

COSTA RICA

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Sample description

Available data for 1992 place population figures at 3,160,408 inhabitants. According to MIDEPLAN and CELADE in 1992 the population over 16 years of age will make up 62.4% of the country's total population. This indicates that over half the national population is composed of the target group of this investigation.

Of the adult population, 66.7% resides in the central region of the country. This region is the country's most developed zone; it is divided into two sub-regions: Metropolitan (57.8%) and the Rest of the Valley (42.2%).

These areas are defined with the purpose of grouping residential zones with similar characteristics, as well as with the intention of guaranteeing a sufficient number of cases within the sample. This will allow for a specific analysis within each region.

The Metropolitan sub-region includes the main urban nuclei of San José (capital), and the principal towns of the Alajuela, Heredia and Cartago provinces.

The sub-region referred to as the Rest of the Central Valley includes the "cantones" located in the Central Valley, in a circle made up of Turrialba, Alfaró Ruiz, San Ramón, Atenas, Puriscal and the rural districts of Desamparados. This sub-region is characterised by small urban centres grouped within the central districts of each "cantón", as well as a considerable proportion of concentrated rural areas².

The sample was chosen using information provided by the National Population and Housing Census of 1984. This census was up-dated by the Office of Statistics and Census (Dirección General de Estadística y Censos). An adequate stratification of the chosen areas was guaranteed by using a Social Development Index (SDI)³, of the country's administrative districts, which enables their classification according to a series of socio-economic variables. The sample has an error margin of + 3%, with a 95% confidence level.

The survey was carried out in the Central Valley, the sample distribution of which is presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Gathering of data

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- 1 Senior Researcher, Institute of Crime Prevention and the Treatment of Offenders for Latin America and the Caribbean, affiliated with the United Nations (ILANUD), San Jose', Costa Rica.
 - 2 This type of segment is characterised by: a) the land is occupied by activities that are not related to agriculture and cattle: b) there are 50 or more houses grouped together: c) basic services are available (water, electricity, etc.).
 - 3 Constructed by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Policies (Ministerio de Planificación Nacional y Política Económica).

Data gathering, processing and interpretation were done by Demoscopia S.A., a Costa Rican enterprise dedicated to social, political and economic investigation, at national and international levels.

A total of 15 pollsters, with vast experience in field work, were trained in the use and application of the instrument, and given information dealing with the investigation.

The polling was done using face-to-face interviews. This technique created a climate of trust and acceptance on the part of those interviewed. Respondents were also informed that the study was sponsored by ILANUD (United Nations Latin American Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders). No major problems were encountered, only those obstacles often present in any investigation of this nature.

Field work was completed between 8 April and 2 May 1992. Although a total of 1,000 interviews were originally planned, only 983 were actually completed. This represents 98.3% of the sample, with a loss rate of 1.7%. Most of the forms which were not processed were put into the unfinished category (discontinued interviews).

Victimisation rate

As shown in Table 6, car owners are frequent victims of theft from car, as well as vandalism. A high rate of bicycle theft victims is reported. A large number of Costa Ricans have been victims of personal thefts and attempted robbery.

It is important to mention that, according to the results, 15.0% of the women living in the country's Great Metropolitan Area have experienced some kind of sexual offence.

The victimisation rate for 1991 tends to be considerably higher than that for the previous years. This is particularly evident among the victims of theft from the car, vandalism, attempted burglary and sexual incidents. Frequency for 1991 is shown in Table 7.

Reasons for not reporting the incident

Respondents who were victims of car and motorcycle thefts are the ones that most often indicated having reported to the police. Table 8 shows that the least reported crimes were sexual incidents (9.3%) and personal thefts (18.2%).

Those who omitted reporting any of the crimes endured indicated that the two main reasons for not resorting to the police were that the police could not have done anything; and that the police would not have done anything (see Table 9).

It must be added that these types of answers are closely related to responses provided in other national studies undertaken by the same enterprise that gathered the data for this survey, in which the feeling was shared of police "lack of effectiveness".

It is also very important to point out that none of the victims indicated not having reported the crime for fear of retaliation. This increases the importance of the lack of trust factor.

Crime seriousness (Table 10)

In general, victims of the various crimes considered the criminal incident to be very serious or moderately serious. Car owners who were victims of car vandalism were more inclined to consider that the crime was not that serious. The victims of theft from car and those of theft of bicycles tended to consider the crime as fairly serious.

Aid to the victims

The respondents who were victims of some type of crime stated that they did not receive support or collaboration from social or governmental organisations or institutions to alleviate the effects of the crime.

Victims received aid from close relatives in 54.3% of the cases. In other cases the collaborators were their friends (36.9%). Responses permit the assumption that social and governmental institutions do not feel concerned about citizen's plights. This attitude is confirmed by the 58.5% of the affected citizens who consider that it would have been a great help if they had received the services of an institution specialised in the treatment of such cases.

Attitudes towards the police

As previously mentioned, "lack of effectiveness" is the image interviewees have of the country's police authorities. It is not surprising that only 23.5% of the victims had reported the incident to the police. Those who reported the incident to the police (54.6%) were not satisfied with the way the report was treated. The main reasons for feeling dissatisfied with police performance were:

They did not do enough	52.1%
They did not recover the property	34.2%
They were not interested	26.2%
They were slow in arriving	26.0%

Respondents considered that the police within their residential area, do not carry out an effective enough job; 55.7% sustained that they do not do a good job. Respondents request more frequent police patrols within their neighbourhoods (78.5%).

Fear of being a victim of crime

66.1% of the interviewees declared they feel fairly safe or very safe when walking in their neighbourhood at night; 13.9% declared feeling very unsafe.

For safety reasons, 54.7% of the people interviewed keep away from certain streets or areas within their residential zone. However, they are not in the habit of going out with other people as a safety measure (57.0%).

The majority of the respondents thought it is likely that someone will try to break into their homes over the next few months.

Crime prevention

The main measures taken by the public in order to prevent criminal actions are: the installment of special locks on doors, and of grating or metallic gates on doors and windows (see Table 11).

It is quite customary among the respondents to ask neighbours to watch their homes while they are out (62.7%).

Opinions as to sentencing offenders

Interviewees were presented with a hypothetical situation, in which an individual committed theft a second time. They were consulted as to what would be the appropriate sentence for this individual: 63.2% considered that the adequate punishment would be imprisonment. 17.9% of those who agree on imprisonment considered that a one-year term should be the time spent in prison. Another group (13.2%) considered that a two-year term for this type of crime would be adequate.

In spite of the fact that 22.9% of the answers favoured sentences of less than twelve months imprisonment, it should be pointed out that a group of interviewees (24.9%) supported sentences of five years or more in jail for this type of crime.

TABLES

Table 1: Sample distribution by region

Region	%	Sample	Segments
Metropolitan	57.8	578	58
Rest of Valley	42.2	422	42
Total	100.0	1,000	100

Table 2: Sample distribution by socio-economic status

Socio-economic level	Sample	Study
High	11.0	11.7
Middle	52.0	52.0
Low	37.0	36.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 3: Sample distribution by gender

Gender	Sample	Study
Masculine	50.0%	49.2%
Feminine	50.0%	50.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4: Urban/rural distribution of sample

Region	Sample
Urban	74.0%
Rural	26.0%

Total	100.0%
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Table 5: Temporal distribution of crimes

	1992 %	1991 %	Before %	Can't remember %
Theft of car	5.0	20.0	70.0	5.0
Theft from car	23.0	38.6	31.4	6.4
Car vandalism	31.8	36.4	30.7	1.1
Theft of motorcycle		25.0	75.0	
Theft of bicycle	11.3	31.9	51.1	5.7
Burglary with entry	23.5	32.6	40.9	3.0
Attempted burglary	28.8	37.5	30.0	3.8
Robbery	27.6	23.0	40.2	9.2
Personal thefts	23.2	33.2	39.5	4.2
Sexual incidents	29.3	33.3	34.7	2.7
Assault/threat	29.9	28.7	36.8	4.6

Table 6: Prevalence victimisation rates (5 years)*

	Victimisation rate (%)
Theft of car	2.0
Theft from car	14.2
Car vandalism	9.0
Theft of motorcycle	1.2
Theft of bicycle	14.3
(Owners)	
Theft of car	5.4
Theft from car	38.0
Car vandalism	23.9
Theft of motorcycle	9.6
Theft of bicycle	21.5
Burglary with entry	13.4
Attempted burglary	16.3
Robbery	8.9
Personal theft	19.3
Sexual incidents	15.0
Assault/threat	8.9

* Prevalence - percentage of respondents who have been victims of a specific form of crime once or more.

Table 7: Prevalence victimisation rates (1 year)*

	Victimisation rate (%)
Theft of car	0.4
Theft from car	5.5
Car vandalism	3.3
Theft of motorcycle	0.3
Theft of bicycle	4.6
(Owners)	
Theft of car	20.0
Theft from car	38.6
Car vandalism	36.4
Theft of motorcycle	25.0
Theft of bicycle	31.9
Burglary with entry	4.4
Attempted burglary	6.1
Robbery	2.0
Personal theft	6.4
Sexual incidents	5.0
Assault/threat	2.5
Consumer fraud	17.4
Corruption	9.1

* Prevalence - percentage of respondents who have been victims of a specific form of crime once or more.

Table 8: Reported crimes

	%
Theft of car	70.0
Theft from car	22.1
Car vandalism	18.2
Theft of motorcycle	91.7
Theft of bicycle	36.2
Burglary with entry	50.8
Attempted burglary	23.8
Robbery	27.6
Personal theft	18.4
Sexual incidents	9.3
Assault/threat	29.9

Table 9: Reasons for not reporting*

	Theft of car %	Theft from car %	Car vandalism %	Theft of motorcycle %	Theft of bicycle %	Burglary with entry %	Robbery %	Personal theft %	Sexual incidents %	Assault/ threat %
Not serious enough	25.0	16.7	16.7		10.8	16.7	28.1	16.3	9.7	15.1
Solved it myself	25.0	4.9	3.0		6.8	28.3	5.3	8.1	12.9	11.3
Inappropriate for police		2.9	19.7		6.8	13.3	8.8	8.9	21.0	11.3
Other authorities		2.9	3.0		1.4	3.3	1.8	5.9	1.6	
My family solved it	25.0	3.9	6.1		10.8	10.0	1.8	4.4	4.8	9.4
No insurance		1.0						7.0		
Police could do nothing	25.0	35.3	30.3		35.1	16.7	35.1	32.6	35.5	35.8
Police won't do anything		39.2	43.9	100.0	54.1	26.7	28.1	33.3	33.9	35.8
Fear/dislike police		2.0			4.1	3.3	10.5	5.2	12.9	15.1
Didn't dare										
Other reasons		7.8	3.0		1.4	6.7		6.7		
Don't know		2.9	3.0		1.4			4.4		

* Percentages calculated on victims who said they had not reported the last incident of each type of crime to the police - multiple answers possible.

Table 10: Crime seriousness*

	Theft of car %	Theft from car %	Car vandalism %	Theft of motorcycle %	Theft of bicycle %	Burglary with entry %	Robbery %	Personal theft %	Sexual incidents %	Assault/ threat %
Very serious	65.0	25.0	20.5	83.3	29.8	45.5	54.0	40.0	48.0	47.1
Fairly serious	30.0	41.4	34.1	16.7	36.2	32.6	29.9	30.0	32.0	20.7
Not serious	5.0	30.7	39.8		30.5	16.7	16.1	29.5	17.3	27.6

* Percentage based on victims of specific crimes.

Table 11: Crime prevention measures*

	%
Installed burglar alarm	9.2
Installed door locks	65.0
Installed window/door grills	61.2
Maintain watchdogs	42.1
High fence	36.9
House has a caretaker	24.8
None of these	
Others	
Ask somebody to watch home	62.7
Neighbours watch anyway	9.2
Possession of firearms	19.1
House is insured against burglary	10.7

* Percentages based on total sample of respondents.

