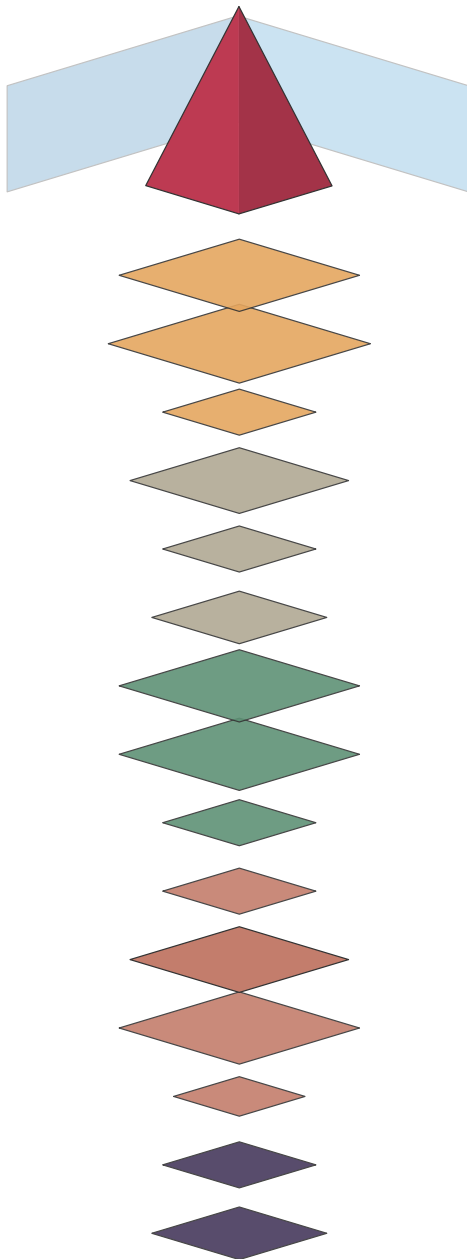




BELIZE



4.87

CRIMINALITY SCORE

106th of 193 countries

23rd of 35 American countries

8th of 8 Central American countries



CRIMINAL MARKETS

4.43

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	3.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	5.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	3.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	4.00
FLORA CRIMES	5.50
FAUNA CRIMES	5.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3.50
HEROIN TRADE	3.50
COCAINE TRADE	5.00
CANNABIS TRADE	5.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	3.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	4.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS

5.30

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	6.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	3.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	5.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5.50



3.29

RESILIENCE SCORE



Funding provided by the United States Government.

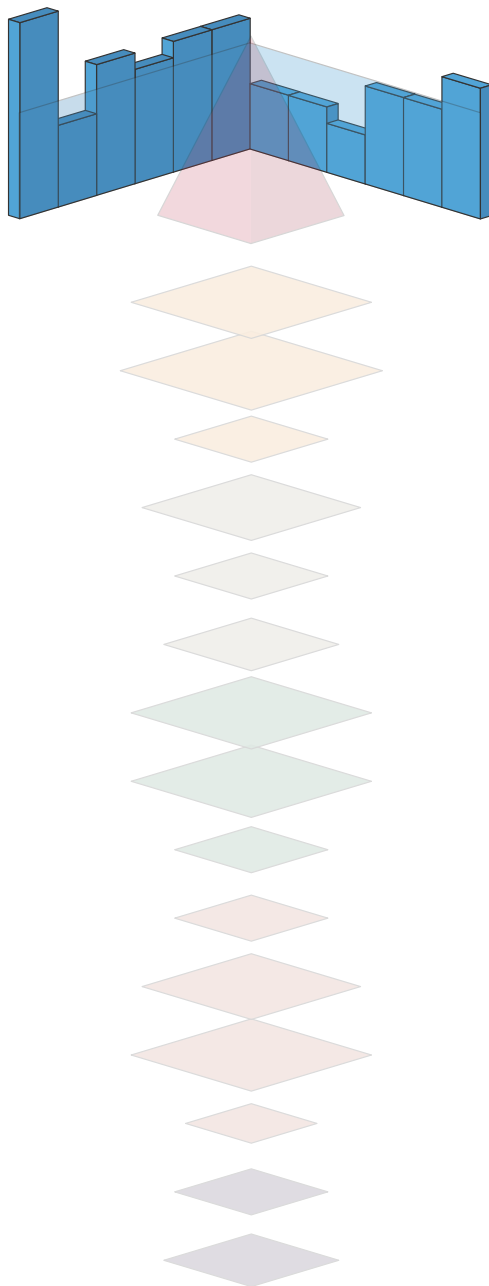


Funded by the European Union

ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.



BELIZE



3.29

RESILIENCE SCORE

155th of 193 countries

30th of 35 American countries

6th of 8 Central American countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	6.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	2.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	4.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	3.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	4.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	2.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	2.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	1.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	3.00
PREVENTION	3.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	4.00



4.87

CRIMINALITY SCORE



CRIMINAL MARKETS 4.43



CRIMINAL ACTORS 5.30



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Belize's geographical position makes it an ideal passage for human trafficking throughout Central America. However, although many independent criminals and regional networks are involved, the human trafficking market does not have strong ties with the more complex international human-trafficking operations. Still, victims are recruited and exploited both in the country and abroad. The groups that are most at risk are females, both Belizean and foreign nationals, children and migrants from Central America, Mexico and Asia. Migrants are exploited in agriculture and in domestic and retail work. Women and children are also exposed to sex trafficking. Targets also include individuals struggling with the economic uncertainty and unstable living conditions that are the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, who are lured with fake promises of employment.

The migrant crisis in Central American is reflected in estimates that indicate an increase in human smuggling in Belize. In recent years, there has been a significant spike in people coming into the country to escape poverty, food insecurity, climate shocks and violence. These flows are heterogeneous in origin, age and gender, but the migrants come mainly from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. For the most part, foreign actors based in Central American countries and China seem to control the human smuggling market in the country. However, most of these activities are facilitated by independent brokers of stand-alone services who help people advance their journeys. The long-standing border dispute between Belize and neighbouring Guatemala has contributed to the country's vulnerability to human smuggling and facilitated irregular entry. In addition, the Northern El Corozal border crossing is often used by groups to smuggle migrants into Mexico. The El Arenal crossing is another important route, primarily used by Cuban migrants.

While there is evidence of some organized criminal groups having used extortion in the past, the crime does not appear to be systematic or significant. However, INTERPOL has recognized the adverse effects of criminal activities such as extortion and kidnapping, resulting from the fierce competition in the drug trade for available markets in the country. The practice is less violent than it is in neighbouring countries. There is no evidence of racketeering activities in Belize.

TRADE

There is a local demand for guns, but the market is primarily driven by foreign demand. Belize is, for the most part, a transit point for illicit arms trafficked to Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras. Evidence suggests that Mexico-bound weapons coming from the US are trafficked through the country to avoid strict measures along the US-Mexico border. Most recently, a new arms-trafficking route between Nicaragua and Mexico has been identified. The participation of Belizean groups in the international arms trafficking market appears to be limited, but domestic actors have been known to smuggle arms into Mexico. Although the theft of police and/or military weapons is not as prevalent in Belize as it is in other Central American countries, Belizean authorities have identified cases of members of the military selling weapons to well-known criminals who are linked to gangs. Corrupt officials, particularly at Belize's borders, facilitate the illicit movement of arms through the country. The illicit arms market has contributed to easy access to arms, which, in turn, accounts for the high percentage of firearm-inflicted homicides.

There is a market for counterfeit goods in the country, largely conducted online. Although Belize itself does not export such goods it is considered to be one of the key transit points for counterfeit electronic and electrical goods produced in China and Singapore and targeting the US. There is evidence of illicit trade in excise goods, including cigarettes and alcohol. Some of the goods are contraband items smuggled through Mexico. However, there is no evidence that the illicit markets for both counterfeit and excise goods are significant, violent, or controlled by organized crime groups.

ENVIRONMENT

Belize is rich in biodiversity and natural resources. Independent criminals allegedly pay local community members to cut down Honduran rosewood, which is then smuggled to China, where it is used for luxury furniture and musical instruments. There have also been reports of Guatemalan loggers entering Belize to participate in this illegal economy.

The illicit fauna market exists mainly to satisfy domestic demand. Endangered parrot, monkey and turtle species are persistently poached and sold in the country as pets. Wildlife trafficking has become more intense in Mesoamerican countries and appears increasingly to be connected to Chinese markets. The poorly defined and lawless border region between Belize and Guatemala is a fertile ground for wildlife trafficking and some reserves have experienced increased levels of illegal incursions from bordering Guatemalan settlements. Jaguar poaching and the illegal

domestic and international trade in jaguar body parts, especially in Asian markets, has also become widespread in recent years due to their importance in Chinese medicine.

Belize also has an illegal gold-extraction market, although it is smaller than others in the region, with independent Guatemalans allegedly involved in illegal gold mining. The gold is not extracted on site, but ore containing flecks of gold is smuggled into Guatemala and extracted there.

DRUGS

Belize serves as a transit point for heroin bound for the US and Mexico. Mexican cartels control heroin flows through the country and hire local Belizeans to smuggle the drug into Mexico and the US. Nevertheless, few heroin seizures have been recorded, which might suggest a downward trend in the use of the drug in destination markets and a limited demand for it in Belize.

The country is an important transit point for cocaine on its way to Mexico and the US, smuggled by air and sea from Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador. There is also a small domestic market for cocaine. In recent years there has been an increase in drug flights landing at clandestine airstrips. The country's islands – and its authorities' limited capacities to patrol them – create opportunities for go-fast vessels to move drugs and other illicit goods through its territorial waters. While the cocaine trade appears to be controlled largely by foreign actors, Belizean gangs have reportedly begun fighting over the movement of the drug, leading to a series of drug-related homicides on land and at sea.

The government recently opted to establish a legal marijuana industry. Cannabis is extensively used in Belize by both locals and tourists. A new law legalizes the recreational use, commercial production and sale of the drug throughout the country. However, local gangs are still believed to control the illicit trade, distributing cannabis grown domestically, as well as a more expensive variety smuggled from Mexico.

Belize is increasingly used as a transit point for the precursors used in synthetic drug production and destined for Mexico. Belizeans are hired to move those that originate in Asia through European countries (Germany, the Netherlands and the UK, among others). Precursors entering the country from Guatemala have also been seized, which may indicate a growing local market dominated by gangs.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes have risen steadily in recent years, with individuals, businesses and governmental bodies increasingly targeted. However, most cyber-related offences do not appear to be related to organized crime.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Several types of financial crimes, including but not limited to phishing, credit card and ATM fraud, identity theft and tax evasion, are prevalent in the country and incidents of embezzlement are reported, mostly carried out by international banks and international financial service providers. Recent reports suggest the involvement of state-embedded actors in the misuse of public funds, such as those intended for unemployment relief and pension funds. However, these crimes are not considered to be significant.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

More than 40 street gangs have been identified in Belize City, but only a few of them are particularly prominent. For various reasons it is difficult to identify the leaders of the gangs. However, charges have been brought against influential figures in these groups. The gangs have substantial territorial control, with some areas being off limits to authorities. These mafia-style groups control various criminal markets, such as distribution of cannabis and cocaine, which contribute to a significant degree of violence, including that perpetrated using firearms and grenades. Prominent gang leaders operate with impunity and have a stake in the legal economy or relationships with political elites.

Belize is bordered by countries in which illicit trafficking is controlled by well-organized and extremely violent criminal organizations, notably Mexican cartels, for whom local gangs operate as suppliers. The most renowned foreign actors are the Sinaloa Cartel and MS13, as well as groups from Ecuador. These organizations tend to play a more important role in transnational organized crime activities, such as arms, cocaine and trafficking of synthetic drug precursors. There are also domestic criminal networks in the country, but they are small scale and mostly responsible for smuggling synthetic drug precursors to and through Belize.

Information suggests that state-embedded actors engage with and facilitate criminal operations in Belize. In addition to allegations of high-profile politicians tied to organized crime there is evidence that corrupt police and military officials participate in criminal economies at various levels. Private sector actors have been linked to financial crimes such as tax evasion and fraud. Moreover, in recent years, Belize has become a country in which criminal organizations launder their money through shell corporations established in the country, constituting an increasingly serious problem.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Since gaining independence, Belize has been relatively stable politically but reports and surveys indicated that the worrying levels of corruption have led to a general lack of transparency and public access to information has been somewhat restricted. Former political leaders have had strong ties to organized crime, and corruption has been flagged as an issue in the country. Overall, moves against organized crime have not featured strongly on the political agenda. In response to mounting pressure pertaining to widespread corruption and lack of transparency within the state apparatus, the government signed the UN Convention against Corruption and started to cooperate with its international counterparts to ratify and implement it within the national legal framework.

Belize is party to most international treaties and conventions pertaining to organized crime. In 2021 the government approved the reintroduction of legislation to the National Assembly enabling the country to become a state party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and also signed the Copenhagen Declaration on Transnational Organized Crime in the Global Fishing Industry. Belize receives assistance from the UK and the US in areas including the fight against organized crime, humanitarian assistance, training and exercise programmes, equipment and technology. There are also established security partnerships with other countries in the region. While on paper international cooperation is sound, Belize lacks a legal framework that allows for efficient implementation and this scourge interferes with the country's security efforts. Although national laws and policies are in line with Belize's international commitments, most of them are rarely enforced and have little impact.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Belize's colonial history has left it with an accusatory legal system based on British practice, albeit with some variations. Although the country collaborates with the US to improve its criminal justice information management system, the justice system is slow and allegedly inefficient. More than a third of prison inmates are being held in pre-trial detention. High-profile organized-crime-related cases are often dismissed due to political influence. However, prison conditions have improved markedly since 2000, with inmates adequately accommodated.

Law enforcement in the country is largely ineffective and despite financial and technological assistance, particularly from the US, corruption remains an obstacle to improving the situation. Control of Belize's unprotected coastline and extended borders with Guatemala and Mexico is

complex, leaving the border isolated and unmonitored and facilitating human smugglers as well as firearms, drug and wildlife traffickers, especially in the adjacency zone, a one-kilometre stretch of land on either side of the border at the centre of a long-running border dispute between Belize and Guatemala. Belizean security forces lack adequate resources to monitor the borders effectively, but a mobile inter-agency border security unit, established in 2012, has the task of interdicting illicit drugs and other contraband trafficked within and across the country's points of entry. However, its members are re-assigned to police units, leaving fewer to monitor the borders.

The ongoing territorial dispute with Guatemala and the resulting unclear border definition further hinder the authorities' ability to carry out operations in that area. Despite the continuous problems related to physical territorial integrity, in the realm of virtual threats, the National Cybersecurity Strategy aims to improve and develop critical infrastructure protection to resist cyber-infiltration.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Despite reforming its tax regime and being removed from the EU's tax-haven blacklist, Belize remains vulnerable to money laundering. Although the country has demonstrated the political will to address this vulnerability, little effort has been made to implement the proper compliance monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Evidence points to foreign actors having used Belize to launder money since at least 2012, while malfeasance persists in the highest echelons of the country's tax service.

The US has provided technical assistance to the country's semi-autonomous interagency group, the Financial Intelligence Unit, which is mandated to investigate and prosecute illicit financial transactions, and has expanded staffing, training and inter-agency cooperation. The unit, however, has little to show in terms of prosecution. Belize is also a member of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, a Financial Action Task Force-style regional body.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

In recent years the Belizean government has ramped up its efforts to safeguard victims of trafficking. The improved victim identification and confirmation procedures enabled more accurate data. For instance, the country enlarged its Anti-Trafficking Police Unit, leading to increased numbers of investigations and better data collection and case monitoring. The Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous People's Affairs also launched a new trafficking in persons module on the ministry's case management system, to develop a multi-agency online

platform to investigate, track and manage cases of human trafficking. The government established a shelter for unaccompanied children, who are vulnerable to trafficking, and prioritized the funding and implementation of the National Action Plan against trafficking. Although Belize has made important progress towards supporting trafficking victims, its implementation of human trafficking legislation is still inefficient and the country lacks the resources to aid victims, as required by the law.

In terms of prevention, the authorities have committed to reducing both the demand for and vulnerability to human trafficking, conducting country-specific research into the issue and tracking and assessing the implementation of human trafficking-related policies. They also intend to enhance their investigative and prosecuting capacities, using a victim-centred approach. The Ministry of Health's National Drug Abuse Control Council, which is responsible for reducing the demand for and supply of drugs, supports special projects such as training and certification programmes for personnel specializing in drug and violence prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. Yet, while prevention mechanisms exist, they do not seem to have been well-implemented in practice.

NGOs play a significant role in the country, especially by supporting the government with victim assistance. Religious institutions, which are the main non-state actors, collaborate with NGOs to carry out missionary work. Belize has a relatively free press environment, but media polarization makes coverage of sensitive issues controversial, while threats, harassment and intimidation of journalists occur occasionally.

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