



THREAT BRIEF LATIN AMERICA



MEXICO: TRENDS

- Official kidnapping rates have decreased over the past five years, dropping from 833 cases in 2020 to 487 in 2024. In the first six months of 2025, 228 kidnappings were reported: 170 for extortion, three involving hostages, 13 kidnappings involving intent to cause harm, and 32 express kidnappings.
- However, the civil society organization Alto al Secuestro reports significantly higher figures: 1,663 kidnappings between October 2024 and June 2025, equivalent to an average of 6.1 kidnappings per day.
- Underreporting remains high. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), only between 1% and 7% of kidnappings are officially reported, and only 1% come to the police's attention. This situation is largely due to fear of reprisals, distrust in authorities, and the perception of impunity.
- Virtual kidnappings have increased over the past two to three years, using social networks and dating apps for extortion. Foreign tourists in Jalisco and Nayarit face a higher risk of virtual kidnapping.
- Kidnapping are often accompanied by significant violence; up to 40% of victims have been killed despite ransom payments, and 60% have suffered physical violence while in captivity.



MEXICO: KEY INSIGHTS

Targets

- Targets range from officials and police officers to agricultural workers.
- Middle- and upper-class individuals are common targets for express kidnappings (ransom starting from USD 500) and traditional kidnappings (USD 25,000 to USD 1,000,000).
- Migrants heading to the US border, including Mexicans and Central/South Americans, are particularly vulnerable, with as many as one in five being kidnapped.
- Although they are not primary targets, foreigners are increasingly the focus of virtual kidnappings, while traditional kidnappings of tourists and business travellers have declined due to increased scrutiny and government restrictions.

Perpetrators

- Organised criminal groups and cartels such as Cártel del Golfo, Los Zetas, Cártel del Noreste, Sinaloa, and CJNG are involved in kidnappings and extortion.
- Opportunistic actors also carry out express and virtual kidnappings, which are prevalent in cities such as Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey.
- Corrupt security figures and their “halcones” (street informants) participate both directly in kidnappings and by alerting the cartels.

Modus Operandi

- Associated with the rise in virtual kidnappings, social media is used to identify targets, especially when seeking luxury items or family connections.
- Express kidnappings of middle-class individuals and foreigners are carried out by taxi drivers and small gangs who force victims to withdraw cash from ATMs.
- Migrants heading to the US are often kidnapped by coyotes linked to cartels and forced to pay to cross the border or released after ransom payments.
- In rural areas or cartel-controlled zones, foreigners are kidnapped either by mistake or opportunistically.
- The use of cryptocurrencies for ransom payments is on the rise.

Mexico: Kidnapping Trends

Types of kidnappings (2023 – 2025)

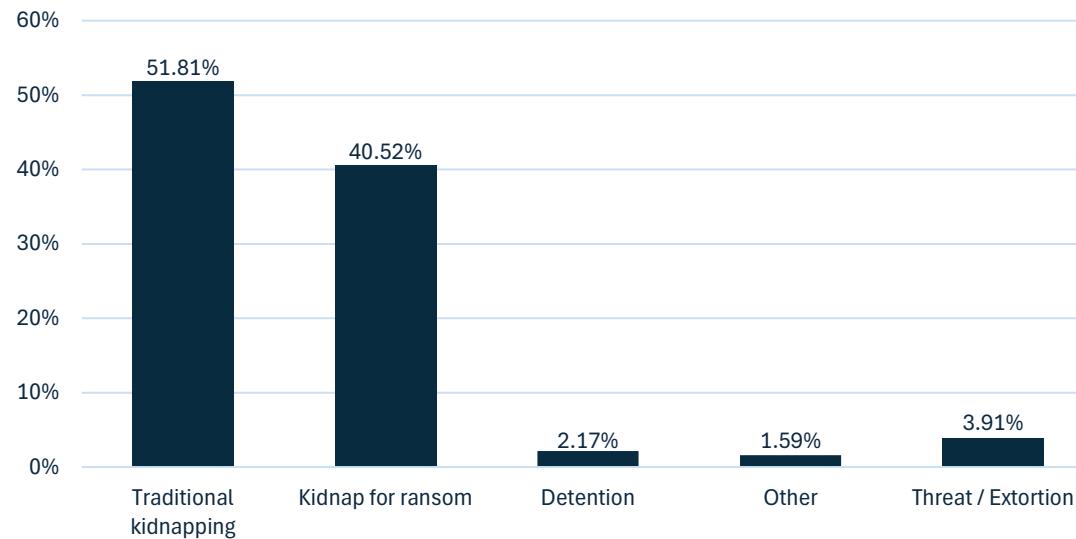
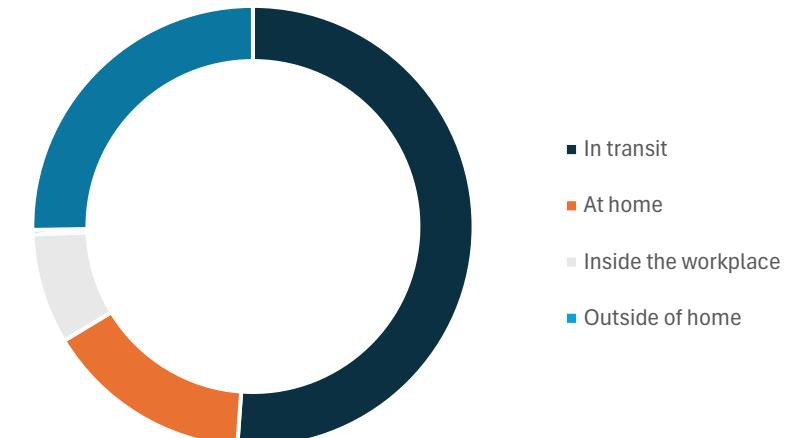
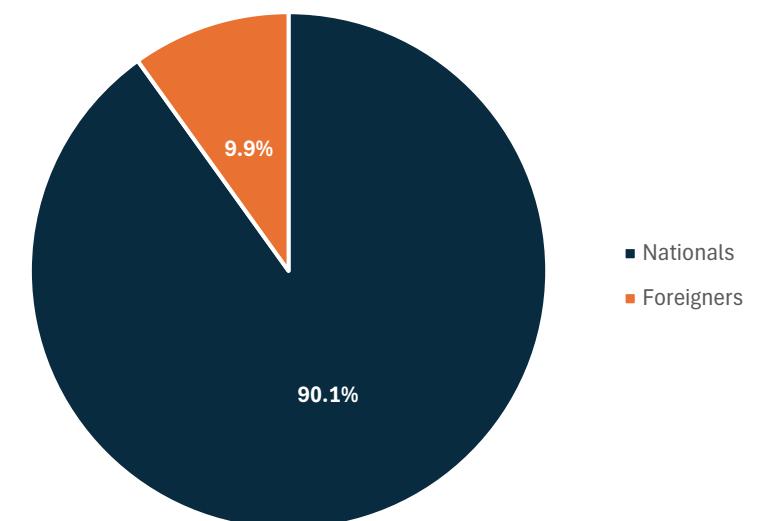


Image: Mexico Kidnapping Statistics (2023-2025)
Source: Crisis24, OSINT

Locations of kidnappings (2023 - 2025)



Nationality of victims (2023 – 2025)



Mexico: Kidnapping Trends (2024 – 2025)

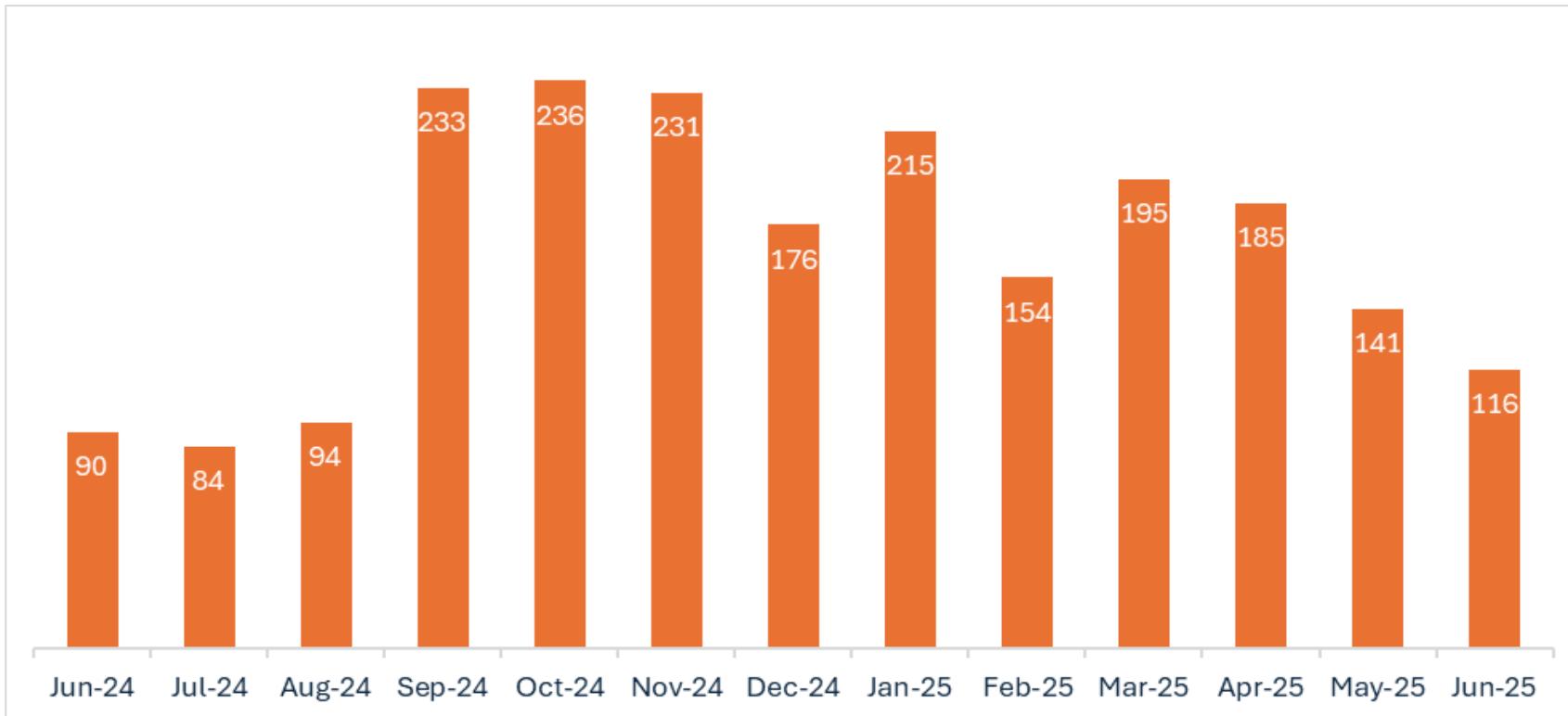


Image: Kidnapping statistics Mexico
Source: Alto al Secuestro (June 2025)

HAITI: TRENDS

- In Haiti, kidnappings have increased significantly since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021, particularly in Port-au-Prince, where 85% of the territory is controlled by gangs.
- According to the UN and Human Rights Watch, 1,494 kidnappings were recorded in 2024, an increase of 66% compared with the 900 in 2023. In just two years, nearly 4,000 kidnappings by armed groups have been reported, and by June 2025, 316 extortion-related kidnappings had already been recorded. In the first six months of 2023, almost 300 kidnappings were reported, matching the total for 2022 and nearly tripling the figures from 2021 (UNICEF).
- The actual numbers are likely much higher, as numerous kidnappings go unreported due to fear, distrust of authorities, and systemic corruption.
- Recent major cases include the kidnapping in July 2025 of five UNICEF employees, who were released three weeks later, although it was not reported whether a ransom was paid. Additionally, on 4 August 2025, a three-year-old child and seven employees of an orphanage – including an Irish missionary – were kidnapped near Port-au-Prince.



HAITI: KEY INSIGHTS

Targets

- Haitian citizens are the most frequent victims of kidnapping.
- Kidnapping for ransom target wealthy residents, foreigners, humanitarian workers, and missionaries.
- Although historically men have been the main victims, the number of women and children abducted for sexual and labour exploitation by armed gangs is increasing.
- Foreigners working on vessels in Haitian ports or their surroundings are likely targets for kidnapping.
- Ransoms range from USD 50,000 to USD 1,000,000, depending on nationality and perceived ability to pay.

Perpetrators

- Armed gangs in Port-au-Prince are the main perpetrators of kidnappings in Haiti and control around 85% of the city.
- Some of the gangs most notorious for ransom kidnappings are 400 Mawozo, the G9 alliance, and the Viv Ansanm alliance. 5 Segonn and the Ti Lapli gang are also known for this activity.
- The influence of gangs extends beyond the capital into key coastal areas.

Modus Operandi

- With a weakened government and security forces, Haitian gangs carry out kidnappings with near impunity. They hold hostages for extended periods, and negotiating the ransom is difficult.
- Victims are taken at gunpoint from their homes or vehicles and held in areas controlled by the gangs.
- Gangs use roadblocks and checkpoints to target foreigners travelling between cities.
- In maritime kidnappings, they employ speedboats to board slower vessels and catch their victims by surprise.

ECUADOR: TRENDS

- Between 2022 and 2024, Ecuador experienced exponential growth in extortion, kidnapping, and kidnapping for ransom offences.
- According to data from the National Police, 713 kidnapping cases were recorded in 2022, rising to 2,095 in 2024. Between January and April 2025, 692 cases were reported.
- As for kidnapping for ransom, a crime directly linked to generating illicit income for criminal organisations, cases increased from 581 in 2022 to 1,457 in 2024. Between January and April 2025, 417 cases were reported.
- Finally, regarding extortion, 6,651 cases were recorded in 2022, nearly tripling to 20,293 in 2024. Between January and April 2025, the National Police reported 4,569 cases.



ECUADOR: KEY INSIGHTS

Targets

- Targets are generally selected based on the perception of their wealth. They include middle- and upper-class individuals, usually businesspeople, prominent family members, and even passengers who appear to have a high economic status on public transport.
- Victims are often chosen for their ability to pay quick, mid-sized ransoms (between USD 5,000 and USD 50,000).
- Foreigners and tourists are frequently targeted in public spaces such as beaches and border towns.

Perpetrators

- Perpetrators are usually organised crime groups, active mainly in Guayaquil and Quito, with links to regional and international cartels that compete over key drug trafficking routes.
- The main groups include Los Chineros, Los Tiguerones, Los Lobos, and Tren de Aragua.
- Colombian guerrilla groups are also known to carry out kidnappings in the northern regions.
- Low-level street gangs and opportunistic individuals focus on express kidnappings, which allow them to obtain money quickly.

Modus Operandi

- Express kidnappings: Victims are held for a short period and forced to make transfers, withdraw cash, or contact family members for quick payments.
- Fragmented gangs increasingly resort to torture and mutilation to pressure payment, avoiding lengthy negotiations.
- Taxi ambushes: Perpetrators pose as app-based or regular taxi drivers, kidnap victims upon boarding, confiscate their phones, and demand ransom using the devices to contact family members.

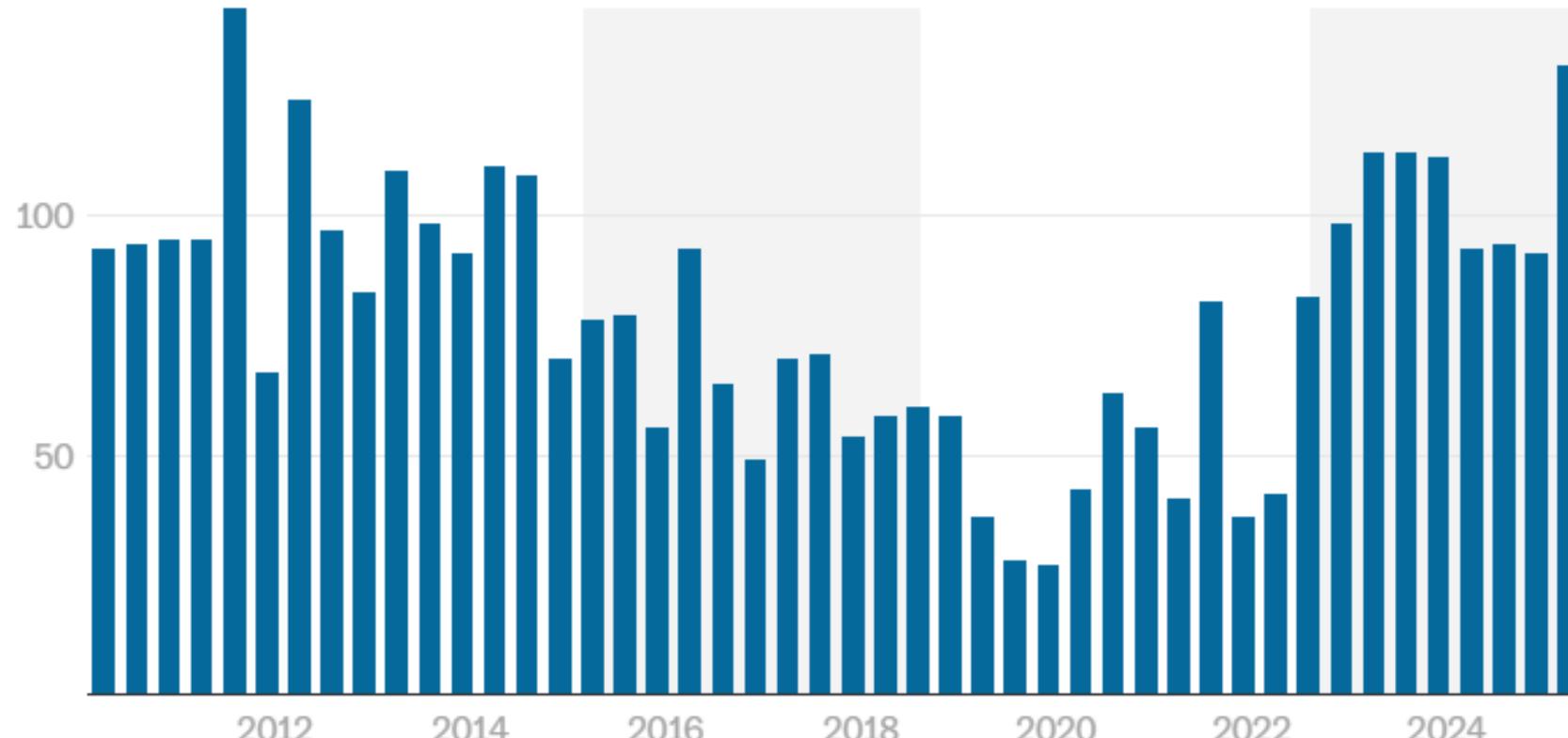
COLOMBIA: TRENDS

- Since 2019, kidnappings in Colombia have tripled, reaching 338 cases in 2023 and 279 in 2024, according to data from the National Police compiled by the Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP).
- Between January and April 2025, 131 kidnappings were recorded, an increase of 40% compared with the same period in 2024. Half of these cases were concentrated in four departments: Antioquia, Cauca, Norte de Santander, and Valle del Cauca.
- The FIP warns of an “outsourcing” approach in some kidnappings, in which criminal organisations or armed groups are hired to carry out the acts.
- Another notable trend is the reduction in the duration of kidnappings in recent years. Since the demobilisation of the FARC, kidnappings for purposes other than extortion have decreased significantly.



Kidnappings in Colombia reach a nearly 15-year high

The first four months of 2025 saw the highest number of cases since 2011



Source: Fundación Ideas para la Paz and National Police

CHILE: TRENDS

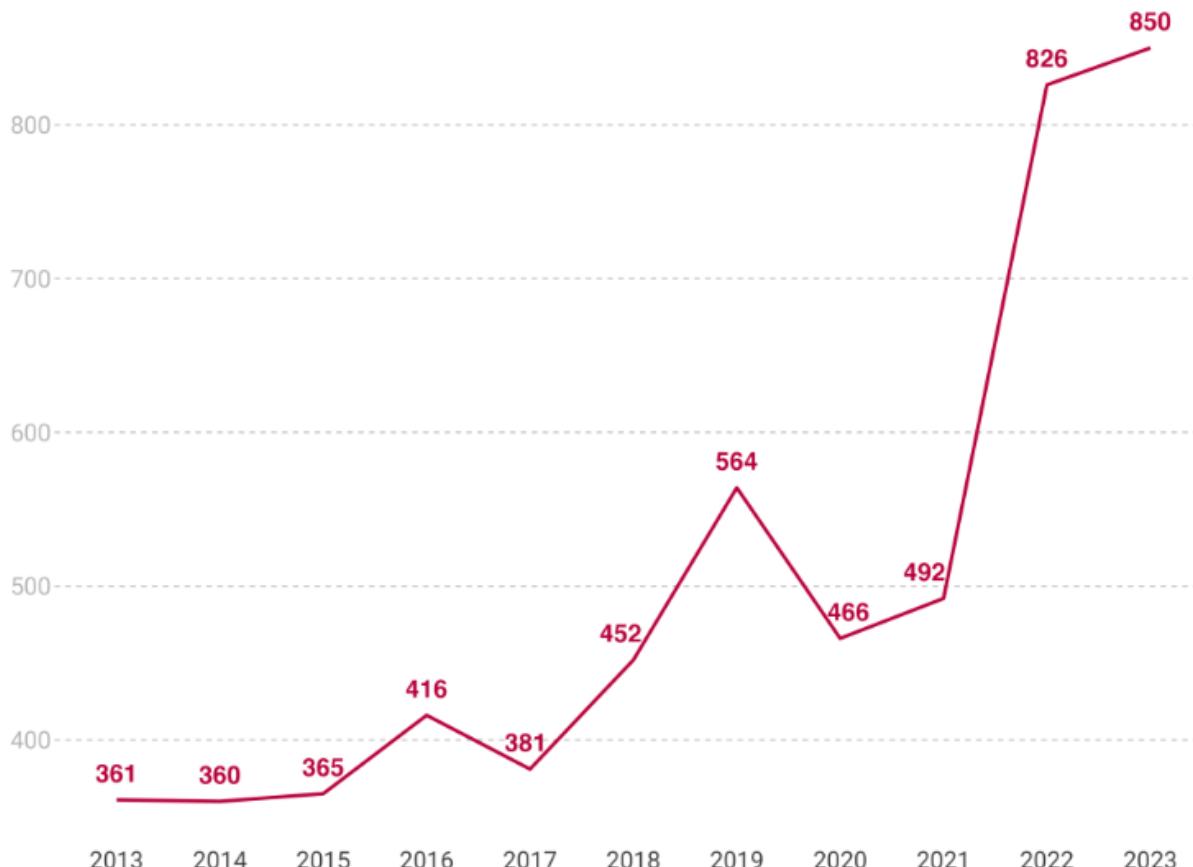
- Over the past decade, kidnappings in Chile have increased by 135%, reaching 868 cases in 2024, according to the Attorney General's Office. The largest jump occurred between 2021 and 2022, coinciding with the expansion of the Venezuelan criminal group Tren de Aragua.
- The Atacama region recorded the highest proportional increase in 2024, with a stark 162% rise in just one year.
- In 2024, nearly four in ten kidnappings (39%) were linked to organised crime, an increase of more than ten percentage points compared with the previous year. Among these, kidnappings motivated by settling scores, collections, or revenge rose from 4.5% of cases in 2022 to 12.4% in 2023.
- At least one in four kidnappings in 2023 involved a foreign national as the alleged perpetrator. Tren de Aragua and its factions have used kidnapping as a tool of control and punishment against members of other groups and against those who refuse to pay imposed extortion demands.



The number of kidnappings in Chile increased by 68% between 2021 and 2022, the most significant rise in the past decade

Number of kidnappings between 2013 and 2023

Julio 2024 | Fuente: Ministerio Público de Chile



Source: Public Prosecutor's Office of Chile
(July 2024)

VENEZUELA: TRENDS

- According to the Ministry of Interior and Justice, kidnapping cases in Venezuela fell by 54.2% during the first six months of 2023 compared with the same period in 2022.
- The Venezuelan Violence Observatory (OVV) recorded 53 kidnappings in 2022, almost double the number in 2021.
 - The OVV explained that the surge in kidnappings was concentrated in central Venezuela, particularly in the states of Carabobo, Aragua, the Capital District, and Miranda, where there has been greater economic recovery and a resurgence of import trade and the sale of goods and services.
- Most cases go unreported due to corruption and a lack of trust in the authorities, resulting in significant underreporting and making it impossible to determine the true scale of the problem.



BRAZIL: TRENDS

- Up to September 2024, 131 people were kidnapped in the state of São Paulo, according to data from the Public Security Secretariat (SSP), representing a 19% decrease compared with the first nine months of the previous year (150 cases).
- In the first half of 2023, Greater São Paulo recorded 91 cases of extortion through kidnapping, of which 63 involved victims abducted directly in public spaces. A separate report revealed that 96% of this type of kidnapping in the city was linked to contacts initiated through dating apps such as Tinder.
- According to the Civil Police, extortion offences increased by 42% in 2023, reaching 3,264 reports, compared with 2022, marking the highest figure in 20 years. This surge is partly attributed to the exploitation of territories by criminal organisations. In addition to residents and shopkeepers, businesses are also frequent targets of extortion.



KIDNAPPING THREATS IN THE REST OF THE REGION

- **Peru:** According to official figures, reports of kidnapping – including kidnapping, express kidnapping, aggravated kidnapping, and attempted kidnapping – have shown a decline from 2022, when 1,836 cases were reported, to 2024, with 1,683 cases. Between January and May 2024, 673 kidnappings were reported, while in the same period in 2025, the figure fell by 4%, with 649 cases recorded.
- **Argentina:** The Specialised Prosecutor's Unit for Organised Crime (UFECO) reported that 26 cases of kidnapping for extortion were recorded in 2024. This reflects a clear downward trend and represents the second-lowest figure since 2015, when 294 cases were reported.
- **Central America:** The risk of kidnapping in Central America remains high, particularly for migrants who face constant threats of extortion, kidnapping, and sexual violence from criminal groups controlling migration routes. This situation is even more critical for those coming from the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), due to the alarming rise in forced displacement, suggesting that these threats may persist or intensify in the coming years.

