



SECURITY OVERVIEW

Barranquilla – Atlántico

Unidad de Análisis Político y Seguridad Corporativa - UAPSC

July 26 2024.

Security Overview

Barranquilla, Atlántico

1. Situational Analysis

So far in 2024, insecurity has probably been the biggest problem of Alejandro Char's administration. Both the occurrence of high-impact crimes and citizen perception of insecurity remain quite high. Crimes such as extortion of merchants, homicides and theft from persons have a negative impact on citizens. In response, local authorities have resorted to increasing the operational actions of the security forces and have even created more specialized units to combat crime ([El Norte](#), 2024). Despite the fact that finding solutions to the problem has been one of Mayor Char's main goals and objectives, the situation persists and the reduction of crime rates continues to fail to materialize ([El Tiempo](#), 2024).

According to the most recent survey of “Barranquilla Cómo Vamos”, conducted in 2023, 45% of Barranquilleros say they feel safe in their neighborhood, 37% unsafe and 23% neither safe nor unsafe. At the general level, 44% indicated feeling safe in the city, 30% unsafe and 26% neither safe nor unsafe. 17% percent of those surveyed reported having been victims of some type of crime. Among the most serious problems in Barranquilla's neighborhoods during the period studied, citizens highlighted street muggings with 68%, the presence of gangs with 14% and drug addiction with 13% ([Barranquilla Cómo Vamos](#), 2023).

In this document the Unidad de Análisis Político y Seguridad Corporativa (UAPSC) of 3+SC will carry out a Security Overview for the city of Barranquilla, analyzing the dynamics that impact security, risk generating factors and criminal behavior based on statistics, with the main objective of making known the security situation of the city in order to establish prospective scenarios and recommendations that are useful for risk management, treatment and control.

2. Crime Analysis

In order to visualize the percentage changes and dynamics by crime in Barranquilla, a crime analysis will be carried out below, showing the figures and trends in the variation of ten high-impact crimes for two periods: the years 2022-2023 and the January-May period of 2023 vs. 2024. Subsequently, each phenomenon will be analyzed in depth, as well as the risk scenarios present in the city, associating recent insecurity events and the areas in which they occurred.

CRIME STATISTICS IN BARRANQUILLA	year 2022	year 2023	Variation % 2022 vs 2023	Jan-May 2023	Jan-May 2024	Variation % Jan-May 2023 vs 2024
HOMICIDES	333	375	13%	150	187	25%
THEFT FROM PERSONS	11569	12966	12%	5465	6296	15%
EXTORTION	415	894	115%	457	309	-32%
KIDNAPPING	3	1	-67%	1	0	-100%
THREATS	1248	1300	4%	378	1003	165%
TERRORISM	1	0	-100%	0	1	100%
RESIDENTIAL THEFT	499	662	33%	303	241	-20%
CARJACKING	481	437	-9%	226	177	-22%
MOTORCYCLE THEFT	989	1201	21%	525	428	-18%
RETAIL THEFT	1559	1054	-32%	470	466	-1%
TOTAL	17097	18890	10%	7.975	9108	14%

Resource: Own elaboration with information from the National Police.

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

According to figures from the National Police, by the end of 2023 there was a 10% increase in complaints for various high impact crimes in the city of Barranquilla, with a total of 18.890 cases in contrast to 17.097 in 2022. With respect to the comparison between January to May 2023 vs. 2024, there is an overall increase of 14% with an increase in four of the ten crimes analyzed, threats with 165%, terrorism with 100%, homicides with 25% and theft from persons with 15%. By number of complaints, it is evident that the crime with the greatest materialization in the security of Barranquilla in the year 2024 is theft from persons with 6.296 cases, threats with 1.003 and theft from commerce with 466.

2.1 Theft from persons

In the first five months of 2024, robberies to people in Barranquilla experienced an increase of 15%. According to data from the National Police, of the total number of cases registered, 2.722 were carried out without the use of weapons, 2.608 with firearms and 725 with a white/sharp weapon.

As evidenced by institutional statistics, theft from persons continues to be a crime with high rates of occurrence in the city of Barranquilla. Authorities blame this situation on the criminal gangs present in the

territory, although common crime should not be left aside. In April, the security forces even spoke of an improvement in the panorama thanks to the continuous captures, dismantling and operations against illegal activities ([Zona Cero](#), 2024). Despite this, the problem has persisted and has worsened, causing citizens to resort to “justice by their own hand” on several occasions ([El Tiempo](#), 2024).

2.2 Theft in different modalities

In addition to theft from persons, in Barranquilla there are different types of theft such as theft from commerce, theft from residences, theft from automobiles and theft from motorcycles. These high-impact crimes affect the security of citizens as they damage people's assets.

In spite of the general decrease in thefts, so far in 2024 there have been relevant events in the city of Barranquilla. In June, the Prosecutor's Office and the Public Force were able to establish the identities of the members of a criminal group dedicated to residential burglary, commercial burglary, as well as other modalities ([Diario La Libertad](#), 2024). A month later, four people were captured for a millionaire robbery of a securities company. The delinquents had circumvented the security of the headquarters located in the Rosario neighborhood ([Infobae](#), 2024).

2.3 Homicides

According to institutional statistics, homicides have increased considerably in Barranquilla so far this year. In fact, the situation has reached such a point that the city's homicide rate exceeds the national rate, which is why in June an elite group of the Gaula was created to address the problem ([Infobae](#), 2024).

According to the police and security experts, the panorama in Barranquilla responds to a great dispute between criminal gangs for the social and territorial control of the city, which will be reassembled in 2020. With the arrival of the pandemic and the confinement, many criminal spaces were cleared, which over time have become the scene and target of disputes between organizations. As a result, violence and murders have been on the rise in the capital of the Atlántico. In January, for example, 14 murders were recorded in less than 48 hours, most of them in the southern sector ([El País](#), 2024).

2.4 Extortion and threats

Closely linked crimes such as extortion and threats are high-impact criminal phenomena in the city of Barranquilla. Of the total number of extortions carried out in 2024, 2.099 were carried out via telephone calls, 1.103 were carried out directly and 747 via social networks.

Despite not being new phenomena, extortion and threats continue to be a widespread problem in the capital of Atlántico, in June a street vendor who had previously been harassed was murdered ([El Tiempo](#), 2024). According to the authorities, the actors involved in these practices are the criminal gangs present in the city, mainly “Los Pepes”, “Los Rastrojos Costeños” and “Los Costeños”. The criminals demand payments from shopkeepers, sex workers or homeowners to finance their organizations. In most cases, the criminals tell the victims that they are paying for “security services” ([Infobae](#), 2024). The amounts demanded are varied

because, depending on the trade union being extorted, the payment can range from 30.000 to 10 million Colombian pesos ([Infobae](#), 2024).

3. Risk Generating Factors

3.1 Micro-trafficking and criminal groups

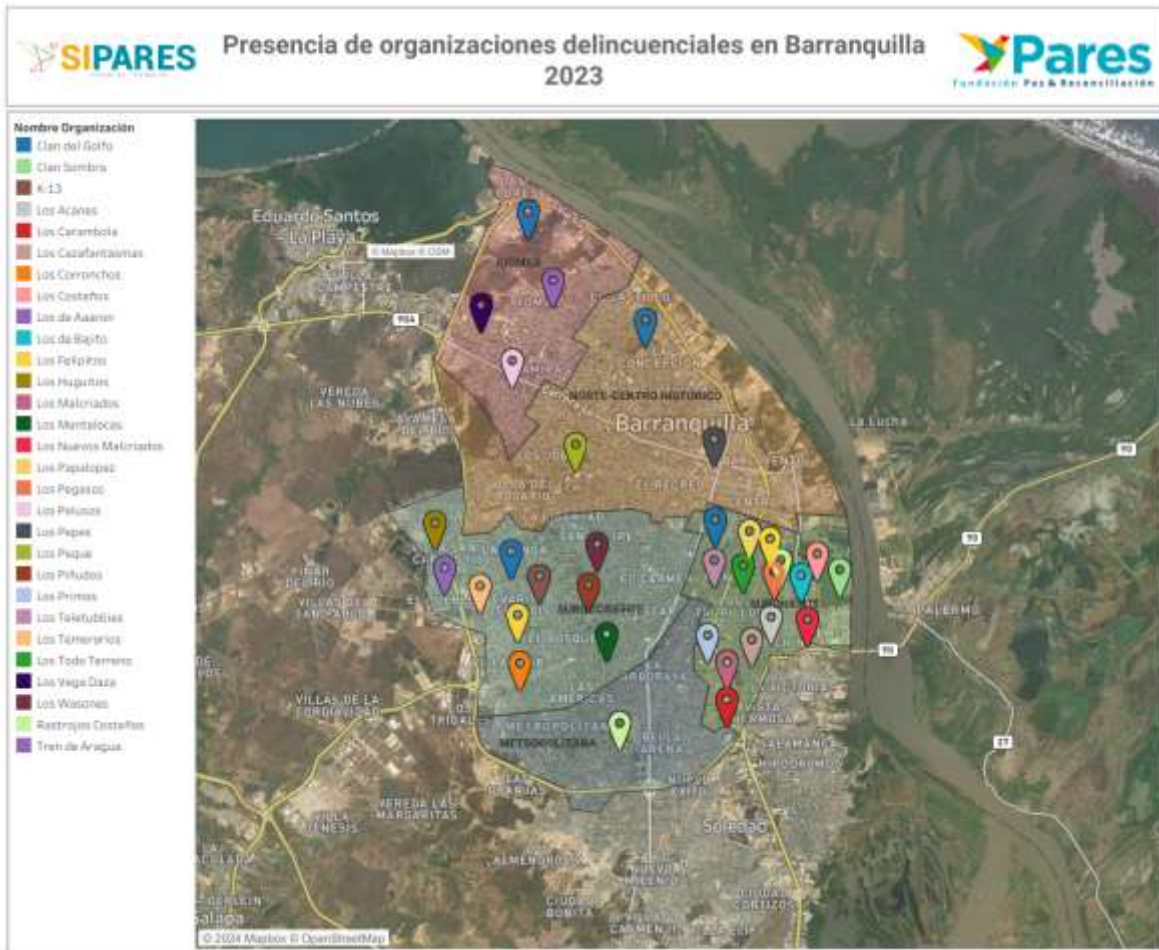
Table reflecting seizures per Kg of each type of drug in Barranquilla

Seized drug	Year 2022 (Kg)	Year 2023 (Kg)	Jan-may 2024 (Kg)
COCAINE HYDROCHLORIDE	12.673,98	6.197,92	3.293,86
PRESSED MARIJUANA	3.693,25	1.636,46	1.558,40
LSD	0	345,00	411,00
ECSTASY-TYPE STIMULANTS	745,00	557,00	164,00
2CB	318,00	426,60	163,00
COCAINE PASTE / BASE	272,03	44,28	20,90
Total	17.702,26	9.207,26	5.611,16

Resource: Own elaboration with information from the Observatorio de Drogas de Colombia, 2024.

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

Distribution of GDO and GDCO in the city of Barranquilla



Resource: PARES, 2024.

Drug trafficking is one of the most consolidated illicit markets in the city of Barranquilla. In fact, the city and the department serve as a strategic corridor for the passage of illicit substances (Semana, 2024). Currently, criminal organizations with influence in Barranquilla are fighting for the micro-trafficking business, while also acting as logistical operators for larger structures, such as the “Clan del Golfo”, for the export of drugs. Tensions and conflicts between gangs over territorial control have resulted in increased violence in the city, due to constant “settling of scores” and vengeful actions. In April, authorities recorded a massacre in the Villanueva sector, the result of a “settling of scores” between “Los Costeños” and “Los Pepes” and disputes over micro-trafficking routes in the area ([W](#)

[Radio](#), 2024). In addition, one of the most powerful clans in the city recently disappeared, resulting in a war between gangs for the rents left by the extinction of the organization ([Semana](#), 2024).

In Barranquilla there is interference of three organized armed groups, the “Clan del Golfo”, the “ELN” and the “Autodefensas Conquistadoras de la Sierra Nevada”, the first being the most consolidated ([Pares](#), 2024). Additionally, around 28 Organized Criminal Groups are present in the city, including the transnational organization “Tren de Aragua” and national structures such as: “Los Costeños”, “Los Pelusos”, “Los Pepes” and “Los Rastrojos Costeños” ([Pares](#), 2024).

3.2 Extortion

Although police data show a decrease in extortion cases in Barranquilla, the phenomenon remains a high impact crime in the city. According to President Gustavo Petro, “the phenomenon of extortion in Barranquilla is one of the most intense in the country”. Its geographical position and the lack of effective social policies have resulted in increased insecurity in the territory ([El Tiempo](#), 2024).

According to the Union of Merchants (Undeco) of Barranquilla, for more than a year, criminals have become increasingly violent when carrying out extortions, to the point of shooting at establishments. Institutional figures indicate that more than 200 stores in Barranquilla and its metropolitan area have closed as a result of extortion activities. Despite the operability of the security forces, the dissolution of the groups is complicated because after the captures the criminals continue to commit crimes from prisons or are quickly replaced ([La Silla Vacía](#), 2024). In June, the authorities captured members of the Organized Criminal Group “Los Costeños”, who were the driving force behind extortion and micro-trafficking in the city and its metropolitan area ([El Universal](#), 2024).

3.3 Social unrest and road blockades

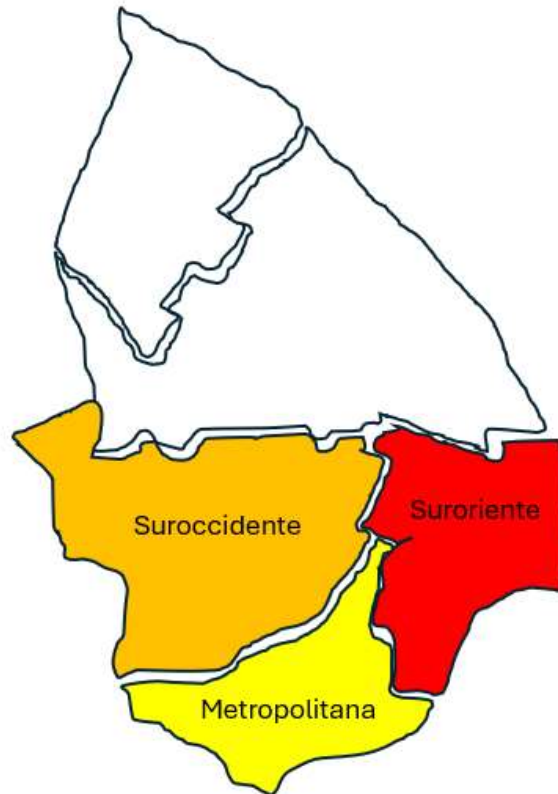
Although social protest is a right and a legitimate action that reflects the existence of a functioning democracy, in certain cases demonstrations can become violent or simply affect the mobility of citizens. In these cases, the mobilization may end up impacting the safety and rights of the other inhabitants of the city. This year the citizens of Barranquilla have taken to the streets on different occasions. Sitins and marches have been the favorite social manifestations of Barranquilleros. Among the most recurrent meeting points are the statue of Joe Arroyo, the monument of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and the Plaza de la Paz. In general, the days have developed peacefully, however, the flow of vehicles in the city has been affected.

At the departmental level, Atlántico is among the five departments that registered the highest number of blockades due to social demonstrations between January and April 2024. Although, as previously mentioned, the protest is legitimate, the action of blocking has consequences on mobility, economy and tourism in the country. One of the areas most affected by this type of events is the Troncal del Caribe, which extends through Córdoba, Sucre, Atlántico, Magdalena and La Guajira ([RCN Radio](#), 2024).

4. Risk Level

These risk level analyses are aimed at identifying the areas where, according to institutional statistics, there is a greater possibility of violence and high-impact crimes occurring. In the case of this Security Overview-Barranquilla, the characterization will be based on the statistics of the Security Observatory of the Universidad del Norte published in April 2024 and on the geo-referencing of criminal organizations of the Fundación Paz y Reconciliación (Peace and Reconciliation Foundation). The most problematic areas of the city will then be enunciated through three indicators: homicide cases, extortion and the number of criminal groups per locality.

Barranquilla Risk Level Map by localities



Resource: Own elaboration based on Observatorio de Seguridad de la Universidad del Norte and Pares, 2024.

Medium Risk Level: Metropolitana.

The Metropolitan locality has been classified as a Medium Risk Level zone because, although it is only affected by “Los Rastrojos Costeños” OCG, it has average rates of homicide and extortion. In the first case, the rate is between 21 and 144 cases in most neighborhoods. In the case of extortion, the average rate is between 3 and 22 cases.

Medium-High Risk Level: Suroccidente.

The Suroccidente locality has been classified as a Medium-High Risk Level zone due to two factors. First, Suroccidente is the second locality with the second highest presence of organized criminal structures, totaling ten in all. Second, taking into account the totality of neighborhoods that make up the territory, the area has a medium-high homicide rate. In the sector there are several areas with a rate between 61-144 cases and there is one neighborhood with a fairly high rate, 144-259 cases.

High Risk Level: Suroriente.

The Suroriente locality is the most problematic area of the city of Barranquilla. The territory has around 16 organized criminal structures, being the locality with the highest presence of criminal groups. In terms of homicides, the locality maintains a rate similar to that of the Southwest locality. In the area there are several neighborhoods with a rate between 61-144 cases and one with one of the highest rates, between 144 and 259 cases. In addition, with respect to extortion, Suroriente is the locality with the highest rates of extortion. The neighborhood with the highest levels, between 22 and 86 cases, is located in this sector of the city.

5. Foresight Design

As in other major cities, the future outlook for Barranquilla does not seem to be encouraging. With the arrival of Alejandro Char to the mayor's office, citizens expected that crime would be destabilized, even more so after the complex year that was 2023 in terms of security in the capital of Atlántico. Despite the numerous measures and strategies implemented by the new president, according to institutional statistics, the materialization of high impact crimes has experienced an increase compared to last year. Crimes such as extortion, robbery, homicides and theft from persons show high rates of materialization. In addition, citizens do not feel safe in the city; the perception of insecurity is high, particularly with respect to the different types of theft.

Experts and authorities attribute responsibility for the situation to the war between criminal groups. In 2024 several leaders of criminal organizations have been captured and assassinated, a situation that has generated power vacuums that the different illegal structures are seeking to co-opt. At the national level, the groups are getting stronger and Barranquilla is no exception to this phenomenon. At the same time, the strategies implemented by the new mayor have not been effective. In fact, security is one of the few issues that Barranquilleros are not satisfied with in this new mayor's office. Although Char has reinforced the operations of the security forces, it seems that he is implementing tactics that have been used in the past and have not been very successful, such as the use of helicopters for monitoring and the patrolling of military units.

Considering that the actions taken by the mayor's office to mitigate and counteract crime have been inefficient, that the statistical trend shows a deterioration in security, and that the organizations are becoming stronger at the local and national levels, it is expected that in the short and medium term

the security situation in Barranquilla will continue to be problematic. As long as these three factors are not addressed in a timely manner, it is almost impossible for the panorama to see a substantial improvement.

6. Recommendations

- 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.
- Taking into account the description of the Risk Level provided in this document, identify the localities with a high risk level in the city. This in order not to transit through them or to foresee safety and self-care plans.
- In case of traveling by means of a private vehicle, make a route analysis and have alternate routes that allow you to resolve any new developments on the route.
- Do not travel or travel late at night in areas that, according to this document, have registered some type of criminal phenomenon or have a high incidence of criminal actors, such as the southeastern area.
- For the movement of expatriates or foreigners within Barranquilla, evaluate the likelihood of having systems to monitor their movements remotely from a Command Center.
- Identify and share the license plates of vehicles, such as cabs or private vehicles, that you use as a means of transportation.
- If you are in crowded places such as restaurants, shopping malls or bars, always take care of your personal belongings and avoid engaging in conversations with people who suddenly ask for favors or want to approach you.
- Avoid having detailed or sensitive information about your family members and the organization you work for on your cell phone.
- Be careful with the information you publish through your social networks, taking into account that, with less privacy, your work and personal data and those of your family members are exposed on the network, which can lend itself to extortion or kidnapping processes.
- If you are a victim of telephone extortion, do not hang up, try to take notes, do not give your name or ID number and, if possible, record the call.
- In case of being a victim of threats in any of its modalities, immediately contact the authorities and do not give in to the requests of the offender.
- 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.
- 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.

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