICAPURO	95	39,4



* RATE FOR EVERY 100,000 INHABITANTS

Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Violence



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HOMICIDES

- 26- The highest number of homicides per federal entity was registered in the states of Miranda with 279 victims, Capital District with 223 and Zulia with 205 deaths. They are followed in order of importance by Bolivar (150), Aragua (127), Carabobo (117), Sucre (111) and Guárico (82).
- 27- Expressed as rates per hundred thousand inhabitants, the first place is occupied by Delta Amacuro, which, although it only had 27 homicides, due to its population size has a rate of 16.1. It is followed by the five states with the highest rates, the Capital District with 13.4; the state of Sucre with 12.6; Guárico with 10.7 and Miranda with 10.5 victims per one hundred thousand inhabitants.



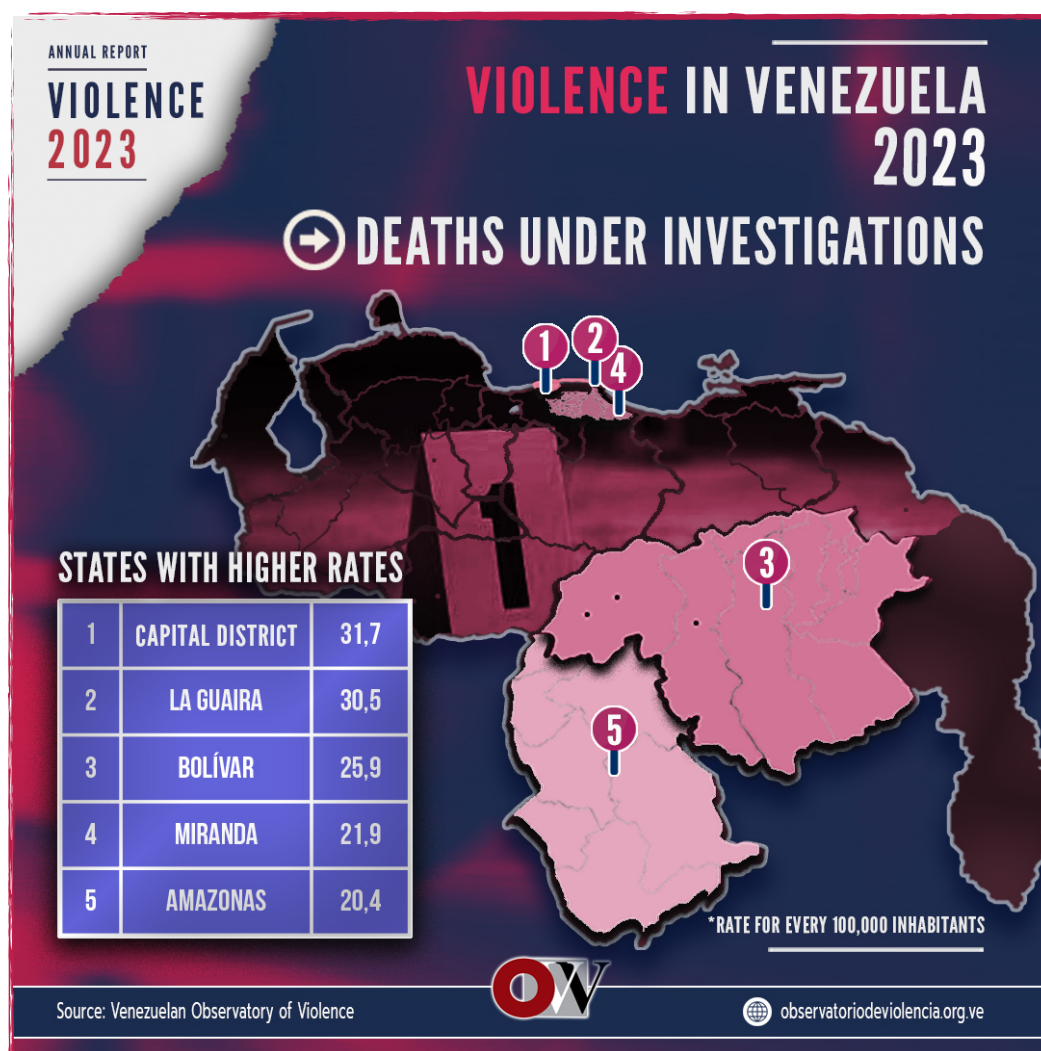
DEATHS DUE TO POLICE INTERVENTION

- 28- The states with the highest number of deaths resulting from police interventions were Miranda with 227 victims, Carabobo with 131, Zulia with 115, Aragua with 100, the Capital District with 96, and the states of Bolívar and Anzoátegui with 41 deaths each and Guárico with 32.
- 29- Observing deaths by police intervention as rates and according to the respective population base, we find that the first five states with the highest rates were Miranda (8.6); Aragua (6.6); Carabobo (6.4); Distrito Capital (5.8) and Amazonas which, although it registered eight cases, its rate was 4.9 victims per one hundred thousand inhabitants.
- 30- In the state of Carabobo, deaths due to police intervention exceeded victims of crime, and in the states of Miranda and Aragua, the magnitudes of both categories were similar.



DEATH INVESTIGATIONS

- 31- The federal entities with the highest number of unsolved cases of violent deaths classified under the category of death investigations were: Miranda (580); Capital District (528); Zulia (460); Bolívar (391); Carabobo (270); Lara (216); Anzoátegui (196) and Aragua (182).
- 32- If we observe them as rates, the five federal entities with the highest number of cases of death investigations in relation to the size of their population were the Capital District with 31.7; La Guaira, which with 93 cases has a rate of 30.5; Bolivar with 25.9; Miranda with 21.9 and Amazonas, which with 33 cases has a rate of 20.4 victims per 100,000 inhabitants.



SELF-INFLICTED VIOLENCE

- 33- According to the various official data available, the rate of self-inflicted deaths is 8.2 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, a value that tended to increase by 6.5% when compared to our estimate for 2022 (7.7 suicide deaths per 100,000 inhabitants). In the context of federal entities, 17 experienced increases in their rates between 2022-2023 (Amazonas, Barinas, Bolivar, Carabobo, Cojedes, Delta Amacuro, Falcón, Guárico, Lara, Mérida, Monagas, Nueva Esparta, Portuguesa, Sucre, Táchira, Trujillo and Zulia) compared to 2021-2022 where only 11 increased their values. In the remaining seven entities, the rate was reduced (Capital District, Anzoátegui, Apure, Aragua, Miranda, Yaracuy and La Guaira) and it is noteworthy that most of them belong to the central-north coastal region, while in the last two previous years (2021-2022) Capital District, Aragua and Miranda, increased their figures.
- 34- For the 22nd year in a row, the state of Merida has the highest rate of self-inflicted deaths in the country, with 15.5 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. The next five states with the highest rates are Táchira (13.6%), Capital District (13.3%, which dropped to third place after holding second place for two years), Trujillo (11.9%), and Lara (10.2%). Once again, the three Andean states are in the lead, which is a common occurrence based on retrospective studies on this cause of death.
- 35- Men continue to be the ones who make the most attempts on their lives (82.0% of cases). Meanwhile, hanging continues to be the method most frequently used by those who attempt suicide (75.1%), while depression tends to appear with the greatest relative weight (86.1%) as the motive or presumed immediate cause of suicide.

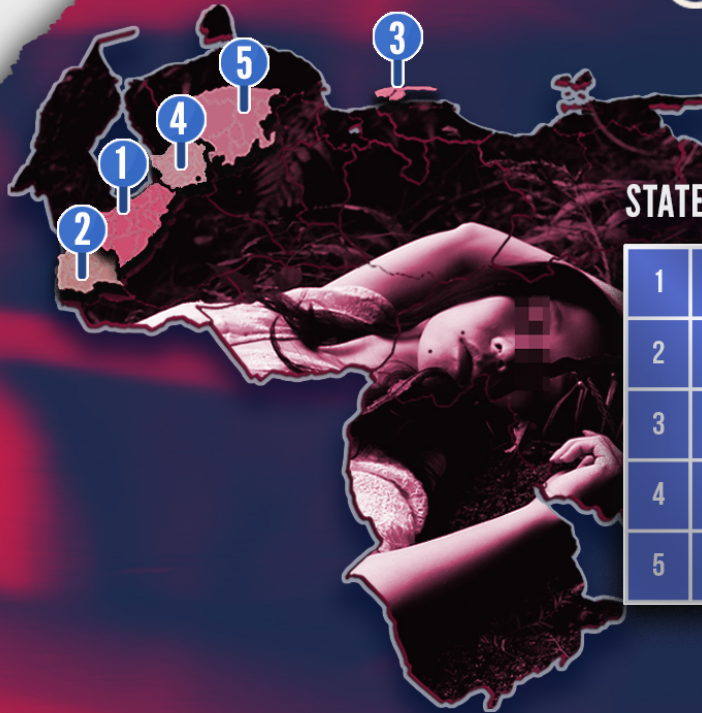


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➔ SUICIDES



STATES WITH HIGHER RATES

1	MÉRIDA	15,5
2	TÁCHIRA	13,6
3	CAPITAL DISTRICT	13,3
4	TRUJILLO	11,9
5	LARA	10,2

*RATE FOR EVERY 100,000 INHABITANTS

Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Violence



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GENDER VIOLENCE

- 36- The masculinization of lethal violence in the country persists. Out of the victims of bodily injury, 61.4% were male; 88.4% of those murdered were male and 98.6% of the victims killed by police intervention were also male.
- 37- Concerning the information available on the motive for the murder, we found that in cases of criminal violence, 95% of the victims were men. However, about suspicious gender violence, the data is different, and the victims were 56% women.
- 38- Female victimization varied notably from a very low level, in the case of deaths due to police intervention, which were 1.4%, to a very high percentage in rapes, where they accounted for 96% of known victims. Among the non-fatal victims of violence, four (39%) out of every ten injured were women, and six (61%) were men.
- 39- In 2023, 12 cases of infanticide were identified in which the mother acted directly as the victimizer or was an accomplice to the death on the part of the father or stepfather. Various types of crimes were recorded and made known to society: cruel treatment, sexual abuse, rape, and negligence, in which there is cruelty and vicious treatment of defenseless children.
- 40- It was also possible to count 171 female adolescent victims of rape and other sexual aggressions and 153 boys and girls victims of these crimes. Eighty-nine percent of the victims of rape and sexual crimes are children under 12 years of age and adolescents, who are also the most frequent victims of sexual exploitation.
- 41- There were cases of children and adolescents murdered by criminals, in situations that could be associated with retaliation or "punishment" against their parents or relatives, as in the case of the 10-year-old boy who was shot several times because his father did not let them steal the motorcycle they were riding, or the 12-year-old teenager who was gunned down at the door of his house by a gang seeking revenge against his stepfather.
- 42- In July 2023, the Public Prosecutor's Office reported that a total of 2,076 cases had been filed for the crime of sexual abuse of children and adolescents from January to June 2023; and in recent months, prosecutorial proceedings and judicial sentences against adults responsible for crimes have been published.



REPORTED VICTIMIZATION

- 43- In a study conducted in mid-2023 with a national household sample survey, with the purpose of finding out the victimization reported by families, it was found that 11% of those interviewed and 15% of some of the other members of that household had been direct victims of a crime during the twelve months before the survey.
- 44- When asked about their perception of changes in the violence situation, 43% of those surveyed said that the situation had remained the same, 22% said that it had decreased and 35% said that it had increased.
- 45- 60% of the population said they were afraid of being victims of violence in public transportation, and 34% of them said they were very afraid. While 18% said they were not afraid at all. Similar proportions are repeated when it comes to the fear of being a victim of crime in a part of the city different from where they live, since in that case 61% said they were worried, while 19% said they were not afraid at all.
- 46- Almost half of the population (47%) stated that due to fear of being a victim of violent crime, they had restricted their attendance to recreational places or at the times they were accustomed to or would like to have attended.
- 47- A little more than one-fifth of the population (22%) stated that due to fear of violence, they had felt the need to move from the area or city in which they lived.
- 48- Despite the victimization rates staying consistent between 2022 and 2023, it is noteworthy that there was a noticeable shift in the population's perception of security, which holds significant social value.



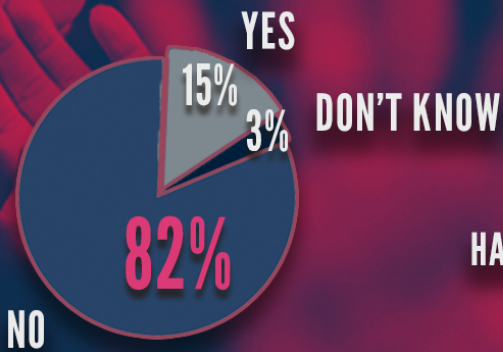
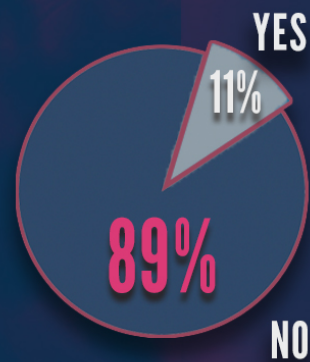
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HAVE YOU BEEN A VICTIM OF A CRIME
IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?



HAS ANY MEMBER OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD
BEEN THE VICTIM OF A CRIME
IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Violence

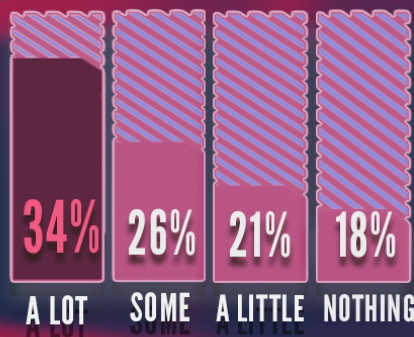


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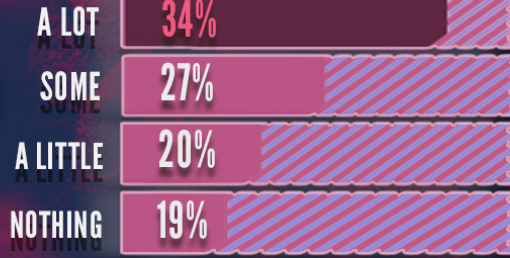
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HOW FEARFUL ARE YOU
OF BEING ATTACKED OR ROBBED
ON TRANSPORTATION?



HOW FEARFUL ARE YOU OF BEING
ATTACKED OR ROBBED IN
ANOTHER PART OF THE CITY?



Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Violence



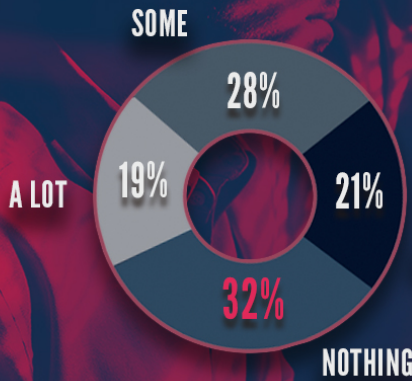
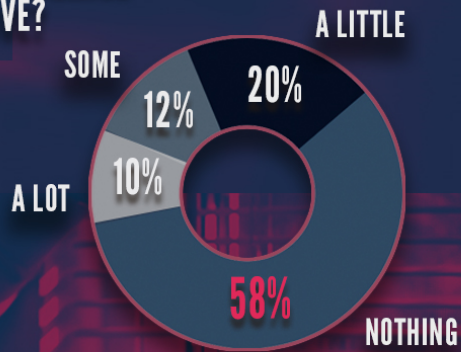
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FOR FEAR OF BEING A VICTIM OF VIOLENCE
HAVE YOU FELT THE NEED TO MOVE?



FOR FEAR OF BEING A VICTIM OF VIOLENCE,
HAVE YOU LIMITED THE HOURS OR PLACES
OF RECREATION THAT YOU PREVIOUSLY
ENJOYED?



Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Violence



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POLICE PROTECTION

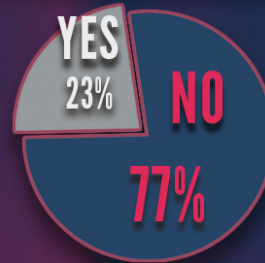
- 49- There is a prevalent lack of clarity among citizens in the country regarding the effectiveness of police protection in the face of crime. A mere 4% of respondents strongly agreed that the police provided them with adequate protection, while 20% (five times as many) strongly disagreed, citing the feeling of being left unprotected. Overall, 36% of respondents believed that the police provided them with protection, while 48% believed that they were not protected by the police.
- 50- However, when asked about their willingness to cooperate with the police and the risk that this could represent, more than two-quarters (59%) of the population considered it very dangerous to cooperate with the security forces. Only a little more than a fifth (22%) considered that it was not at all dangerous to help the police in their work.
- 51- Deaths due to police intervention are evaluated in different ways by the population, because while some consider the results positive, there is a rejection of the means used and the possible violations of human rights and due process. This perception varies depending on how close or far away the events occur.
- 52- It is significant that in some municipalities there were more deaths due to police action than homicides committed by criminals, in the municipality of Juan José Mora of the state of Carabobo; municipalities of Lander and Libertador of the state of Miranda; municipalities Linares Alcántara of Aragua and Zamora of Guárico.
- 53- During the year, an effort was made by the police to offer protection to highly vulnerable agricultural companies and producers in their production and commercialization tasks. In the opinion of business actors, this protection work has been unevenly distributed and has not had the universal character required by its public function, considering that it is a process of informal "privatization" of police actions.
- 54- In a study with a national sample of households, it was found that in 23% of those interviewed, a quarter of the population stated that in the previous 12 months, they had had to pay police or military officials because they had been asked for money to resolve some situation or problem. Extortion by officials who demand payment or request "collaboration" under asymmetrical conditions of power has become generalized in public administration offices, but constitutes a greater aberration with those officials who are in charge of law enforcement and protection of citizens. The public sentiment is that they are being subjected to a dual form of coercion - one from the criminal elements and the other from the law enforcement agencies. This is causing significant damage to the institutional framework of the country..

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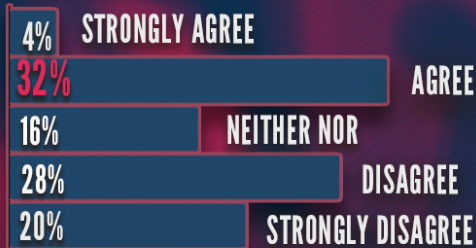
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DID ANY POLICE OR MILITARY PERSONNEL
DEMAND MONEY FROM YOU TO SOLVE A PROBLEM?



DO YOU AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT:
THE POLICE PROTECT ME FROM CRIME?



Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Violence

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PROTECTION OF OTHER SOCIAL ACTORS

- 55- The reduced trust in the police leaves room for other social actors, legal and illegal, to take over the protection role that is the State's obligation.
- 56- Neighbors are the main actors in which the population places its trust for protection against crime: 63% of Venezuelans considered their neighbors to be their family's primary protection against crime.
- 57- Although in a much lower percentage, but no less significant, 7% of those surveyed considered that the so-called "collectives" protected them from crime. This is an important figure, considering that these social actors are present in small geographical areas of the country.
- 58- It is also significant that 3.2% of the population considers that it is the criminal gang operating in the area where they live that offers them protection, showing progress in establishing criminal governance in several areas of the country.
- 59- The establishment of various modalities of criminal governance in several territories of the nation shows the expansion of the business model that illegal actors have assumed to control various types of income from the construction of factitious monopolies of production or distribution of legal goods with the use of force. This business model, based on extortion and direct or associated participation in business, has led to the repression of petty crime and juvenile violence by organized criminal groups and provoked a sense of security among the population and a reduction in the rates of lethal violence.



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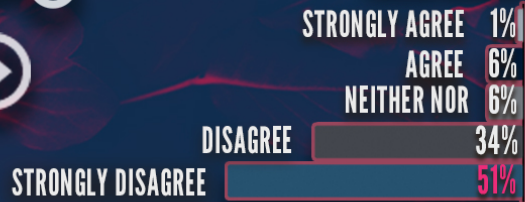
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ARE YOUR NEIGHBORS A HELP IN PROTECTING
YOUR FAMILY FROM CRIME?



DO COLLECTIVES PROTECT US
FROM CRIME?



Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Violence



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THE MORALITY OF SOCIETY

- 60- In 2023, there was a significant decline in the quality of life for the general population. This was due to a number of factors, including stagnant wages in the public sector, modest increases in the private sector, the use of the dollar for transactions, and sustained inflation in the prices of essential goods and services such as food, transportation, and public utilities. As a result, many people had to seek out additional sources of income, such as taking on a second job or starting a small business. Some even had to sell assets to cover the costs of necessary expenses, such as school supplies for their children or medical treatment.
- 61- In the midst of these adverse conditions, it is susceptible to imagine that the temptation of crime as a means to overcome poverty could be generalized in society. To this end, we asked a sample of the national population what their opinion was on whether a young person in their community would agree to join a criminal group in order to get out of poverty. The response options had two dimensions: one of moral evaluation (would or would not approve of it) and the other of situational understanding (would or would not justify it).
- 62- The results were that 88% of those interviewed expressed a profound moral rejection of such behavior and stated that they would neither approve nor justify it.
- 63- In the remaining 12%, a quarter, 3% expressed that they approved and justified it. The remaining 9% expressed a moral rejection of the decision and said they approve would disapprove of it but that they would find it understandable and justify it because of the present and future conditions expressed in the question.
- 64- The notable rejection of the situation by 88% of the population shows that this is the dominant and generalized moral value regardless of social strata or political, ideological, or religious preferences. However, it is important to note a worrying difference found in the age groups, since the group that approved or justified the action was made up more of young people, while among the older population, rejection predominated.



ANNUAL REPORT

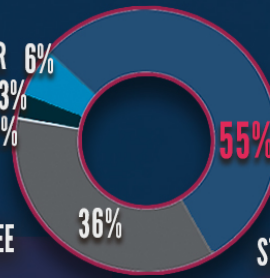
VIOLENCE 2023

VIOLENCE IN VENEZUELA → 2023

IS THE (CRIMINAL) GANG THAT DOMINATES
THE AREA PROTECTING US?



NEITHER NOR 6%
AGREE 3%
STRONGLY AGREE 0,2%

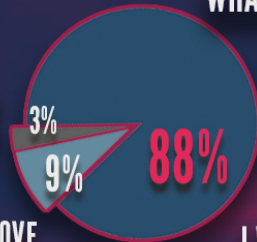


DISAGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE

WHAT DO YOU THINK IF A YOUNG PERSON IN YOUR
COMMUNITY AGREES TO JOIN A CRIMINAL
GROUP TO GET OUT OF POVERTY?

APPROVED
AND JUSTIFIED



I WOULD NOT APPROVE
BUT I WOULD JUSTIFY IT

I WOULD NOT APPROVE
NOR WOULD I JUSTIFY IT



Source: Venezuelan Observatory of Violence



 observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve

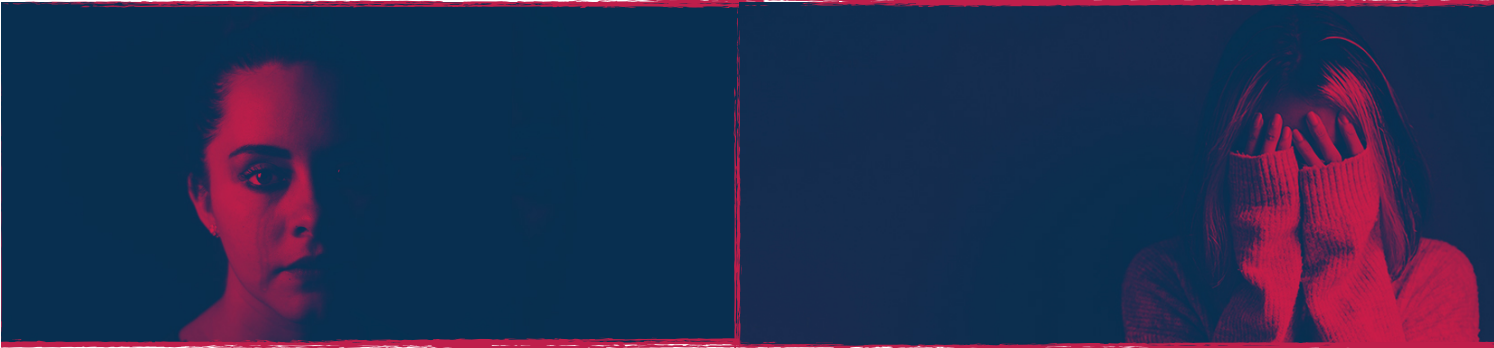
INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

- 65- In 2023, Latin America witnessed two contrasting scenarios related to violence and criminal activities. Ecuador, which was once considered a relatively safe country in the region, experienced a significant surge in crime and lethality, making it perhaps the most dangerous country in the region. In contrast, El Salvador witnessed a steady decline in the number of homicides during the same period.
- 66- In the year 2023, many countries saw a decrease in the number of homicides. However, it is essential to note that this positive trend did not completely compensate for the previous rise in violent deaths in some countries, nor did it bring the rates back to their historical levels.
- 67- Ecuador has experienced fluctuations in its homicide rate over the last century, with periods of eight to ten years of ups and downs. The homicide rate had remained stable between 8 and 10, but in the first decade of the 21st century, it peaked in 2008 with 18 victims per 100,000 inhabitants. Between 2009 and 2018, there was a considerable decrease in the rate of violence, with an official calculation of 6 deaths per hundred inhabitants. However, there has been a sustained increase in violence since then, and it is projected that the rate could reach 44 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants by 2023, potentially making it the highest in the region. This sudden change can be explained by the presence in the Pacific coast provinces (Guayas, Manabí, Esmeralda, El Oro, Entre Ríos) of local criminal gangs that, in alliance with Colombian and Mexican criminal organizations, have built an important niche of criminal action, dedicated to drug exportation and money laundering with strong penetration in local politics. Ecuador is located between two cocaine-producing countries, Colombia and Peru, and its coastal areas have important ports that had been used for drug transit, but in recent years, these provinces have become a privileged logistical location for drug smuggling, along with the country's important agricultural exports. On the other hand, using the dollar as the country's legal tender since 1999 has made it easier for criminal groups to carry out illegal transactions and launder money from other countries. The assassinations of the mayor of Manta or of a presidential candidate in the middle of the electoral campaign, and the subsequent elimination of the material executors of the crime, are an important indicator of the presence of organized crime in the country and its risks for democratic governance.
- 68- In 2015, El Salvador had a homicide rate of 106 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. With a history of social and political violence for more than a century, it was after the end of the internal war between the guerrillas and the national army between 1979 and 1992 that the shift from political violence to common criminality took place, driven by the demobilization of combatants from both sides. The unemployed combatants began to use the violence they had learned for other purposes. They contributed to the emergence of the two criminal gangs, the "maras", which imposed their dominance over large territories and whose confrontations for markets, rents, and spaces turned the country into the most violent in the world. After various security policies that alternated between an iron fist and truces, the most recent policy implemented by the government of mass incarceration of young gang members, allowed the fracturing of gangs and the drastic reduction of homicides, whose rate dropped according to the government to 18 in the year 2021, to 7.8 in 2002 and that official sources estimate to end 2023 with 2.3 deaths per one hundred thousand inhabitants. The methods used and the results obtained are a source of controversy, admiration and rejection, both nationally and internationally. Some analysts and politicians criticize the security policy employed by the government of El Salvador for the human rights and due process violations that may have occurred; others doubt the veracity of the death figures and rates offered by the authorities, since, they argue, these data do not include deaths occurring in police action, nor the disappearances carried out by both

criminal gangs and the police forces themselves. What is widely recognized is the drastic change in the situation of violence and criminality in the country.

- 69- Honduras has been another country that has had very high homicide rates during the last decade and has shown a sustained reduction recently. Officials claim that the application since the end of 2022 of a "State of Emergency" and a "crime solution" plan has allowed a reduction in violent deaths and the homicide rate, which could close 2023 with a figure that some estimate could be around 30, while others believe it could reach 37 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. Civil society organizations maintain that there is an important change in criminality due to greater control of gangs and confrontations that end in multiple murders, and a focus of activities not only in the traditional areas, such as the city of San Pedro Sula, but also an expansion and consolidation in the coast and jungle of the Mosquitia as a platform for drug trafficking from South America to the United States.
- 70- In Colombia and Brazil, there has been a sustained and significant reduction in violence in recent years, and by 2023, a modest decrease of about 2% in the homicide rate per hundred thousand inhabitants is expected, which in preliminary calculations is estimated to be around 23 deaths in Colombia and 21 deaths in Brazil. Both countries have also seen changes in the territorial location of violence, with a reduction in traditionally violent cities and an increase in the departments of the Atlantic coast in Colombia. In Brazil, violence that had shifted from the southern states (Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais) to the north (Amazonas, Amapá) and northeast (Maranhão, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Bahia), has once again spiked in the southeast of the country.
- 71- In Mexico, it can be estimated from police sources and data provided by The National Institute of Statistic and Geography (INEGI, for its initials in Spanish) that after a reduction in murders in 2021 and 2022, the homicide rate will remain stable at around 24 deaths per hundred inhabitants in 2023. Territorial differences in violence are very important in Mexico, and affect the national rate, as violent deaths are lower in the Yucatan peninsula (Campeche, Yucatan) and very high in the northern region bordering the United States (Sonora, Baja California), and in the central part of the country (Colima, Zacatecas, Michoacan, Guanajuato). Violence in Mexico continues to be determined by the rivalries between criminal organizations for the control of illegal rents, whether linked to the trafficking of drugs such as cocaine or fentanyl or for the control of other goods, such as the production and export of avocados. An essential change in the criminal world, which is the cause of new conflicts, occurs due to changes in the type of drugs trafficked to the United States, as there is a contraction in the export of marijuana and cocaine and a significant increase in shipments of fentanyl and methamphetamines. These changes in the drug market have an impact on the dominance of markets and routes held by criminal organizations, which may have an impact on both the increase and decrease in homicides.
- 72- In other Central American countries such as Guatemala and Panama, it is possible to calculate slight decreases in homicide rates, resulting in a rate of 16.2 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in Guatemala and 10.8 in Panama at the end of the year. In Nicaragua, it is not possible to calculate the situation of violence due to the censorship applied to information on crime in recent years.
- 73- Chile has been one of the countries with the lowest violent deaths in Latin America. The existing criminality was concentrated in robberies, thefts, and other crimes against property, but committed with a very low lethality, so the country presented enviable rates of around 3 homicides per hundred thousand inhabitants. That rate had slightly increased as of 2018, and in the "First national report of consummated homicides" presented by the government in mid-2023, a rate of 6.7 for the year 2022 was reported. The increase in crime and especially in

violent deaths became a matter of political concern, and the presence of the gang of Venezuelan origin known as the Aragua Train had particular relevance, due to the continuous highlighting in the press of their use of violence and the lethality they provoked. By the year 2023, a reduction is estimated that could place the rate at around 5 deaths per hundred thousand inhabitants.



CONCLUSIONS

- 74- In 2023, a discernible reduction in the overall levels of violence could be observed in Venezuela. This decrease in violence can be attributed to the reduction of disorganized criminal activities and the growing concentration and monopolization of violence by powerful criminal organizations. These criminal organizations are now focusing on specific niches of criminal opportunities, which has led to a decreased overall level of violence in the country.
- 75- The decrease in "disorganized" violence, which causes high lethality, has been reduced by the notable emigration of young people and the loss of opportunities for crime.
- 76- In recent years, there has been a reduction in the lethality of violence in certain parts of the country. This trend has been attributed to agreements made between criminal gangs regarding the distribution of tasks during business operations, as well as the demarcation of areas of operation, which has allowed for their expansion and consolidation. However, in municipalities where there are no such agreements or where criminal control has not been fully established, violent events continue to occur.
- 77- In spite of the significant outflow of millions of young people from the country in recent years, a segment of the youth population still remains outside the formal education system and lacks access to employment opportunities. This cohort is at a heightened risk of engaging in criminal activities, which could potentially lead to the emergence of new local gangs and the involvement of youth in organized criminal networks. Such a situation could have grave consequences as this group of young people may end up replacing the emigrated youth as the next generation of criminals.
- 78- The data shows a decrease in fatalities resulting from police encounters. However, the numbers are still alarmingly high. Furthermore, there is a lack of information regarding the methods utilized by law enforcement officials to distinguish between the lawful and unlawful use of force.
- 79- Although we observe a reduction in the number of violent deaths in the country, the estimated rate for Venezuela, at the national level, is higher than that of countries such as Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, being only surpassed by Ecuador and Honduras, which lead the figures of violence in the region. Despite a decrease in the overall number of violent fatalities in Venezuela, the national rate of violent deaths remains notably high, surpassing that of countries such as Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil. Only Ecuador and Honduras exhibit higher levels of violence within the region.
- 80- The absence of information caused by censorship and the lack of transparency in cases classified as death investigations, which make up the majority of violent deaths, combined with the high number of deaths resulting from police intervention, creates uncertainty about the true level of violence and crime in the country. This uncertainty prevents a proper interpretation of the situation and impedes the development of effective public policies.
- 81- Although there is no public information that allows monitoring indicators of the effectiveness of the management of the Public Ministry about the crime of sexual abuse of children and adolescents, we recognize the value of police action and the administration of justice in the prosecution and legal punishment of crimes of sexual abuse, cruel treatment, negligence, among others. However, there are no known institutional measures for the safeguarding and comprehensive protection of victims, nor about the increase of public prevention programs and

services, for the timely attention to the vulnerable population and not only act when the damage, aggression, and death have already occurred.

- 82- Gender violence remains invisible due to the lack of official information in which public agencies document cases, which would allow the identification of risk factors and the necessary protection services and resources. On the other hand, a real difficulty is the lack of specialized training for the proper registration of cases of femicides, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and injuries, since as long as criteria and indicators with disaggregated data are not established, with a gender approach and from a human rights perspective, it will only be possible to count on scattered, inaccurate and unreliable data to know the nature of violence against women in Venezuelan society.
- 83- The victimization of women has considerable consequences and impacts on society. The deaths of women due to femicides imply orphanhood, exclusion, and abandonment of the children in their care; women survivors of personal injuries, rapes, and threats assume the challenge of facing the damages, injuries, and threats without support programs, with their resources and without services or opportunities for protection and development. In the context of deprivation, poverty, and structural violence typical of the complex humanitarian emergency that the country is experiencing, most of the women who have suffered violence continue to assume their responsibilities as mothers, heads of households, and responsible for the care and protection of their families.
- 84- The rate of self-inflicted violence in Venezuela fluctuates with the ups and downs of the humanitarian crisis and its impact on people, as well as the various risk factors associated with such behavior. It is important to note that without significant changes to the country's economic and political institutions, and improvements in living conditions, mental health and emotional stability for the majority of the population will be difficult to achieve. Furthermore, unless public policies on the prevention and control of self-inflicted violence are implemented, this behavior will continue to be a public health issue and a cause for concern.
- 85- The decrease in occurrences and prevalence of fatalities caused by violence is crucial and beneficial for the welfare and fundamental freedom of the public. Nevertheless, the rate of 26.8 casualties per one hundred thousand individuals persists to be alarmingly high and continues to rank among the highest in both the continent and the world.