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An analytical presentation of the road safety situation in Mauritius – Policing experiences in the light of situational crime prevention

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Abstract

Aim: The study aims to present the road safety situation and local policing responses in Mauritius through the theoretical framework of situational crime prevention. The research is based on the author's data collection during a stay in Mauritius as a PhD student and police officer, as well as professional consultations with the Mauritius Police Force.

Methodology: The analysis focuses on accident statistics from 2024–2025, the new penalty points system introduced in 2026, and criminologically relevant factors of the traffic environment. The study compares the island nation's practices with international road safety trends.

Findings: Although the total number of fatal accidents shows a 7.2% decrease, the victimization rate of pedestrians and especially the age group over 60 indicates a significant increase. The sanction system implemented in January 2026 and technology-based enforcement (Safe City) seek to manage environmental and human risks using the toolkit of situational crime prevention.

Value: The study contributes to the interpretation of safety challenges in a specific traffic environment and offers findings relevant to international law enforcement knowledge exchange.

Keywords: road safety, Mauritius, situational crime prevention, pedestrian protection, policing experiences

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Introduction

Although the global road safety situation has shown slight improvement, it remains critical: according to the latest report published by the World Health Organization (WHO) in December 2023, 1.19 million people lose their lives on the roads each year (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). Although this figure represents a decrease compared to the previous 1.35 million, road traffic crashes remain the leading cause of death worldwide among those aged 5–29. More than half of the victims are vulnerable road users, and 90% of these tragedies occur in low- and middle-income countries. The present study was inspired by the author's stay in Mauritius during his PhD studies at Széchenyi István University, during which he established professional contact with the Mauritius Police Force while traveling in a private capacity but acting in his professional capacity as a police officer. The professional openness experienced there, together with informal consultations with local policing leaders, made it possible to prepare a data-driven analysis that tests the findings of earlier research examining the Northern European model (Krenner & Szabó, 2023) in a radically different geographical and social environment. The study is a comparative analysis based on document analysis, complementing publicly available statistical and legal sources with the author's field experiences gained during his stay in Mauritius and with professional consultations conducted with experts of the Mauritius Police Force.

Geographical and Traffic Characteristics of Mauritius

Mauritius is an island nation in the Indian Ocean with an area of 2,040 km², where a population of approximately 1.3 million shares a road network of roughly 2,800 kilometres (Mauritius Police Force [MPF], 2026a). The left-hand traffic system, combined with substantial international tourism (more than 1.38 million visitors in 2024), creates a particular adjustment challenge for foreign drivers, especially when navigating intersections and roundabouts (Ministry of Tourism, 2024). By the end of 2025, the island's motor vehicle fleet had reached 746,961, which, relative to the size of the territory, creates an exceptionally dynamic traffic environment (MPF, 2026a). In order to further improve road safety, the police proactively identify areas requiring technical development, such as the continuous improvement of nighttime visibility on rural road sections, which international analyses also highlight as a key safety consideration (ASIRT, 2024). In line with this, the authorities are also working

on stricter technical regulation of the glare caused by modern vehicle technologies, such as LED headlights (MPF, 2026a). According to the official target indicator provided by the MPF, the current road traffic fatality rate stands at 8.7 per 100,000 population, and the aim is to reduce this below 5; this objective is supported by the monitoring of hazardous road sections and by targeted road safety measures (MPF, 2026a).

Road Safety Trends and Victim Categories

The development of road safety data in Mauritius between 2024 and 2025 reflects complex policing and criminological dynamics. The growth of the island nation's vehicle fleet is a determining factor: within a single year, the number of registered motor vehicles increased from 710,605 to 746,961, representing an expansion of more than 36,000 vehicles (MPF, 2026a). Against this backdrop of increasing traffic pressure, the 7.2% decrease in the number of fatal road crashes (from 125 to 116), together with the 7.5% decrease in the number of fatalities (from 134 to 124), indicates a favorable shift in the development of the road safety situation (MPF, 2026a). Behind the aggregate figures, however, a significant structural realignment can be observed: while substantial improvement occurred among motorcyclists and passengers, pedestrian involvement increased by 25%, from 24 to 30 persons (MPF, 2026a). The most notable shift can be observed in the victimization of the population aged over 60, where the number of fatalities rose from 25 to 46, representing an 84% increase within a single year (MPF, 2026a).

Routine activity theory provides a useful framework for the criminological interpretation of these trends, according to which the occurrence of negative events requires the simultaneous presence of a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Based on the modernized approach of Marcus Felson and Mary A. Eckert (2018), changes in social routine activities combined with the traffic exposure of vulnerable groups may create new forms of vulnerability. In the case of Mauritius, environmental factors identified by the authorities, such as perceptual deficits, may contribute to the weakening of the capable guardian function, thereby increasing the risk exposure of vulnerable groups. This phenomenon is consistent with situational risks previously identified in the context of micromobility, where the combined effects of a regulatory vacuum and the lack of technical control generate criminogenic environmental conditions (Krenner, 2025).

The Mauritian Legal Environment and the Reform of the Sanctions System

One of the central elements of Mauritius's road safety strategy is the consistent modernization of the legal framework and the sanctions system, aimed at strengthening the sense of responsibility among road users (MPF, 2026b). Depending on the seriousness of the offense, fines range from 500 to 100,000 Mauritian rupees, which at the current exchange rate corresponds to approximately HUF 3,600 to HUF 725,000 (Road Traffic Act, 1962/2022). In addition, serious offenses, such as driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, entail mandatory disqualification from driving (Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2025).

In order to increase the effectiveness of policing responses, the penalty points system was reintroduced in full on 31 January 2026 (MPF, 2026b). The legislation draws a clear distinction between learners driving with a Provisional Driving Licence (PDL) and drivers holding a full driving licence following the successful completion of the driving test, namely a Competent Driving Licence (CDL) (Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2025). The system is based on a 36-month 'rolling' period: each penalty point imposed remains valid on the driving licence for exactly three years from the date of imposition (MPF, 2026b). If a driver reaches the critical threshold within this 36-month period – 15 points in the case of a CDL, 10 points in the case of a PDL, and likewise 15 points in the case of an international driving permit – the court disqualifies the driver from driving for a period of at least six months (Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2025; MPF, 2026b).

The Mauritian regulatory system also incorporates the principle of strict liability familiar from Hungarian law, which the local legal order frames as owner liability (Road Traffic Act, 1962/2022; MPF, 2026b). Under the Photographic Enforcement Device Notice procedure, if a fixed camera records a speeding offense, the fine and the corresponding penalty points are imposed primarily on the registered owner of the vehicle (Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2025; MPF, 2026b). The owner may be exempted from liability only if he or she credibly identifies the actual driver of the vehicle (MPF, 2026b). From a criminological perspective, this measure is closely related to rational choice theory, as it seeks to influence road users' behaviour by increasing the expected cost of non-compliance (Krenner, 2025).

Technological Innovations and the Modernisation of Policing Control

Building on the technical pillars of situational crime prevention, the development strategy of Mauritian traffic policing places technological innovation at the service of 'increasing the risk of detection' and the 'application of physical barriers' (Clarke, 1997; MPF, 2026c). A central element of this modernization process is the Safe City project, the technical parameters of which are transparently documented in government reports: nationwide, the system includes 4,000 Intelligent Video Surveillance (IVS) cameras installed at 2,000 strategic locations (Government Information Service [GIS], 2021). These are complemented by 300 dedicated Intelligent Traffic Surveillance (ITS) cameras performing automated number plate recognition (ANPR) and traffic analysis functions at 75 key junctions (GIS, 2021; MPF, 2026a). From a criminological perspective, this digital infrastructure may be interpreted as an extension of the 'capable guardian' function, directly influencing road users' rational decision-making processes by reducing anonymity and reinforcing the perceived inevitability of accountability (Hollis et al., 2013; Reynald, 2010).

The operational management of the project is based on a multi-level command structure centered on the Main Command and Control Centre located in Ebène, supported by seven sub-centres and monitoring units established at 71 police stations (GIS, 2021). The integrated nature of the system is also reflected in the fact that, in addition to camera-based monitoring, policing work is supported by a modern digital radio communication network. According to the project documentation, the main components included 4,500 multimedia radio devices and 500 vehicle-mounted communication terminals, while the official parliamentary report states that by August 2020, 350 in-vehicle radios had actually been installed in police vehicles (GIS, 2021; Parliamentary Debates, 2020). The operational significance of technological surveillance is demonstrated by the fact that, following the commissioning of the Main Command and Control Centre in August 2019, the official parliamentary report recorded 101 cases by 10 August 2020 that required police investigation and in which Safe City cameras played a role in detection (Parliamentary Debates, 2020).

Since 2021, the MPF has also modernized its aerial surveillance capabilities: the establishment of the Drone Unit has made it possible to deploy unmanned aerial vehicles for the analysis of traffic congestion and the centimetre-accurate documentation of accident scenes (MPF, 2026c). This technology represents a new level of 'increasing the risk of detection,' as it is capable of fulfilling the capable guardian function from spatial positions that are difficult to monitor

through conventional patrol policing (MPF, 2026a). The preventive arsenal is further complemented by the MauHazard interactive training tool (Jeewajee & Sungkur, 2019), which develops young drivers' hazard perception skills through simulation-based methods. Methodologically, this approach is comparable to the emphasis placed in the Finnish model on conscious skills development and the proactive management of human factors (Krenner & Szabó, 2023). Taken together, these innovations form a policing ecosystem in which technology is not merely an instrument, but an active component of situational crime prevention.

Protection of Vulnerable Road Users and the Criminological Aspects of Pedestrian Safety

A deeper analysis of Mauritian road safety data shows that while overall fatality indicators display an improving trend, the involvement of vulnerable road users, particularly pedestrians and older persons, is increasing significantly in parallel. The 25% increase in the number of pedestrian victims, together with the 84% rise in the fatality rate of the population aged over 60 within a single year, represents a structural challenge that goes beyond purely policing-related issues (MPF, 2026a). Routine Activity Theory provides a robust framework for the criminological interpretation of this phenomenon, according to which the occurrence of an accident as a negative event requires the simultaneous presence of a motivated offender (here: a rule-violating driver), a suitable target (here: a vulnerable pedestrian), and the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

From the perspective of Routine Activity Theory, the victimisation of older pedestrians in Mauritius may be interpreted as a situation in which greater physiological vulnerability combined with traffic exposure increases the risk associated with 'suitable targets.' The available data do not allow for a full exploration of the underlying causes; nevertheless, age-related vulnerability and the specific characteristics of the traffic environment emerge together as relevant explanatory factors. Contemporary clinical research confirms that, among pedestrians aged over 65, the outcomes of collisions are significantly more severe: the probability of multiple trauma is 41%, compared to 11.8% among younger pedestrians, while the risk of mortality increases by 3.7% with each additional year of age (Pavol et al., 2025). In the Mauritian context, an environmental risk identified by the authorities, namely glare caused by LED headlights, may adversely affect drivers' perceptual capacity and thereby weaken the optimal visibility conditions that perform the role of a 'guardian' (MPF, 2026a). Marcus Felson and Mary A. Eckert (2018) emphasise that the criminogenic character of environmental

conditions is often produced by an asynchrony between technological development and social habits: the modernisation of the vehicle fleet has progressed more rapidly than the corresponding development of pedestrian infrastructure.

The issue of pedestrian safety is also inseparable from rational choice theory. According to a representative survey conducted by the Road Safety Observatory, the decision-making mechanisms of Mauritian road users are dominated by time-saving and convenience: 60% of pedestrians cross outside designated crossing facilities even when such a crossing is available within 50 metres (Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail [MLTLR], 2021). In this context, rule-breaking is the outcome of a utilitarian calculation in which the pedestrian values the time saved more highly than the risk of an accident. The research also revealed that 25% of respondents consciously disregard the red signal at signalised pedestrian crossings when they do not see an approaching vehicle (MLTLR, 2021). From a criminological perspective, this behaviour points to the absence of situational control: if the physical environment (for example, the absence of barriers) does not make rule-breaking inconvenient or impossible, the individual tends to move in the direction of least resistance.

The policing response to this complex problem lies in the strengthening of the Community Policing model. The MPF's 'Vision 2029' strategic plan treats proactive prevention and social embeddedness as priorities in place of purely reactive interventions (MPF, 2026c). This approach is linked to the fourth pillar of situational crime prevention, namely 'removing excuses,' by opening direct educational channels to the most vulnerable groups. Neighbourhood Watch networks and local public safety forums enable the police to appear as partners in the everyday lives of those living in accident black spots (MPF, 2026c). According to the theory of Danielle M. Reynald (2010), the activation of community control is the most effective way of restoring the capable guardian function where technological surveillance alone is insufficient. Road safety campaigns targeting older persons, together with awareness-raising activities carried out with the involvement of senior citizens' associations and councils, are aimed at improving risk perception and strengthening more responsible road-user behaviour through community control.

International Comparative Analysis: Different Paths Towards a Common Goal

The modern approach to road safety, embodied in the Vision Zero concept, formulates globally shared objectives; however, the policing and crime prevention

pathways leading to these objectives differ significantly depending on the socio-economic structures and infrastructural conditions of individual countries. The adaptive capacity of situational crime prevention is demonstrated by the fact that, while Northern European models are built primarily on the deterministic force of the physical environment, Mauritius and Hungary rely on the symbiosis of technological surveillance and strict legal sanctions.

The Finnish Model: Passive Prevention and 'Forgiving' Infrastructure

The criminological foundation of the Finnish road safety system is systemic responsibility, which is based on the premise that human error is inevitable. In Finland, situational crime prevention focuses primarily on 'removing excuses' and 'reducing risks' at the level of the built environment (Krenner & Szabó, 2023). In the Nordic model, the capable guardian does not merely mean police presence; it also means the 'forgiving road.' The exceptionally high level of public trust in the Finnish police legitimises forms of control in which voluntary compliance with the law has become part of the social norm (Christián, 2013).

The Hungarian Context: Technological Control and the Legal Sanctions System

Since the 2010s, Hungary's road safety strategy has placed increasing emphasis on technology-based enforcement. Its most important instrument is the VÉDA Intelligent Road Camera Network, which is capable of recording and documenting traffic violations in an automated manner, thereby significantly increasing the intensity of enforcement and the perceived risk of detection (Jankó, 2019). The system integrates several hundred fixed and mobile enforcement devices capable of identifying not only speeding, running red lights, and failure to wear seat belts, but also other traffic violations. The VÉDA project was created as a technological development of the police's road safety activities and aims to reduce the number of accidents through the more consistent enforcement of traffic rules (Jankó, 2019). From a criminological perspective, the Hungarian model may be interpreted as a technological extension of formal surveillance, seeking to influence road users' rational decision-making mechanisms by increasing the probability of detecting rule-breaking. Within this framework, the technological enforcement infrastructure performs the capable guardian function and may be classified among the situational crime prevention tools aimed at 'increasing the risk of detection.'

The Mauritian Model: An Adaptive Hybrid Solution

Mauritius provides a distinctive response to the challenges arising from its insular characteristics. While in Finland the size of the territory and the low population density allow for spacious road design, Mauritius, due to its extremely dense built environment and narrow road network, is compelled to apply a form of 'technological intensification.' The 4,000 cameras of the Safe City project form, within a relatively small area (2,040 km²), an intensive surveillance network that represents an exceptionally dense technological enforcement infrastructure in relation to the size of the island state. One of the distinctive features of Mauritius is the combination of community policing and technology-based control: where technological surveillance alone is not sufficient in every instance – particularly in addressing risks affecting vulnerable pedestrians – the police complement their enforcement function with community presence and partnership-based cooperation (MPF, 2026c).

Policing and Criminological Lessons

The comparative analysis demonstrates that, although policing strategies aimed at improving road safety pursue the same objectives – namely reducing the number of accidents and protecting vulnerable road users – the social, infrastructural, and institutional characteristics of individual countries result in different models of implementation. The theoretical framework of situational crime prevention offers a well-interpretable common denominator for comparing these different approaches, as its toolkit can be applied flexibly to the management of risks arising in the traffic environment.

The Finnish model is based primarily on the safety function of the built environment. The concept of 'forgiving roads' is grounded in the assumption that human error is a natural feature of traffic, and that the role of the system is therefore to reduce the severe consequences of such errors through infrastructure design. By contrast, Hungary places emphasis on the integration of technology-based enforcement systems and legal sanction mechanisms. The VÉDA Intelligent Road Camera Network and the institution of strict liability seek to influence road users' behaviour by increasing the perceived risk of detection, thereby bringing to the fore those situational crime prevention instruments that operate through 'increasing risks'.

Mauritius's road safety system may be interpreted as a distinctive combination of these two approaches. The technological surveillance infrastructure created

by the Safe City project, the tightening of the penalty points system, and the strengthening of community policing together form a hybrid model in which both technological control and social presence play a role. This configuration illustrates well that the instruments of situational crime prevention do not appear in a uniform form; rather, they operate in different combinations, adapted to the given social and geographical environment.

The comparison of the three models thus leads to the conclusion that the effectiveness of road safety systems depends not on the application of a single universal solution, but on the extent to which a given country is able to integrate technological, infrastructural, and social instruments in managing traffic-related risks. International exchange of experience therefore does not enable the simple transfer of models, but rather their adaptive interpretation, offering important lessons for both policing practice and criminological research.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to provide an analytical presentation of the road safety situation in Mauritius through the application of the theoretical framework of situational crime prevention, with particular attention to the role of policing responses and technological control. Based on the statistical data, legal solutions, and institutional practices presented, it may be concluded that, in the Mauritian context as well, road safety cannot be reduced to a purely traffic-engineering or normative issue: the development of accident risks is shaped jointly by environmental conditions, regulatory mechanisms, and enforcement practices.

The analysis has shown that technological developments, particularly video surveillance and automated enforcement systems, play a decisive role in Mauritian policing responses; at the same time, the protection of vulnerable road users remains an area in which, alongside formal control, community presence and the improvement of risk perception also retain considerable importance. The international comparison further demonstrates that, despite differing institutional and infrastructural conditions across countries, the central question in improving road safety is, in every case, how prevention, enforcement, and social adaptation can be effectively connected.

In this sense, the Mauritian example represents not merely a specific island-state traffic environment but also illustrates that policing thinking in the field of road safety can be effective only when regulatory, technological, and social factors are interpreted in relation to one another. The concluding lesson of the study is therefore that the maintenance and improvement of road safety constitute

a complex, multi-factor policing task everywhere, one that remains sensitive to the specific characteristics of the given environment

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