

Urban prosperity index: perception of the security variable in the Santa Rosa canton – Ecuador

Índice de prosperidad urbana: percepción de la variable seguridad en el cantón Santa Rosa – Ecuador

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Abstract

The article examines the perception of security in the Santa Rosa canton, Ecuador, and its relationship with the urban prosperity index, which is measured through dimensions such as productivity, infrastructure, quality of life, equity and social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. Security, as a critical component of this index, is addressed from the perspective of citizens, who evaluate its impact on socioeconomic development and quality of life. To this end, a descriptive investigation with a quantitative approach and non-experimental design was developed. Surveys, designed with a Likert scale, were applied to a representative sample of 384 people. The findings reveal a predominant perception of insecurity, with 55% of participants expressing dissatisfaction and 15% rating security levels as very low. This perception negatively affects the socioeconomic development of the locality, limiting job creation and discouraging investment. Citizens demand urgent measures, such as the modernization of surveillance systems, an increase in police officers, and better coordination between law enforcement. Furthermore, they perceive that national strategies do not address the specific



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problems of their community. Experts agree on the need for adapted public policies, including preventive actions, strengthening social ties, and repairing urban infrastructures. These measures are essential to improve the perception of security and, consequently, boost the urban prosperity index in Santa Rosa.

Keywords: security, urban prosperity index, crime, citizen perception, local development.

Resumen

El artículo examina la percepción de la seguridad en el cantón Santa Rosa, Ecuador, y su relación con el índice de prosperidad urbana, el cual se mide a través de dimensiones como productividad, infraestructura, calidad de vida, equidad e inclusión social, y sostenibilidad ambiental. La seguridad, como componente crítico de este índice, se aborda desde la perspectiva de los ciudadanos, quienes evalúan su impacto en el desarrollo socioeconómico y la calidad de vida. Para ello, se desarrolló una investigación descriptiva con enfoque cuantitativo y diseño no experimental. Se aplicaron encuestas, diseñadas con una escala de Likert, a una muestra representativa de 384 personas. Los hallazgos revelan una percepción predominante de inseguridad, con un 55% de los participantes, expresando insatisfacción y un 15% calificando los niveles de seguridad como muy bajos. Esta percepción afecta negativamente el desarrollo socioeconómico de la localidad, limitando la creación de empleo y desalentando la inversión. Los ciudadanos demandan medidas urgentes, como la modernización de los sistemas de vigilancia, el aumento de agentes policiales y una mejor coordinación entre las fuerzas del orden. Además, perciben que las estrategias nacionales no abordan las problemáticas específicas de su comunidad. Los expertos coinciden en la necesidad de políticas públicas adaptadas, que incluyan acciones preventivas, fortalecimiento de los lazos sociales y reparación de las infraestructuras urbanas. Estas medidas son esenciales para mejorar la percepción de seguridad y, en consecuencia, impulsar el índice de prosperidad urbana en Santa Rosa.

Palabras clave: seguridad, índice de prosperidad urbana, delincuencia, percepción ciudadana, desarrollo local.

Introduction

According to each context, the physical and functional structure of cities has evolved in diverse ways, but it has always revolved around a fundamental core that constitutes the center of urban life. This core is characterized by a high concentration, or specific concentration, of goods, people, and activities, and receives various denominations depending on the place: historic center, urban center, downtown, financial district, commercial or business area, among others (Torres and Iracheta, 2022). Currently, this territory is known as

the Central System, a concept that has a flexible definition and admits some variations, but maintains its centrality in urban behavior. Consistent with the research of Palero (2024), this idea was originally proposed by Christopher Alexander in the 1960s and later developed in its theoretical formulation by Paul Lesourd.

In less developed countries, more than 50% of people already live in cities, while in more developed countries, the level of urbanization exceeds 70%.

This process, known as urban transition, is associated with demographic, economic, and environmental changes in a region (Ochoa *et al.*, 2019).

For Castro and Miranda (2021), the high concentration of goods and people lead to the development of certain activities or interaction processes, mainly linked to socioeconomic and cultural dynamics, which not only attract residents from nearby communities but also individuals from other cities or regions.

Hence, the study on the perception of insecurity focuses primarily on the assessment of social and urban functioning, as well as its relationship with the risk of criminality (Gómez and Zendejas, 2019). In this context, Gómez's research (2022) revisits the methodological postulates of the criminological group of the National Society of Sciences on Criminality of the United States, led by Thomas Boden and Wilson Pickett, highlighting the figure of J.J. Byrne, creator of the "fostered environment" theory, which analyzes how certain urban conditions can generate social marginalization.

As mentioned in previous studies by Currie and Pérez (2021), Vera and Bass (2022), and Ramírez and Revilla (2023), professionals responsible for urban planning and security apply insecurity assessment instruments focused on the urban territory. These instruments are based on key planning references, such as buildings and architectural extension, to identify and manage risks. From these elements, key aspects associated with insecurity are systematized, establishing objective criteria derived from the observation of two main factors: citizens' spatial perceptions and human behavior patterns in the urban environment.

Spatial perception and the interaction between individuals and their environmental surroundings play a fundamental role in the assessment of urban security. This perception is influenced by the diverse valuations that people make about objects, experiences, and the environmental fabric that surrounds them. In this sense, security has consolidated as a crucial factor for urban life over the years. A city that does not guarantee the secu-

rity of its citizens (or that is perceived as insecure) faces the risk of being abandoned or experiencing a significant deterioration in its life quality and socioeconomic development (*El Universo*, 2023).

It is then, when insecurity will be biased by the preferences and fears of each individual, based on previous experiences, their own personality and sensitivity to various sources of concerns or conflicts (Canestraro *et al.*, 2019). A citizen may feel more insecure walking through a crowded commercial street than in the darkness of an empty street. The fear of accidents caused by climatic variations is greater than the fear of industrial accidents.

This argument sustains that security has become one of the most relevant aspects for cities. In the citizen context of Ecuador, security has surpassed the barrier of the personal level, also becoming a more complex aspect, affecting both the internal stay (physical protection) and the external development of citizens in the streets (social protection). According to the Institute for Economics & Peace (2023) in its Global Peace Index report, Ecuador ranks 121st out of 163 countries in terms of peace and security. The homicide rate in the country is 13.1 per 100,000 inhabitants, a figure considerably higher than the world average of 6.1. The perception of insecurity in Ecuador is high. According to the National Survey of Citizen Security and Victimization (2021), 65.2% of Ecuadorians feel unsafe in their city or neighborhood.

Currently, citizen security is a fundamental factor for the development and prosperity of cities. As Gonzales and Barbaran (2021) point out, in Ecuador, the high perception of insecurity represents a significant challenge that must be addressed comprehensively. This problem is particularly evident in the Santa Rosa canton, El Oro province, where there has been a worrying increase in insecurity rates in recent months. This situation has generated great alarm among the population and has led the authorities to take urgent measures. At the end of August 2023, the mayor declared the canton in a state of emergency due to insecurity, with the aim of allocating additional re-

sources to combat crime and strengthen citizen security (El Universo, 2023).

However, despite these actions, insecurity remains a serious problem in Santa Rosa. Citizens demand more forceful measures and lasting solutions that allow them to recover tranquility in their streets (El Universo, 2023). The lack of security has negative effects on multiple aspects of urban life. On the one hand, the local government may be reluctant to invest in public infrastructure in areas considered unsafe, which directly affects the quality of life of the inhabitants. On the other hand, the perception of insecurity reduces citizen participation in community and civic activities, weakening social cohesion. In addition, a worrying exodus of the population has been observed, as many people emigrate from the city in search of better living conditions. This phenomenon not only affects the social fabric but also limits the urban and economic development of the canton.

This situation has meant that Ecuador, like many Latin American countries, faces challenges in terms of citizen security that negatively impact the development and prosperity of its cities. Hence, the objective of this research focuses on analyzing the urban prosperity index from the perception of the security variable in the Santa Rosa canton – Ecuador.

1. Security in Ecuador

Between 2009 and 2013, Ecuador experienced the greatest advance in citizen security in Latin America, according to a Gallup study and official data. This progress was reflected in a notable reduction in serious crimes, such as homicide, which reached its lowest level since 2000. The report positioned Ecuador in fourth place among 21 Latin American nations, surpassing Uruguay, but behind Nicaragua, Panama, and Chile (Barros *et al.*, 2023).

Analysis of National Government data by Guerrero *et al.* (2022) revealed a notable decline in Ecuador's homicide rate, reaching 10.87 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2013, down from 18.88% in 2008 and 16.99% in 2000. This downward trend led to pro-

jections of a single-digit rate by 2014, the lowest in fourteen years.

For Velasco (2023), Ecuador went from being one of the safest countries in the region in 2018 to suffering its most violent year in 2022. The new administration had to face this serious problem by creating a plan to combat organized crime and improve security forces and the judicial system. However, crime and violence rates in Ecuador have experienced a notable increase. Official figures reveal a sustained increase in crimes, especially homicides and robberies. For example, since 2019, Ecuador has recorded an exponential increase in intentional homicides, exceeding the initial figures by more than 500%.

This escalation of violence closed in 2022 with more than 7,000 violent deaths, placing the country at an alarming homicide rate of more than 35 per 100,000 inhabitants (Tayupanta, 2023). In this way, public safety problems, characterized by gender violence, drug trafficking, and organized crime, demand urgent attention. This has meant that investment in security has experienced a notable growth during 2024. In particular, until September 2024, USD 37 million has been allocated to this security sector, representing 54% of the total assigned budget. Most of this amount has been used to acquire essential protection equipment for police officers, reaching an investment of USD 28 million (Tapia, 2024).

Currently, Ecuador faces a complex challenge in terms of public safety, with notable repercussions on the economy and the well-being of the population. Crime, prison overcrowding, and the distribution of public resources are interconnected elements that require a holistic approach to achieve positive change. The increase in crime in Ecuador is a multifactorial phenomenon explained by the confluence of economic, social, and political factors. The lack of opportunities, poverty, and inequality generate vulnerable conditions that facilitate recruitment into illicit activities. Likewise, institutional weakness and impunity foster impunity and perpetuate cycles of violence, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Causes of Crime in Ecuador

Aspecto	Descripción
Poverty	Poverty can increase the likelihood of individuals resorting to crime due to the scarcity of opportunities for legitimate income. Despair and the perceived lack of options can lead to the belief that crime is the only viable alternative, or that there are no negative consequences for committing it.
Social Inequality	Poverty and marginalization can push individuals towards crime, as a form of escape or as the only alternative for survival, due to the feeling of social exclusion they experience.
Lack of Educational and Employment Opportunities	The lack of education and job skills increases the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities due to limited lawful employment opportunities. This situation, in turn, generates frustration and disillusionment, which can further drive criminal behavior.
Corruption	The lack of consequences for criminal actions can create a climate of impunity, fostering a greater inclination towards committing crimes. This, in turn, weakens institutions and the rule of law, hindering crime prevention and control efforts.
Lack of Access to Justice	Exclusion from the judicial system leads to frustration and disillusionment, factors that increase the risk of engaging in criminal activities. Furthermore, this same exclusion exposes them to being victims of crimes, which increases their potential for recidivism

Note: Club de Aplicación, Desarrollo e Investigaciones Económicas (2024).

The resurgence of crime, particularly in the recent period, raises alarms and demands a thorough analysis of its roots. Factors such as poverty, social disparity, and the lack of educational and employment opportunities increase the vulnerability of certain population sectors, driving them towards crime. Crime is not only a public safety problem but also an obstacle to the country's economic and social development (La Hora, 2024). It is necessary to implement effective public policies that prioritize prevention, education, and social investment to build a safer and more prosperous future for all.

2. Background of Social Investment in Ecuador

Social investment in Ecuador experienced a notable growth during the period 2006–2015, increasing from 1.976 million dollars in 2006 to 6.819 million in 2015. This increase represents a 244% rise, demonstrating a significant commitment by the government to improve the population's welfare (Ormaza *et al.*, 2020).

Despite the increase in social investment, challenges persist regarding income distribution and equitable access to basic services. It is important

to continue working to reduce inequality through the implementation of public policies that promote a fairer distribution of income, reducing the gap between rich and poor (Grupo FARO, 2019). Only in this way will universally access to quality education, health, and human development services be guaranteed, regardless of people's socioeconomic level. Thus, promoting both the social inclusion of vulnerable groups and people with disabilities, Afro-descendants, and indigenous populations.

According to Márquez *et al.* (2020), this allows us to synthesize that the increase in social investment in Ecuador, during the period 2006–2015, has had a positive impact on the country's development. However, challenges remain to be faced to achieve a fairer distribution of income and equitable access to basic services. It is essential to continue with public policies focused on poverty reduction, the improvement of education and health, and the strengthening of social inclusion to achieve comprehensive human development in Ecuador (Esparza *et al.*, 2023).

Although great efforts have been made to reduce inequality in Ecuador, data indicates that there is still a long way to go. The Gini Index, an indi-

Poverty Reduction: Investment in social programs has contributed to the reduction of extreme poverty in the country, allowing more people to access basic necessities such as food, housing, and health services

Improvement in Education: The increase in investment in education has allowed for the construction of new schools, the training of teachers, and the implementation of quality educational programs, which has contributed to improving the educational levels of the population

Human Development: The focus on human development has promoted equal opportunities, community empowerment, and citizen participation, contributing to greater general well-being of the population

Access to Health: Investment in the health sector has enabled the expansion of public health coverage, the construction of new hospitals and health centers, and the acquisition of medicines and medical equipment, which has improved access to quality health services for the population

Figure 1.
Development Aspects in Ecuador

Source: Grupo FARO (2019).

cator that measures the concentration of wealth, has decreased in the country, but still remains at considerable levels. Similarly, extreme poverty continues to disproportionately affect certain population groups, such as indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians (Restrepo *et al.*, 2024).

In Ecuador, the Gini Index has experienced a reduction from 0.551 in 2007 to 0.462 in 2017. While this trend is positive, this index is still above the threshold of 0.40, considered a high level of inequality. According to data from the Coordinating Ministry of Social Development, in 2006 the incidence of extreme poverty among indigenous people was 36.8%, with a decrease rate of 13% in 10 years, reaching 31.9% in 2016 (National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC, 2021)).

For its part, the Afro-Ecuadorian population had an extreme poverty incidence of 23% in 2006, with a decrease of 46%, that is, an incidence of 12.4% in 2016. Regarding mestizos, their extreme poverty incidence was similar to the national average, reaching 15.2% in 2006, with a decrease of 60% during the period 2006–2016, reaching 6.1% for the year 2016 (INEC, 2021).

Despite the progress made, inequality and extreme poverty remain important challenges in

Ecuador, so it is necessary to continue with public policies focused on reducing the existing gaps between different population groups and guaranteeing access to opportunities for all citizens.

The current distribution of the Ecuadorian population, with a high concentration in urban areas, presents both challenges and opportunities. To guarantee a good quality of life for all inhabitants, it is necessary to develop sustainable communities in the 221 municipalities of the country. These communities must have adequate infrastructure for mobility, risk mitigation strategies, economic development opportunities, and other conditions that promote general welfare.

3. Urban Prosperity Index

According to Cervantes (2021), the Urban Prosperity Index (CPI) emerges as an innovative tool to comprehensively understand cities. Unlike traditional approaches, the CPI adopts a holistic vision that encompasses six fundamental dimensions:

By integrating these six dimensions, the CPI offers a comprehensive view of the progress and well-being of cities. This tool allows for the identification of strengths and weaknesses, the formulation of effective public policies, and the guidance of invest-

Table 2.
Dimensions of the Urban Prosperity Index

Dimensiones del Índice de Prosperidad Urbana	Descripción
Productivity	This dimension evaluates the city's capacity to generate wealth and economic opportunities for its inhabitants. Factors such as employment rate, business competitiveness and innovation are considered.
Infrastructure for development	Urban infrastructure plays a crucial role in the well-being of the population. The CPI analyzes the quality and accessibility of basic services such as transportation, drinking water, energy and communications.
Quality of Life	This dimension goes beyond the basic satisfaction of needs and focuses on the general well-being of citizens. It considers aspects such as health, education, culture, access to green spaces and citizen security.
Equity and Social Inclusion	The CPI recognizes the importance of a just and inclusive society for sustainable urban development. It evaluates income distribution, access to opportunities and citizen participation, among other factors.
Environmental sustainability	Environmental protection is fundamental to the future of cities. The CPI analyzes the environmental impact of urban activity and the city's capacity to manage its resources.
Governance and urban legislation	The quality of urban governance largely determines the success of public policies and the well-being of citizens. The CPI assesses transparency, accountability, efficiency and citizen participation in decision making.

Note: Álvarez y Yanes (2021).

ments towards priority areas. The CPI thus becomes a fundamental ally for sustainable urban development and the construction of more prosperous and inclusive cities (Jiménez and Martín, 2021).

The Prosperous Cities Index, therefore, emerges as a fundamental guide to transform cities into centers of progress and well-being for all, leveraging their potential to generate a positive impact on the lives of millions of people worldwide (Barrera *et al.*, 2022), because, with the results of the Urban Prosperity Index, governments can foster debates on topics related to urban development, such as poverty, housing, equity, metropolitan planning, and governance.

Methodology

The study is framed within a quantitative approach of descriptive level, with a non-experimental cross-sectional design. Its objective is to analyze the perception of the security variable in the urban prosperity index of the Santa Rosa canton, Ecuador. To this end, an analytical-synthetic method was employed that allowed for the de-

composition of the phenomenon into its key components and then, their integration to understand its global dynamics.

As a main technique, a structured survey was applied to the population of the Santa Rosa canton, which has 60,388 inhabitants according to the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC, last available census). The instrument is a 4-value Likert scale with 8 items, designed to measure attitudes and perceptions related to urban security. The scale was developed following the recommendations of Cisneros *et al.* (2020).

The survey was applied directly to a representative sample of the population, selected through stratified random sampling. Data collection was carried out during the period of September 2024, ensuring the temporal and spatial representativeness of the results.

Additionally, an exhaustive literature review was conducted to contextualize the study and contrast the findings with the existing literature. This review included the analysis of academic docu-

Equation 1.
Sample Calculation

$$\text{Tamaño de muestra} = \frac{Z^2 * p * (1 - p)}{e^2} = \frac{(1,96)^2 * 0,5 * (1 - 0,5)}{(0,05)^2} = 384,16 \approx 384$$

ments, government reports, and specialized databases, following the guidelines proposed by Gómez *et al.* (2022).

Results

Through the application of surveys to the inhabitants of Santa Rosa, Ecuador, a comprehensive analysis of citizen perception of security, a crucial aspect of the Urban Prosperity Index, was carried out. This study allowed us to delve deeper into the community’s specific concerns, assess levels of trust in security institutions and detect areas that require greater attention to improve the quality of urban life. A number of findings were contextua-

lized, such as the fact that 55% of the population consulted consider that insecurity is a priority in the community.

The implemented security measures in Santa Rosa canton are perceived as largely ineffective, evidenced by widespread dissatisfaction among residents. Only 10% of the population believes the measures are sufficient (split equally between “totally” and “moderately” sufficient), while a majority (60%) report them as “insufficient.” This suggests that current initiatives are failing to achieve their intended goals of crime reduction and improved public safety perception.

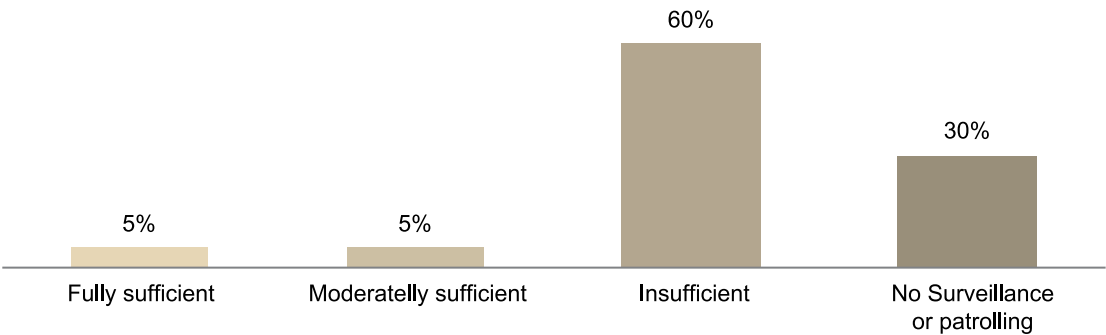


Figure 2.
Perception of the population on security measures.

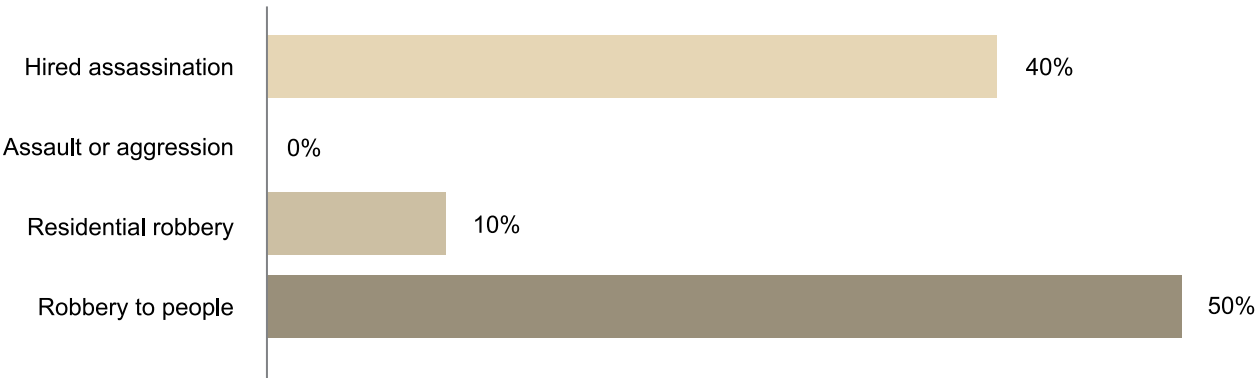


Figure 3.
Type of crime witnessed

A significant 30% of residents report a complete absence of surveillance or patrolling, highlighting a pervasive perception of abandonment by security authorities. This lack of visible police presence directly fuels feelings of vulnerability and insecurity among citizens.

This finding highlights the urgency of implementing concrete measures to guarantee citizen security in the canton. It also poses a challenge for both the local government and neighborhood associations, who must work together to restore peace of mind to the residents. Robbery from individuals presents the highest incidence among reported crimes in Santa Rosa, with 50% of respondents identifying it as the main problem. This result suggests a correlation between the high rate of thefts and factors such as deficiencies in surveillance systems, the vulnerability of public spaces, and the increase in criminal activities in crowded areas.

In this same context, hired assassination (sicariato) were identified by 40% of respondents as a major problem, evidencing the profound severity of organized violence in society. This alarming figure highlights the urgent need to implement comprehensive strategies to combat these criminal networks and ensure the safety of citizens. On the other hand, although residential robbery represents a smaller percentage (10%), this crime generates a widespread feeling of insecurity, undermining the tranquility of homes and affecting peaceful coexistence.

The data reflects that the majority of Santa Rosa population perceives the surveillance and patrolling service as insufficient. 70% of respondents feel unsafe (55% “unsafe” and 15% “very unsafe”), while only 30% consider that the service provides them with some security. It is striking that no respondent (0%) feels “very safe,” which evidences a

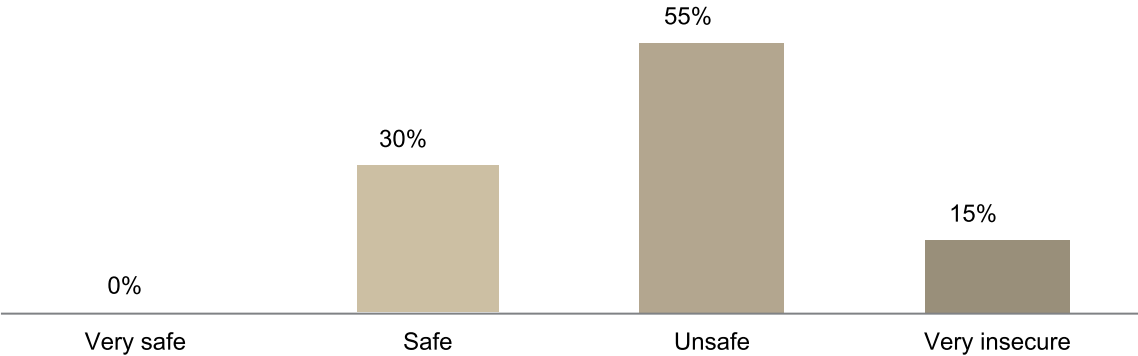


Figure 4.
Perception of the surveillance and patrolling service.



Figure 5.
Perception of the impact of insecurity on commerce

generalized lack of trust in the implemented security measures.

The survey reveals that insecurity is stifling local commerce in Santa Rosa. An overwhelming majority of respondents, 85%, indicate that the perception of insecurity has a very negative impact on commercial activities, resulting in decreased sales, business closures, and a decline in the local economy. The general perception is that insecurity is suffocating local commerce; residents strongly believe that the lack of security is frightening customers and severely damaging the economy,

underscoring the urgent need to strengthen security measures to reactivate commerce and build confidence.

An overwhelming 85% of respondents directly associate insecurity with a substantial reduction in the generation of new jobs. This data suggests that the climate of insecurity is creating distrust among entrepreneurs, who fear being targeted by crimes such as robberies or extortion, which inhibits their ability to invest and expand their businesses, thus limiting job opportunities.

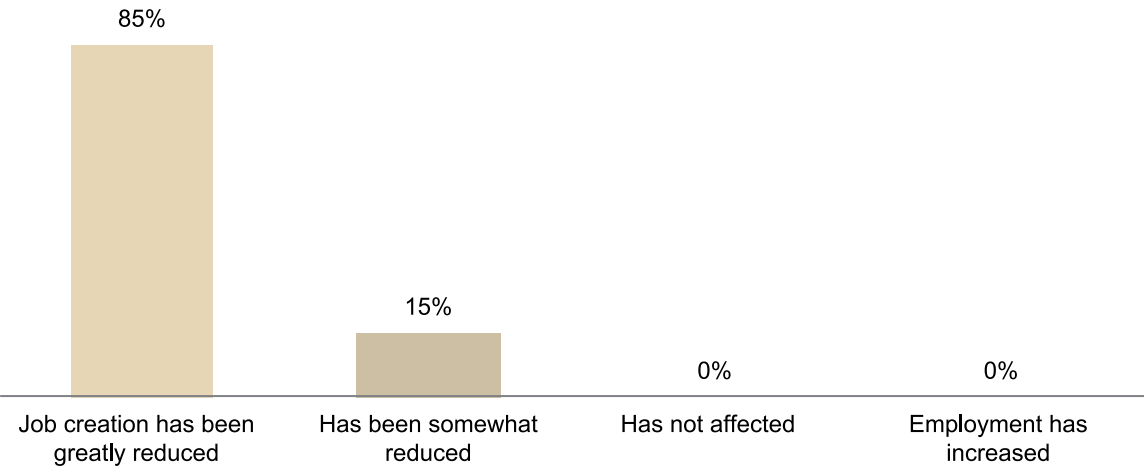


Figure 6.
Perception of the impact of insecurity on commerce in job creation

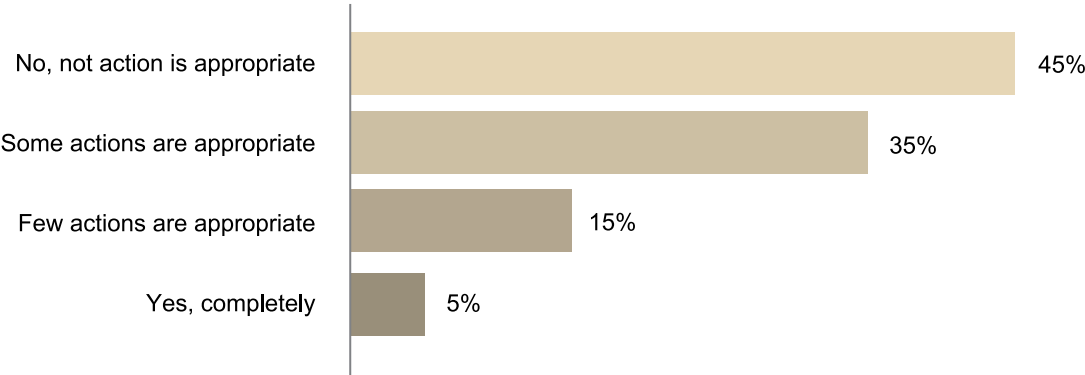


Figure 7.
Government intervention in security

The evaluation of government policies to improve security in Santa Rosa yields discouraging results. The majority of respondents (80%) express dissatisfaction with the actions implemented. While a small percentage (20%) acknowledges some isolated efforts. The predominant perception is that these measures are insufficient or inadequate to address the problem effectively.

A wide range of opinions is revealed regarding the effectiveness of national programs in comba-

ting crime in Santa Rosa. While a minority (20%) perceives significant benefits, especially in relation to concrete measures that have shown tangible results, the majority of respondents express a feeling of dissatisfaction (25%). A considerable percentage (30% and 25%) believes that the programs have had little or no positive impact, suggesting that current strategies are not effectively addressing community concerns, such as drug trafficking and organized crime.

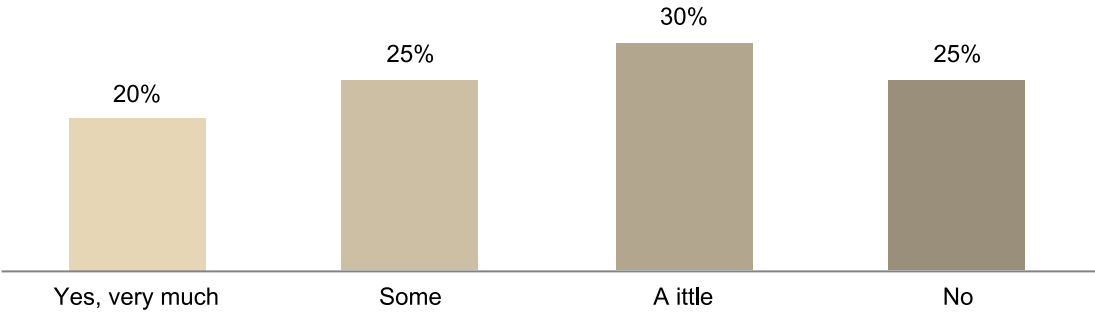


Figure 8.
Perception of national crime-fighting programs

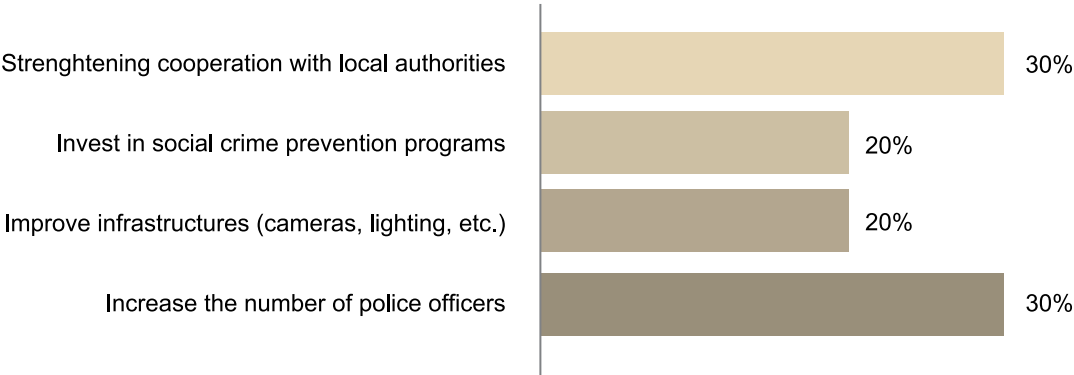


Figure 9.
Perception of alternatives to improve citizen security.

The residents of Santa Rosa have emphatically expressed the areas they deem fundamental for the national government to reinforce security in the locality. This reveals two primary demands from the citizenry regarding security: firstly, 30% consider it essential to increase the number of police officers to ensure a greater presence on the streets and a more rapid response to emergencies. Additionally, another 30% highlight the importance of strengthening collaboration between local and national authorities to develop more personalized and efficient security strategies.

The study also reveals that 20% of respondents believe that improving infrastructure, such as increasing the number of security cameras and enhancing public lighting, is fundamental to reducing the feeling of insecurity. Simultaneously, this proportion of respondents believes it is necessary to implement preventive social programs that address the underlying causes of crime, such as lack of opportunities and social exclusion.

Summarizing the most significant findings, the survey revealed that the population of Santa Rosa shows high dissatisfaction with security measures: only 10% consider them sufficient, while 60% rate them as “insufficient” and 30% state “there is no surveillance.” The most concerning crimes are theft from individuals (50%) and hired killings (*sicariato*) (40%). Insecurity severely affects commerce (85%) and job creation (85%). 80% are dissatisfied with government policies, demanding more police officers (30%), better coordination between authorities (30%), security infrastructure (20%), and preventive social programs (20%). These responses expose the need for comprehensive measures to restore confidence and improve the life quality of Santa Rosa population.

Discussion

The survey data regarding security perceptions in Santa Rosa canton reveals a severe crisis in citizen safety. A substantial 55% of residents reported dissatisfaction with current security levels, with an additional 15% deeming them critically low. This pervasive concern, consistent with prior research (e.g.,

Morse *et al.*, 2014), not only indicates anxieties about personal safety but also significantly impedes the municipality's socioeconomic development and quality of life. The resulting erosion of public trust in institutions creates a detrimental cycle, hindering community progress and well-being.

Likewise, it is worth noting that the perception of citizen insecurity exerts a significant influence on job creation. A resounding 85% of respondents affirm that crime has drastically restricted the creation of new jobs. This data aligns with previous research that reveals that insecurity deters investment and destabilizes the labor market. Companies, fearing economic losses and the need to allocate additional resources to security measures, opt to avoid operating in areas with high crime rates (Decker, Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2017).

Moreover, profound citizen discontent with the security measures implemented by the central government is revealed. An alarming 45% of respondents believe that none of the government actions have succeeded in improving the security situation in the region. This marked discrepancy evidences a clear disconnect between national policies and the local realities of Santa Rosa. Apparently, the lack of security strategies tailored to the specific needs of the community has generated a sense of abandonment and distrust among residents. As Vivanco (2021) points out, security strategies, as well as their policies, must be adaptable to the reality of each region.

On the other hand, the evaluation of government programs focused on combating drug trafficking and organized crime reveals a marked polarization in public opinion. While a fifth of the population believes that these efforts have generated tangible benefits, a slightly larger portion states that they have not observed improvements in their environment. This mismatch between national policies and local perceptions suggests that, despite addressing major problems, these initiatives are not managing to satisfy the immediate security needs of Santa Rosa citizens, such as the reduction of everyday crimes that directly affect their quality of life.

Consequently, the citizenry considers that the main measure to strengthen security is the increase in police personnel. This point of view coincides with criminology theories that suggest that greater visibility of law enforcement can reduce crime rates and generate a sense of greater protection among residents (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). However, the survey also highlights the importance of modernizing security infrastructure, through the installation of surveillance systems and improvement of public lighting, as well as strengthening coordination between different levels of government.

As can be evidenced, the findings reveal a profound sense of insecurity among the population, demonstrating a notable discrepancy between national strategies and the realities of each community. This situation has generated an urgent demand to implement more effective measures adapted to local particularities. It is crucial to understand that security is not limited to crime repression, but encompasses a set of actions that strengthen the social fabric, improve living conditions, and promote prevention through social programs.

Conclusion

The findings of this research evidence that the perception of insecurity in the Santa Rosa canton has a significant impact on its Urban Prosperity Index. This index, which measures dimensions such as productivity, infrastructure, quality of life, equity and social inclusion, and environmental sustainability, is negatively affected by the high perception of insecurity among residents. The results show that 55% of respondents express dissatisfaction with security levels, while 15% rate them as very low. This perception not only limits the socioeconomic development of the city but also discourages investment and reduces the quality of life of its inhabitants.

The government's attempts to guarantee security in Santa Rosa, although laudable, have not mana-

ged to adapt precisely to the specific demands of the community. Citizens demand a greater police presence in strategic areas, the modernization of security infrastructures, and smoother coordination between different levels of government. These measures are essential to improve the perception of security and, consequently, boost the Urban Prosperity Index.

It is indispensable to adopt a comprehensive approach that not only focuses on crime repression but also addresses the underlying causes of insecurity. This includes the implementation of preventive social programs, investment in urban infrastructure, and strengthening citizen participation. Only through a synergy between public safety and social development can a substantial improvement in the urban prosperity of Santa Rosa be guaranteed.

This study is particularly relevant for vulnerable groups, such as women, who face greater risks in unsafe environments. The perception of insecurity limits their mobility, access to employment opportunities, and participation in public life. Therefore, security strategies must incorporate a gender perspective that prioritizes their protection and guarantees their right to live in environments free from violence and discrimination.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. As a cross-sectional study, it does not allow for the analysis of changes in security perception over time. Furthermore, the sample, although representative, could be expanded in future research to include more diverse perspectives, such as those of surrounding rural communities or specific groups like young people and the elderly. These limitations open opportunities for future studies that delve into the structural causes of insecurity and evaluate the impact of specific public policies on the Urban Prosperity Index.

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