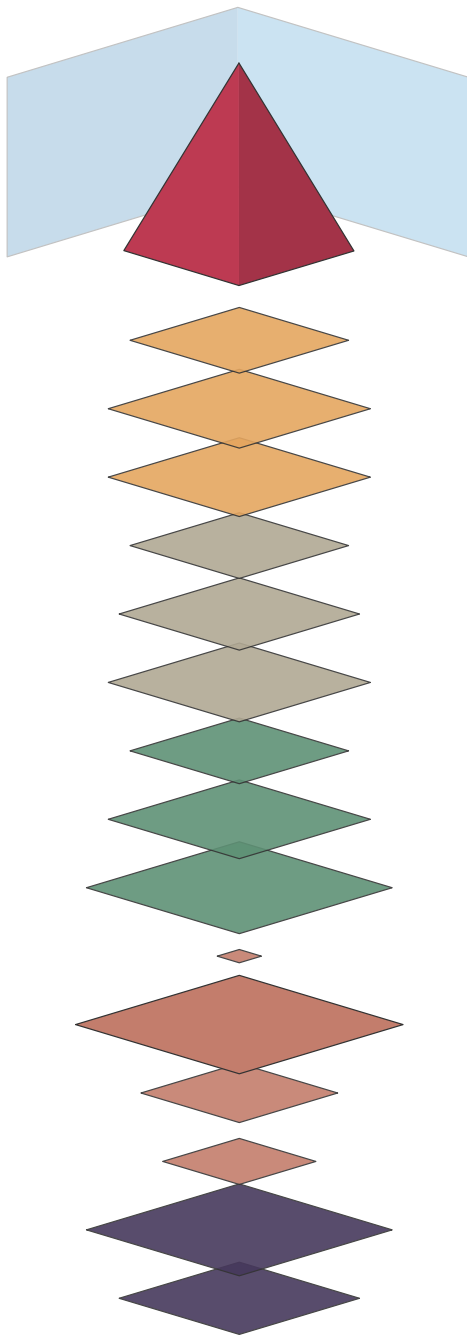




COSTA RICA



5.53

CRIMINALITY SCORE

72nd of 193 countries

17th of 35 American countries

7th of 8 Central American countries



CRIMINAL MARKETS

5.37

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	6.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	5.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.00
FLORA CRIMES	5.00
FAUNA CRIMES	6.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7.00
HEROIN TRADE	1.00
COCAINE TRADE	7.50
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	5.50



CRIMINAL ACTORS

5.70

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	7.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	2.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.00



5.63

RESILIENCE SCORE



Funding provided by the United States Government.

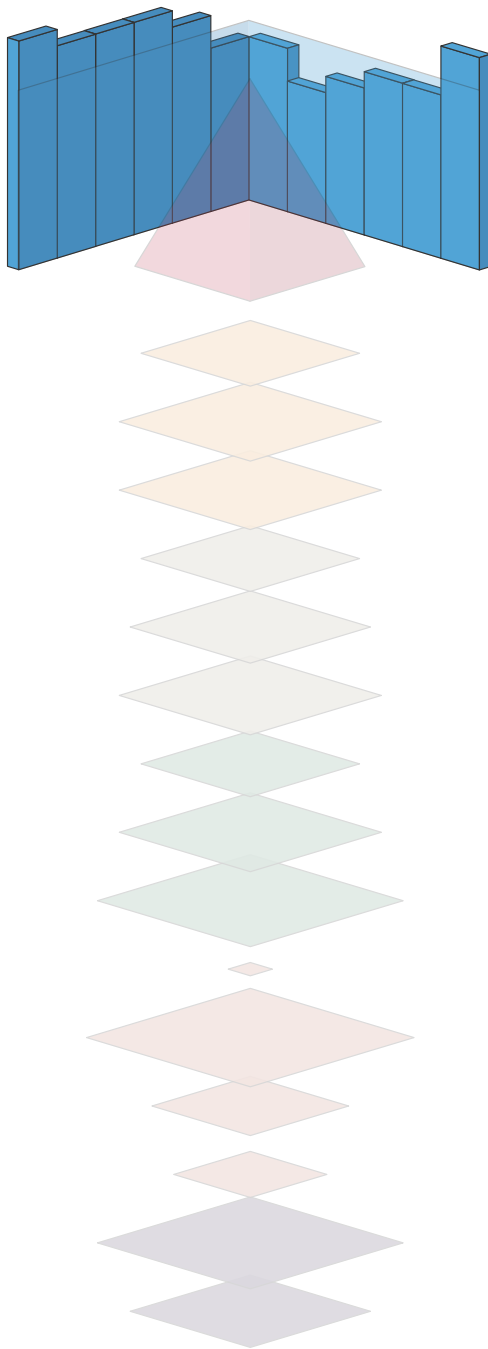


Funded by the European Union

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COSTA RICA




5.63 RESILIENCE SCORE

50th of 193 countries
7th of 35 American countries
1st of 8 Central American countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	7.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	6.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	6.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	6.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	6.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	5.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	4.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	4.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	5.00
PREVENTION	5.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	6.50



5.53 CRIMINALITY SCORE

 CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.37
 CRIMINAL ACTORS	5.70

CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Costa Rica is a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking involving labour and sexual exploitation. The trafficking market has become prevalent in part due to tourist demand for sexual services, which returned to the pre-pandemic rates following the lifting of COVID-19 related restrictions. Nicaraguans fleeing state violence are vulnerable to trafficking in Costa Rica, while Costa Rican victims are primarily exploited in the US, Mexico, Guatemala, Canada, Spain, and the Bahamas. Within Costa Rica, victims have been identified to originate in Peru, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Russia, China, South Africa, and the Philippines to name but a few.

Human smuggling networks operating in border towns in the southern part of the country are known to move migrants coming from various Asian and African countries, as well as Cuban and Haitian nationals, en route to the US. Nicaraguan migrants are also increasingly entering the country irregularly and with the help of smugglers. Many migrants who arrive in South American countries, such as Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, or Ecuador, reportedly travel to Costa Rica via Panama. Actors involved in human smuggling networks are usually foreigners residing in Costa Rica and with contacts in different neighbouring countries. There is no empirical evidence of extensive networks, although the assumption is that smugglers in Costa Rica may be coordinating arrivals coming from the Darien with other facilitators operating in South America.

Extortion is usually perpetrated by criminal groups that are also involved in drug trafficking but have decided to diversify their activities. 'Gota a Gota' is a type of informal loan associated with extortion as a method of curbing people to pay the money lord. This practice increased in Costa Rica during the pandemic as access to bank loans became more difficult.

TRADE

Costa Rica is a significant transit country for illicit arms heading north and south, which are suspected to be sourced from Panama or trafficked from Nicaragua and Colombia. The legal market also fuels the illegal arms trade in the country, making easier for criminal organizations to have access to firearms, evident in the high rates of firearm-related homicide. The impact of this market is significant in the country, as criminal groups need this source to fight for drug territorial control.

The counterfeit market is relevant in Costa Rica, with goods originating from other countries usually smuggled from Nicaragua and Panama. Counterfeit goods range from clothes and cosmetics to technological devices and pharmaceutical products. The illicit trade in excise goods also appears to be significant in the country, mainly involving cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. Illegal cigarettes, manufactured in India, Korea, or China are brought to Central America by sea to Panama or Nicaragua. From there, they cross the borders until they reach the provinces of Costa Rica.

ENVIRONMENT

Costa Rica is an important source country for flora and fauna crimes. Timber, namely cocobolo, illegally harvested in the country is then trafficked to Asia. The illegal timber trade is mainly carried out by Asian nationals who hire local intermediaries to facilitate its extraction in Costa Rica. Due to flexible customs controls, illicit timber is packed with teak and subsequently approved for extraction and exportation.

Because of its biodiversity, Costa Rica is also a source country for live animals and animal parts, including turtles, iguanas, snakes, frogs, cat pelts, shark fins, butterflies, beetles, wasps and spiders. There is easy access to animal-made products, such as shell bracelets, reptile-skin wallets and bird feathers. In some cases, animals are exported by commercial shipments. Tourists have also transported live snakes, frogs, lizards, hummingbirds and coatis through the airports. Within Costa Rica, there is a black market for turtle eggs, birds, monkeys and fish. There are also reports of shark carcasses being used to traffic cocaine to Mexico, another major shark meat recipient, enabled by corruption.

Illegal gold mining and associated mercury trafficking are reportedly increasing in Costa Rica. The extraction of gold at the Las Crucitas mine was handled by a foreign firm until 2011, but mining regulation changes resulted in the company's concession being revoked. In light of this, illegal miners started exploiting the remaining reserves. Illegal extraction commonly involves Nicaraguan operators, known for using rudimentary methods to expose gold with mercury. Profits are paid to foreign actors (mainly Nicaraguans) and demand is largely external, with the final destination mainly being the US.

DRUGS

Heroin trade and consumption remain insignificant in the country. Conversely, cocaine trafficking is pervasive in Costa Rica as the country continues to be a relevant transit country for this drug. Costa Rica's strategic location and vast maritime territory make it an attractive transit

and logistics hub for illicit drug trafficking. The final destination of the drugs is usually Mexico and the US, but a small percentage of cocaine remains in Central America to supply local consumption. Shipments are transported by fast boats, fishing vessels and commercial ships, semi-submersible vessels, that arrive on the Atlantic or Pacific coast, coming from Colombia, as well as by plane using illegal routes, and by land. Fishermen are also allegedly involved. Costa Rica is also becoming a transit country for cocaine destined for Europe. The increase in the volume of seizures performed in recent years was concentrated in drugs concealed in containers on ships headed for Europe. Their destinations included ports in Spain, France, Croatia, the Netherlands, Italy, and Belgium. Colombian and Mexican cartels are involved in the trafficking as well as the 'Ndrangheta. Currently, local groups like Los Moreco (Movimiento Revolucionario de Crimen Organizado) carry out operations, and there has been an increase in local consumption. Still, there are small networks that help in the transportation and storage of the drugs. This illegal market in the country poses several security problems, such as contract killings, drug control disputes between armed groups, and forced recruitment of youth.

The cannabis market is sourced from domestic production, mainly grown in mountainous indigenous areas, and through imports of what is known as 'High Red', from Jamaica. The latter primarily enters the country by boats passing through Colombia's San Andres and Providencia archipelago. Costa Rican cannabis is of low quality and unlikely to be exported. Smaller cannabis seizures usually occur in the province of San José, with the largest taking place in Limón. Local and foreign loose networks are involved in the cannabis trade. The cannabis market value is smaller than the cocaine trade, and profits are paid to domestic and foreign actors, with local demand.

In comparison to other drugs, the synthetic drugs trade in Costa Rica is also small, although consumption is reportedly on the rise. The most commonly seized drugs are Ecstasy, LSD, and K2, with ketamine also becoming more popular. The country is primarily a destination market for small amounts of synthetic drugs imported from Asia and the US.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes, particularly ransomware, are common in the country. However, there is little information on the organizational level of the perpetrators of these crimes. Local and international cybercriminals, including cybercrime groups from Russia, are believed to be involved in many ransomware attacks occurring in the country, adversely affecting governmental operations. Cyber-dependent crimes mainly target the financial system, such as bank webpages and transfer accounts through mobile services.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

The most common types of financial crimes are cyber-enabled fraudulent activities and identity theft. Phishing is also common in the country. There has been an uptick in electronic fraud in recent years. Most of these offences are perpetrated by inmates. Other common financial crimes in the country include tax evasion and embezzlement.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

The most important and well-established mafia-style group in Costa Rica is Los Moreco, which is a well-structured mafia-style group involved in drug trafficking across the country, mainly in the provinces of Limón, Alajuela, Guanacaste, and San José. The group is believed to act independently from foreign structures but there is minimal information related to its involvement in markets other than drug trafficking or in the prison system. Aside from Los Moreco, there are several other drug gangs in Costa Rica whose leaders are either dead or in jail but whose associates continue to operate, and include: 'Turesky Gang', 'Gang of Pollo', 'Gang of El Indio', 'Gang of Ojos Bellos' and 'Gang of Gato Cole'. It is believed that the rise in homicides in the country in recent years can partly be attributed to the use of violence by these gangs. They are far more sophisticated than those mafia-style groups that were active in the 70s and 80s in Costa Rica. However, despite the active presence of such groups in the country, they can hardly be compared with their Mexican and Colombian counterparts.

Foreign criminal actors are active in the country, particularly from Mexico, Colombia, and Italy, and are known to work closely with local groups. These groups are mainly engaged in arms and drug trafficking as well as money laundering, including the Sinaloa Cartel (from Mexico), the 'Ndrangheta (from Italy), and members of the largely demobilized Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – FARC). Drug traffickers from other Central American nations have also used Costa Rica as a base of operations and as a hideout.

Loose domestic criminal networks are also known to engage in a variety of criminal markets, including drug and human trafficking as well as illegal mining and logging, and contraband smuggling. These networks are widespread across the country, although they are particularly active in San José, Puntarenas, Liberia, and Limón and have links with foreign criminal actors, especially from Colombia and Mexico.

Private sector actors are mainly involved in money laundering with the three main legal industries used by organized crime being construction, real estate, and the hotel industry. With regards to the public sector, although assessed as less corrupt than other counterparts in the region, cases of corruption and bribery have been reported in Costa Rica. Nevertheless, state-embedded actors do not appear to engage directly in organized crime in the country.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Costa Rica is considered a democratic country with no evidence that the political system has been penetrated by organized crime. The newly elected president has made statements against organized crime and is in favour of improving the salary and conditions of the police force. The new security policy has not been drafted in a document yet, though installing scanners at ports has been mentioned as a priority. According to experts, the main security issues that the new president will face are cocaine trafficking, gang violence, and rising corruption. The new government of Costa Rica has also shown interest in combating cybercrimes and financial crimes and declared a national emergency due to cyberattacks on public institutions. Costa Rica seems to have a strong legal and institutional framework against corruption. Additionally, in the past two years, the country has made efforts to tackle corruption as part of a drive to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), including by adhering to the Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Servants in International Commercial Transactions of the OECD and passing a bill to combat bribery in companies. In 2022, the country launched the National Integrity and Corruption Prevention Strategy (2021 – 2030) to prioritize corruption prevention and coordination among several stakeholders from the private and public sectors as well as civil society.

Costa Rica has signed and ratified a number of international instruments related to organized crime. It also has extradition treaties with countries including Colombia, the US, Spain, Nicaragua, Italy and Mexico, and bilateral agreements to counter drug trafficking and money laundering with Argentina, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and the US. The latter in particular has been working closely with the Costa Rican government to secure borders, seize drugs, establish a Judicial Wire Intercept Programme, and further train police. Costa Rica also has a number of laws aimed at tackling organized crime. Furthermore, the country has upped efforts to fight violence with the ‘Sembremos Seguridad’ security plan, indicating long-term dedication to fighting organized crime and violence through public policy and citizen engagement.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Costa Rica’s judiciary comprises the Supreme, Appeals and District Courts. The judiciary seems independent and free from intervention by other institutions. The courts are widely trusted and used by citizens to settle disputes and in general terms are not believed to be corrupt. In 2021, the Judicial Branch took a major step forward in its

anticorruption efforts through the launch of the country’s first Judicial Observatory, a web platform designed to provide an array of public information and monitoring on cases related to corruption. Prisons are overcrowded, primarily due to preventive detention. However, Costa Rica is considered to have one of the lowest levels of impunity in the region.

The Public Prosecutor’s Office determines the scope of investigations and the Judicial Investigation Agency (OIJ) is responsible for criminal investigations. In addition, the legislative assembly has created a special jurisdiction of organized crime mandated to investigate and prosecute serious crimes committed by people of legal age, although implementation issues have been reported. The OIJ and the national police are Costa Rica’s main security agencies, as the country has no military. INTERPOL’s National Central Bureau, part of the OIJ, and based in San José, is the main point of contact for foreign agencies collaborating with Costa Rican authorities. The national police have a number of special units in charge of anti-narcotics operations. However, in recent years, there have been cases of police involvement in drug trafficking which have raised concerns among citizens. The use of force and corruption within the police is moderate.

The borders, patrolled by the police border unit, are most affected by drug, arms and human trafficking as well as illegal mining and human smuggling. The air surveillance service has boosted its capacity to control the country’s airspace with additional radars and training, while the government expanded the use of the Judicial Wire Intercept Programme, resulting in more convictions for trafficking. Costa Rica is also a participant of the WCO Container Control Programme and collaborates with Panama and Nicaragua on border control strategies.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Costa Rica remains an important money laundering hub, despite its anti-money laundering laws, and a technical commission for implementing and monitoring the national strategy and mechanisms to freeze terrorist funds and to train judges, prosecutors and judicial investigators. Money is primarily laundered through the construction industry, real estate, and the hotel industry. In addition, a recent increase in money laundering activities is also attributed to the drug trade. There are concerns regarding the authorities’ capacity to halt drug trafficking syndicates from further infiltrating the legal economy. Furthermore, Costa Rica does not regulate virtual currencies, and cryptocurrencies present an additional enforcement challenge for local authorities. While financial institutions remain vulnerable to money laundering, their exposure has been diminished

with the continued monitoring efforts of Costa Rica's Financial Analysis Unit.

Costa Rica's economic environment is favourable for legal businesses despite issues such as rising operating costs, challenging legal environment and infrastructure deficiencies. Foreign direct investment is high, and it has been a significant contributor to Costa Rica's economic growth. Historically, transnational trafficking groups have employed Costa Rican citizens to help in money laundering operations using local banks and other legitimate businesses. Apart from that, there is not a lot of information regarding specific sectors of the economy that are controlled by organized crime or with regard to economic areas in which illicit activities can occur relatively freely. During President Carlos Alvarado's administration (2018 - 2022), Costa Rica experienced a slowdown in economic growth and an increase in unemployment and poverty. This allegedly increased the risk of criminal organizations penetrating the legal economy.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The two support mechanisms for victims and witnesses of crime in Costa Rica are the OIJ's witness protection unit and the Office for the Attention and Protection of the Victim. The latter also provides free and confidential

protection to crime victims, as well as individual and group psychological care, social assistance, legal advice and referrals to social support networks and healthcare institutions. Costa Rica also has three main prevention programmes under the Ministry of Public Security: a community security programme, a commercial security programme and another focused on the protection of children and adolescents. Most efforts to tackle organized crime are in collaboration with foreign governments or international organizations. Additionally, the Foundation for Peace and Democracy has been implementing a project to improve police capacity to prevent youth violence and criminal activity. Despite extremely high levels of media freedom, media ownership is concentrated in the hands of a limited number of people, limiting pluralism and diversity in the media landscape. Nevertheless, several international and private academic, advocacy and research institutes investigate security and organized crime-related trends and issues in the country.

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