

Crime



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Colombia Analysis: Expanding criminal trends and methodologies to conduct robberies will challenge perception of safety in upscale areas of Bogota

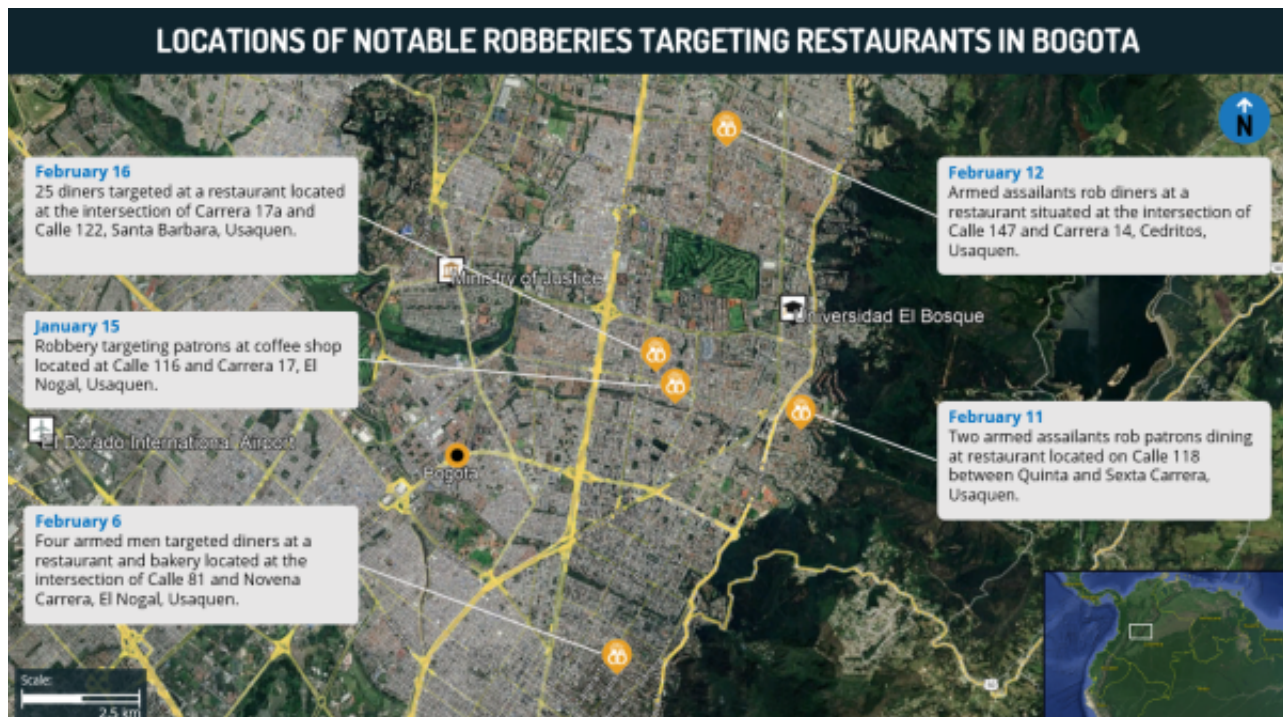
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- An uptick in robberies using three different methods has been reported in Bogota in recent months, challenging the perception of safety of upscale areas in the city.
- Premeditated armed robberies at dining establishments in affluent parts of northern Bogota pose a threat to high-profile locals, tourists, and the expat community.
- Criminals are increasingly employing scopolamine to incapacitate predominantly male, local victims at nightlife venues to facilitate thefts in upscale areas.
- The inherent delay in automatic door and gate systems to residential complexes is being exploited by criminals to conduct robberies, highlighting security vulnerabilities of gated residences.
- **Travel to Bogota may continue while remaining cognizant of these emerging criminal trends and their respective modus operandi.**

Armed robberies at upscale restaurants

CURRENT SITUATION

- In late January and throughout February, multiple armed robberies targeting patrons of upscale dining venues were reported across Bogota. This prompted the US Embassy in Bogota to issue a [security alert](#) for the same.



- On February 24, and as part of the 'Operacion Bogota Camina Segura' (Bogota walks safe) security strategy, Mayor Carlos Fernando Galan announced the deployment of 700 additional police officers to patrol 'critical' locations across the city.
- Additionally, in response to the uptick in restaurant robberies, Galan announced a security initiative denominated 'Patrulla Gourmet' (the gourmet patrol). This is made up of 100 motorized law enforcement agents aimed at guaranteeing security in the dining venues located in different parts of the city, specifically in the northern neighborhoods of Cedritos, Chapinero, and Usaquen.

ASSESSMENTS & FORECAST

1. The uptick in armed robberies targeting dining establishments in affluent areas of Bogotá, namely Chapinero and Usaquen, is part of an emerging trend used by criminals since January. These incidents, characterized by a modus operandi involving assailants arriving at eateries on motorcycles and carrying out a speedy robbery of the patron's valuables before fleeing, suggest a high level of premeditation rather than opportunism.
2. Based on the speedy nature of the robberies and their evident success despite the presence of private guards, it is highly likely that assailants conduct reconnaissance before targeting the intended restaurants. This may even include criminals previously acting as a guest to carefully assess the restaurants' security weaknesses, patron patterns, and perceived affluence of customers to maximize theft value, and evade capture. This points to the sophistication of these criminal incidents, which may be possibly conducted by members of small criminal gangs.
3. The predominant targets have been high-end restaurants, cafes, and breweries frequented by affluent locals, tourists, and the expat community, thus reflecting the threat posed to residents and travelers alike. For instance, some of the victims include notable figures like businessman Alejandro Serrano Roa and television presenter Alejandra Giraldo. While most incidents have transpired without violence, there remains a latent potential for such robberies to escalate should victims attempt to resist. Given the possibility of some of these high-profile individuals having their own private security along with them, it is also possible that private guards would attempt to

foil the robbery. This carries the potential to lead to exchanges of gunfire inside the venue, thus increasing the potential for stray bullets to impact bystanders.

- 4. FORECAST:** Despite initiatives like the newly created 'Patrulla Gourmet', this trend is expected to continue being used by criminals due to its success rate and high impunity, with most of the perpetrators not being captured. The recurrence of such incidents will likely prompt restaurants to further bolster their private security to deter robbers and increase patrons' perception of safety. Nonetheless, with the perpetrators managing to overpass private security in previous instances, further similar armed robberies will continue to be reported. This will challenge the perceived safety of upscale dining venues in Bogota and deter some visitors from frequenting them.
- 5. FORECAST:** Targets are expected to remain upscale dining venues in affluent areas in northern Bogota, including in areas such as Chapinero and Usaquen (especially the Cedritos area), where criminals continually exploit patrons' perceived wealth and leverage restaurants' security vulnerabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Travelers in Bogota are advised to increase vigilance against possible crime in upscale restaurants, especially in Chapinero, and Usaquen, in light of emerging trends of robberies targeting locals and tourists alike.
2. Travelers should avoid exposing jewelry or other items that may make them a target for theft. Store your valuables in your hotel room safe.
3. In case of being targeted in a robbery, adhere to the assailant's instructions and do not attempt to resist due to the latent threat of violent escalations.

Robberies Using Scopolamine drug

CURRENT SITUATION

- Reports indicate a rise in scopolamine-related crimes in several areas of Bogota, most notably in Zona T, also known as Zona Rosa, one of Bogota's major shopping and entertainment districts. Scopolamine, often referred to as "Devil's Breath," is primarily being used to facilitate robberies. This potent drug renders victims highly susceptible, frequently leading to the theft of their belongings and, in severe cases, to health complications or even death. According to police reports, 78 percent of victims are men.
- 2023 saw a marked increase in the use of scopolamine in criminal activities, with over 1,400 reported cases, making 2023 the year with the highest number of scopolamine-related incidents. Recorded incidents peaked in March, coinciding with the Easter holiday week of 'Semana Santa' (Holy Week), associated with a high number of festivities across the city.
- Police identified specific neighborhoods in Bogota particularly affected by scopolamine-related thefts: Chapinero, notably in the Zona T area; Los Martires, within the Santa Fe neighborhood; Teusaquillo, specifically in the Galerias neighborhood; and Usaquen, especially in the Cedritos area.

ASSESSMENTS & FORECAST

1. While this criminal tactic using scopolamine is not new, the growing use of this drug in 2023 to conduct robberies points to an emerging trend that will continue to rise. Criminals increasingly employ psychotropic substances to incapacitate victims and facilitate thefts. This method often involves mostly female perpetrators targeting unsuspecting men by employing seduction and distraction techniques to 'spike' the victim's drink and ultimately robbing them while unconscious. The nature of these crimes appears to be opportunistic rather than premeditated, relying on distraction and the lowered guard of victims in social settings where alcohol consumption is common. The common identity of the perpetrators points to these likely acting alone, rather than

belonging to specialized criminal groups.

2. **FORECAST:** The high success rate and impunity surrounding scopolamine-related crimes suggest the risk will remain high throughout 2024 in northern Bogota, especially during late-night hours in areas like Chapinero (Zona T), Los Martires (Santa Fe), Teusaquillo (Galerias), and Usaquen (Cedritos). While the sedative effect of scopolamine reduces the likelihood of violent confrontations, the risk of health complications due to adverse effects, which could ultimately result in death, cannot be ruled out.
3. This emerging trend parallels a similar pattern observed in [Medellin](#) in recent months. Criminals in both cities have used seduction or distraction to lure unsuspecting individuals for drugging and subsequent robbery. Incidents often exploit nightlife venues, indicating a common exploitation of social environments. However, Medellin's trend of using online dating applications to lure victims, most of which are tourists, contrasts with Bogota's primarily direct interpersonal interactions in bars or clubs, mostly with locals.
4. **FORECAST:** Although Bogota has not yet reported specific targeting of tourists, or fatalities, given the overlapping nature of both trends, there remains a heightened possibility of criminals in Bogota increasingly resorting to dating apps to lure their victims, as seen in Medellin. In other words, there is a potential for the trend seen in Medellin targeting tourists expanding into Bogota, particularly in Zona T where most of the city's nightlife is concentrated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Travelers in Bogota are advised to increase vigilance against possible crime in nightlife venues, especially Zona T, Santa Fe, Galerias, and Cedritos, in light of the growing trend of robberies using scopolamine.
2. If you are going to visit bars and clubs, do not accept drinks from strangers, and never leave your drink unattended. Seek medical attention if you suspect you have been exposed to scopolamine and alert local authorities.

Robberies Exploiting Automatic Doors in Residential Complexes

CURRENT SITUATION

- Reports from February 17 highlight a trend in the Barrios Unidos locality, west adjacent to Chapinero, where criminals exploit the delay in automatic doors of residential complexes to infiltrate and commit thefts.
- Surveillance footage has revealed a group of three suspects taking advantage of the time lag during the opening and closing of gates as vehicles pass through, enabling unauthorized entry into these complexes.
- The crimes committed primarily involve the theft of personal items from common areas, and to a lesser degree, also attempted break-ins into private apartments.

ASSESSMENTS & FORECAST

1. The incidents reported in Barrios Unidos reveal the exploitation of the inherent delay in automatic door and gate systems by criminals, a modus operandi known as the "Delay Exploitation Method" (DEM). Automatic doors and gates, designed for user convenience, inadvertently introduce a security gap during their operational delay. This brief window is strategically exploited by perpetrators, transforming a feature of accessibility into a critical security weakness. Criminals often exploit the lack of private security in the form of guards.
2. The exploitation of this gap demonstrates significant vulnerabilities in these gated residential complexes, indicating that these breaches are not opportunistic but rather calculated and

premeditated. This is due to the extensive surveillance required by the perpetrators to understand the timing of the door or gate operations, as well as their entry and exit being timed to blend seamlessly with legitimate activities. The identification of three suspects on security footage suggests that perpetrators are usually small, likely decentralized criminal groups, specializing in this method.

- 3. FORECAST:** Although not enough cases have been reported as of this writing, the possibility of this modus operandi becoming an increasing trend remains plausible, especially should criminals sustain their success rate and evade capture. Therefore, similar crimes relying on the DEM modus operandi will continue being reported in Barrios Unidos and could potentially expand to other areas of Bogota where residential complexes lack private security guards to monitor unauthorized entry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is advised to avoid staying in buildings or residential complexes with automated gates if there is no private security that can monitor potential DEM exploitation, especially in Barrios Unidos.
2. Remain cognizant of your surroundings, including any suspicious behavior of individuals in the vicinity of your building or residential complex.
3. Ensure that the gates or automatic doors accessing your building or residential complex have been closed after entering.