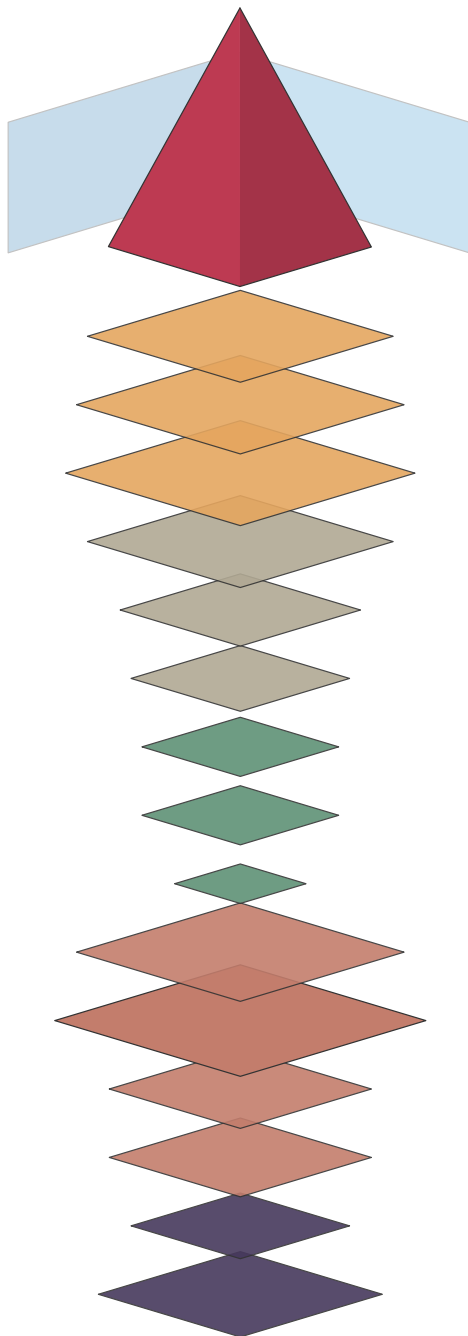



 **GUATEMALA**



 **6.60**
CRIMINALITY SCORE
26th of 193 countries
9th of 35 American countries
4th of 8 Central American countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **6.10**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	8.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	7.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5.00
FLORA CRIMES	4.50
FAUNA CRIMES	4.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3.00
HEROIN TRADE	7.50
COCAINE TRADE	8.50
CANNABIS TRADE	6.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	5.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.50

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **7.10**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	7.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	8.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.00

 **4.08**
RESILIENCE SCORE



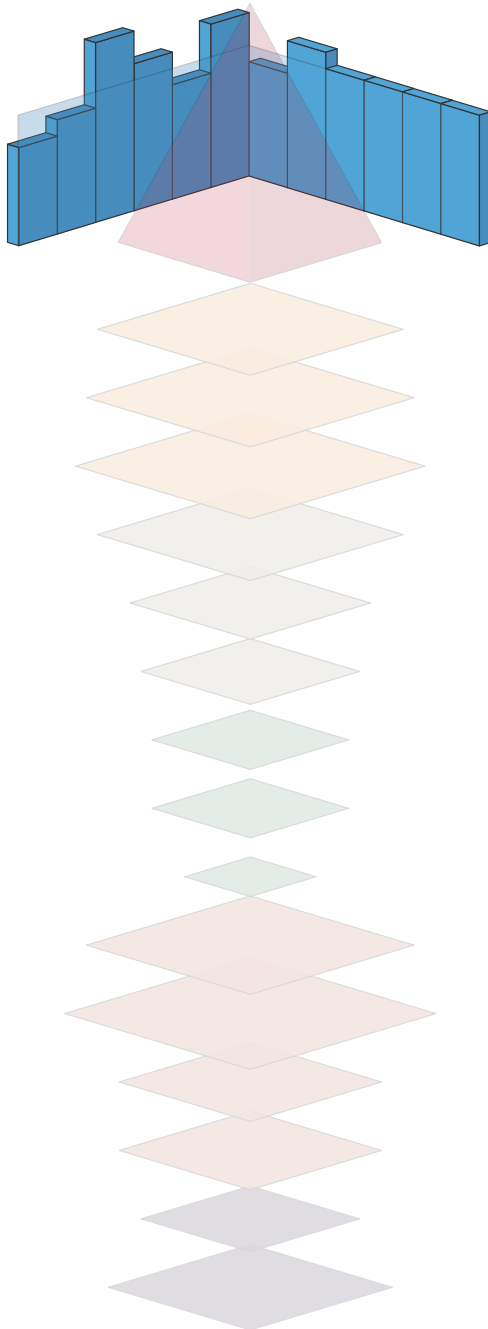
Funding provided by the United States Government.



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.

 **GUATEMALA**



 **4.08**
RESILIENCE SCORE

127th of 193 countries
26th of 35 American countries
4th of 8 Central American countries

<u>POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE</u>	3.00
<u>GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY</u>	3.50
<u>INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION</u>	5.50
<u>NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS</u>	4.50
<u>JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION</u>	3.50
<u>LAW ENFORCEMENT</u>	5.00
<u>TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY</u>	3.50
<u>ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING</u>	4.50
<u>ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY</u>	4.00
<u>VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT</u>	4.00
<u>PREVENTION</u>	4.00
<u>NON-STATE ACTORS</u>	4.00

 **6.60**
CRIMINALITY SCORE

 CRIMINAL MARKETS	6.10
 CRIMINAL ACTORS	7.10



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Guatemala is a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking. Women and minors from across Central America and, to a lesser extent, from Colombia and some African countries are particularly vulnerable to sexual and labour exploitation in the country. National or non-citizen victims tend to be exploited in the agricultural, domestic and textile industries, not only in Guatemala, but also in Belize, Mexico and the US. Guatemala has a history of peonage and forced labour, especially among indigenous communities. Although recruiting for sex or labour trafficking is not as lucrative as recruiting for human smuggling, many forms of exploitation in the country are linked to the movement of people and might occur during or after the smuggling journey. The border areas between Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador are particularly affected by the human trafficking market. Traffickers are often members of well-organized local criminal groups who work in cooperation with international traffickers, particularly along the Guatemalan border, and have connections with drug-trafficking organizations.

Human smuggling in Guatemala is often a response to the difficulty people experience in accessing visas and passports due to their origin and remote locations. Many of the convicted smugglers are from indigenous communities and work with other smugglers and criminal networks in Mexico and beyond. Guatemala's location along a major route between South and North America, as well as long stretches of unmonitored borders, facilitates the smuggling of people. Human smugglers are often connected to well-organized criminal groups, and people in some rural Guatemalan highlands have made smuggling a livelihood. Guatemala is also a destination country for smuggled individuals, and criminal groups and corrupt authorities facilitate their entry. The lack of job opportunities, poverty, state-sponsored harassment, gang violence and the search for a better life have contributed to the growing human smuggling market.

Extortion is a pervasive criminal activity in Guatemala and has been on the rise in recent years, with thousands of extortion cases reported each month. Extortion is often conducted by means of phone calls, and victims include businesses, individuals and even prisoners. The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to 'copycat groups', which have gained territory in the extortion market by focusing on private residences and individuals rather than businesses, as gangs have largely suspended their activities due to economic slowdowns. Criminal groups often use violence

and threats to enforce payments, and even prisoners are forced to pay entrance fees to jails to avoid violence.

TRADE

Guatemala serves as both a destination and transit country for arms trafficking, with various entry points for AR-15s along major trafficking routes. The expansion of the illicit arms market can be attributed to factors such as the Guatemalan civil war, porous borders, lack of control and understaffed border authorities. Criminal gangs in need of firearms often engage with arms traffickers and sell weapons on local black markets. It is estimated that over one million illicit arms are present in Guatemala, leading to widespread violence across the country, with most homicides committed with firearms. Firearms and ammunition seizures have been consistent over the years. Meanwhile, the laws regulating arms possession have stricter rules for owning a weapon but are laxer when it comes to ammunition, which is often bought legally before being trafficked. The state lacks control over the arms market, with police primarily focused on seizing illicit arms rather than dismantling the market's structure. In addition, Guatemala serves as a hub for distributing illicit arms to El Salvador and Honduras.

Trade in counterfeit goods has notable economic consequences in Guatemala, which is exacerbated by the country's strategic location and societal and economic conditions. Counterfeit apparel production and pharmaceutical sales also pose problems, with the latter being particularly concerning, as it can lead to dangerous fake medications being consumed. Guatemala is considered a provenance economy for counterfeit footwear, clothing, leather articles and handbags, mostly imported from China, South Korea, India or Turkey. Counterfeit products are increasingly sold on social media platforms.

Illicit trade of excise goods, primarily tobacco products and alcoholic beverages, is a moderate criminal market in Guatemala. Most of the contraband tobacco products originated from Panama and entered through Belize. Smuggled cigarette brands from China and India were also found in the country. The illicit trade has substantial economic repercussions on the state, with the state treasury accruing losses in tax revenue.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes, specifically rosewood trafficking, are prevalent in Guatemala due to high demand from China. Illegal logging and timber trafficking also occur in various regions, often tied to drug trafficking activities. Indigenous people have complained about logging and companies without permits engage in illegal pine extraction. Live flora, such as aloe and

tillandsia, are also trafficked. Local farmers and intermediaries participate in flora trafficking operations through organized rosewood trafficking networks. Limited resources and extreme poverty in rural areas also contribute to this trade. The unclear demarcation of the Guatemala–Belize border and the lack of cross-border cooperation hinder the ability of security forces to combat flora crimes effectively. Moreover, the issue is not a priority in Guatemala, further limiting anti-rosewood trafficking resources.

Wildlife trafficking in Guatemala involves organized criminal groups with knowledge of routes and cooperation with corrupt authorities. The cross-border movement and trade of species between countries demand perfectly organized groups, and scarlet macaws, monkeys and reptiles are among the most trafficked species. Most of the wildlife trafficking happens along the Guatemala–Belize border, often committed by rosewood traffickers. Local farmers and intermediaries participate in the trade, selling the animals to foreign buyers. Although there is a demand for scarlet macaws, the traffickers do not seem to be well-organized on a large scale.

Illicit mining is the most prevalent non-renewable resource crimes in Guatemala, with foreign criminal actors involved in illegal jade mining operations. In some areas, entire villages are allegedly involved in illicit jade extraction in collaboration with corrupt local authorities. Legal mining operations have also been reported to disregard environmental impact standards and use illegal means to control social concerns.

DRUGS

Guatemala is the third-largest producer of opium poppy in Latin America and its heroin trade is concentrated along the Guatemalan–Mexican border. Mexican cartels have expanded into Guatemala to cultivate poppies and the heroin is mainly destined for the US. Poppy production is viewed by many locals as a lucrative livelihood and it causes local communities to fight over the control of water and land.

In addition, Guatemala is a significant transit country for cocaine due to its location on a major drug trafficking route between South and North America. Cocaine enters the country by land, sea and air, and it is Guatemala's primary drug market. Criminal actors involved include mafia-style groups in the form of drug cartels. Corruption runs rampant in the market, with drug cartels and individual narcos penetrating local and national political, judicial and law enforcement systems. They are known to create alliances with state actors at all levels. There has also been a rise in coca plantations in the country in recent years which has been demonstrated by the increase in coca eradication and clandestine laboratory dismantlement conducted by law enforcement. This indicates that Guatemala is becoming a cocaine producing country, albeit to a limited

extent compared to major cocaine producing countries in South America.

Furthermore, Guatemala is a country of origin and transit for cannabis. The country's cannabis market operates primarily for domestic and regional cannabis users. In rural areas, the cultivation of marijuana is controlled by transnational drug trafficking groups. Criminal actors involved in the market include youth gangs and other smaller criminal groups. Some children are also forced to sell marijuana at school. Criminals involved in the cannabis trade are also usually engaged in other criminal markets.

Guatemala is also both a source and transit country for the synthetic drug trade. Chemical precursors from other countries are transported through Guatemala to Mexico for processing, although processing may also occur in Guatemala. Synthetic drug laboratories have been detected in the country for many years. Guatemala's proximity to Mexico, its access to loosely controlled seaports and corruption facilitate the emergence of drug laboratories. Mexican, Guatemalan and Colombian criminal groups are the most important in terms of clandestine laboratories in the region, as well as in the procurement of chemical precursors. Nevertheless, the synthetic drug trade remains smaller than the cocaine or heroin trade in the country.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Guatemala has seen a notable increase in cyber-attacks, particularly in the form of ransomware attacks. Criminal organizations exploit the lack of internet regulation and control to conduct cybercrimes. In recent years, hacks on websites with the '.gt' domain have been reported and corporations have been affected by leaked documents exposing corruption. In 2022, the hacker group known as Guacamaya Roja hacked confidential documents from a project managed by a multinational mining company operating in the country. The mining company alleged that it suffered a cyber-attack and that a disinformation campaign was being conducted against the business.

In addition, a new technique known as crypto clipping is gaining popularity in Guatemala. This malware works by altering the beneficiary address during cryptocurrency transactions.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes are prevalent in Guatemala and pose substantial risks to its economy. Moreover, actions impeding the independence of Guatemala's judiciary expose the country to ongoing financial crimes and hinder its capacity to prevent or combat such crimes. In recent years, individuals and companies have been convicted of various financial crimes, including fraud, tax evasion and embezzlement. Tax evasion is a significant issue and leaked documents have revealed that Guatemala is one of the most used countries in Latin America for offshore purposes by politicians,

businesspeople and private individuals. Embezzlement is also a big concern, with civil servants being convicted of misappropriating funds from various projects.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Foreign actors, including Mexican drug cartels and transnational criminal gangs, are dominant in Guatemala's criminal landscape. Mexican cartels control much of the drug trafficking in the country, collaborating with local drug cartels and criminal groups. These international criminal groups mostly collaborate with their local counterparts in Guatemala, which is mainly a transit country for the drug trafficking markets. Meanwhile, local criminal networks participate in various criminal markets, such as marijuana, poppy and coca cultivation, human trafficking, kidnapping and money laundering. They consist of former military members, police officers, public officials and drug traffickers who work with groups from other Central American countries. Smaller criminal gangs are known for their extreme violence, including torture, and involvement in sexual exploitation and human trafficking. While criminal networks lack the means to influence Guatemala's democratic process at the national level, they are believed to have influenced local mayoral elections.

Corrupt state-embedded actors support Guatemala's criminal markets by facilitating or engaging directly in illegal operations. They participate in drug trafficking, such as cocaine and marijuana trafficking, and are influenced by

drug traffickers who use their power to sway local elections, protect drug shipments and guarantee impunity. Some state-embedded actors, emboldened by the perceived immunity associated with their positions, have created their own drug operations.

Mafia-style groups, including drug cartels and international gangs, operate in Guatemala, engaging in drug trafficking, arms trafficking, contraband, human trafficking and human smuggling, as well as extortion. These groups are highly organized and hierarchical, with many leaders and large memberships, and operate in Guatemala's main cities. Although territorial disputes have decreased in recent years, occasional clashes between these groups and Guatemalan authorities still occur in remote criminal enclaves and abandoned rural areas along the Guatemalan–Mexican border. These groups have also infiltrated various sectors of society, including politics, the security forces, the private sector and the judicial system.

In the private sector, the Guatemalan government has investigated private security companies for operating illegally without licences to carry weapons, posing a risk to communities. Transnational mining companies are also causing environmental damage, fueling corruption schemes and attempting to influence indigenous leaders, while monitoring journalists who report on their irregularities. Many local and foreign companies have been accused of laundering their proceeds in the country and this illicit practice involves billions of dollars each year.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Guatemala's political leadership is widely viewed as corrupt, with current and former officials being linked to corrupt practices and drug trafficking organizations. The elite's disinterest in reforming tax legislation has contributed to the state's long-standing debt, and the lack of critical reforms in the justice, legal and security systems has allowed crime to flourish. Organized crime and public safety are major campaign issues in Guatemala, but anti-organized crime initiatives have been largely ineffective, with many requiring more funding and continuity. The lack of influential institutions to address corruption contributes to general perceptions about corruption in the country. The failure of the state to protect judges has contributed to the country's elevated warning status in terms of governance. In recent years, Guatemala's UN-backed anti-corruption body was abolished and the creation of a new national presidential anti-corruption commission has been criticized as being too close to the executive to be impartial. Guatemala's legal

framework enables the public to request information on any subject not deemed confidential, however response times from national institutions are slow. The government has made efforts to improve transparency, including publishing budgets and creating platforms to make information about public procurement available. However, contracts in state institutions lack transparency, and there is little political will to reform the civil services law to guarantee that job and career qualifications in the public sector are based on performance.

Guatemala has ratified various international treaties on organized crime, leading to legal reforms and improvements in anti-organized crime efforts. This has resulted in positive impacts on investigations into gang extortion and drug cartels. The country has bilateral extradition agreements with several countries, including the US, and has extradited many important drug traffickers, including a former president. Perceptions about Guatemala's efforts to cooperate in

combating organized crime are positive, but implementation remains a challenge. Guatemala has also enacted a range of laws and legislative initiatives to combat organized crime, money laundering, sexual violence and trafficking. However, there are concerns about the government's strategy to tackle crime, including legislative initiatives that were eventually blocked by the Constitutional Court. The lack of proper training among law enforcement authorities also makes it difficult to apply the existing legal framework effectively.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Guatemala's judiciary struggles to manage complex cases, despite receiving international cooperation funding. The departure of the UN-backed anti-corruption body has left investigative and judicial authorities vulnerable to criminal organizations entrenched in state institutions and deprived them of international support. In fact, attacks on prosecutors and judges investigating corruption and organized crime have increased since its shutdown. In addition, the prison system is inadequate and has issues with overcrowding, corruption and a lack of resources. Organized crime is flourishing in prisons and gang leaders coordinate illegal activities from within.

Guatemala has several law enforcement units specializing in organized crime, such as the anti-narcotics unit and the criminal investigation unit, which have received training and support from the US government. However, these units are still affected by understaffing, lack of equipment, corruption and poor coordination with investigators. The lack of public confidence in the national police force further undermines its effectiveness. Community policing models exist in some rural areas, but there is no monitoring of their impact. Guatemala's intelligence system is inefficient due to poor coordination between police, military, civil and strategic intelligence units.

Guatemala's borders with neighbouring countries, including Mexico, Honduras, Belize and El Salvador, have hundreds of blind spots, where there is little or no state presence. These areas of weakness make it easy to smuggle contraband, drugs and people in and out of the country. The still-active territorial dispute with Belize and the resulting unclear border definition further hinders the authorities' ability to conduct operations in that area. The terrain, which includes rivers and jungles, makes regional border control a challenge, and effective control would require significant investments in marine and air-force technologies. Despite some government efforts, border control personnel remain corrupt and under-equipped, and the government also faces challenges with extortion in areas controlled by gangs.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Guatemala has the legislative framework and institutional capacity to combat money laundering, but questions have been raised about the impartiality of the institutions responsible for this task, as they are funded by banks. In practice, foreign judicial authorities still conduct major investigations, particularly those in the US. Guatemala is not currently on any black or grey lists; however, it runs the risk of being grey-listed due to regulatory issues that need strengthening. The country has not yet adopted any regulations or measures to prevent the use of crowdfunding or online gambling for money laundering, and there is a weak regulatory framework for savings and credit cooperatives.

The economic regulatory environment in Guatemala is characterized by widespread extortion that affects small to medium-sized businesses, including multinational companies. Extortion is conducted by gangs and copycat organizations, and the weak law enforcement system, coupled with a lack of trust in law enforcement capabilities, exacerbates the problem. Organized crime diversifies existing business activities or establishes legitimate companies to increase profits, launder money, or enter the legal sphere, particularly in the agricultural and mining sectors. Smuggling of goods is fueled by tax and tariff evasion, and certain trade restrictions lead to illicit trade. The economic environment in Guatemala also remains heavily regulated, rendering doing business in the country cumbersome.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Guatemala's victim support services are insufficient, but some programmes exist to assist victims and witnesses. The public prosecutor's office has a unit to provide support to victims and a witness protection programme, and the government recently established an institute for victims. However, these programmes lack transparency and the country's weak institutional framework creates a climate of impunity that diminishes the effectiveness of victim support initiatives. The use of 'effective collaborators' as witnesses has only recently been implemented in large corruption cases or those related to gang leaders and drug traffickers and key witnesses are placed in special facilities. Furthermore, drug users are often treated as criminals rather than victims and there are limited resources to treat addiction. Civil society provides some victim support services, including legal advice and psychological treatments, and anonymous hotlines exist for reporting crimes.

Crime prevention has a focus on situational prevention and initiatives aimed at gangs, membership and extortion. Although strategies were published some years ago, specific results and monitoring and evaluation are yet to be determined. Overall, the crime prevention agenda is weak, with limited results due to hardline enforcement strategies and political developments. Public awareness campaigns focused on human trafficking, smuggling and gang activity exist, but the government lacks transparency and

effective communication between institutions responsible for crime prevention.

Guatemala faces significant challenges regarding press freedom and human rights, with a high number of attacks against journalists and human rights activists. Media ownership is highly concentrated and often lacks impartiality. The government provides limited support for think tanks and civil society initiatives aimed at addressing organized crime, and there is a lack of coordination between authorities and NGOs assisting victims. Indigenous people make up almost half of the population and are marginalized at social and political levels. The government is attempting to modify laws governing NGOs to increase control over them. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the situation in Guatemala, making access to trustworthy information difficult and creating an unfavourable climate for journalists. Human rights activists have faced attacks, with Guatemala having the fourth-highest number of killings of human rights defenders in the region.

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