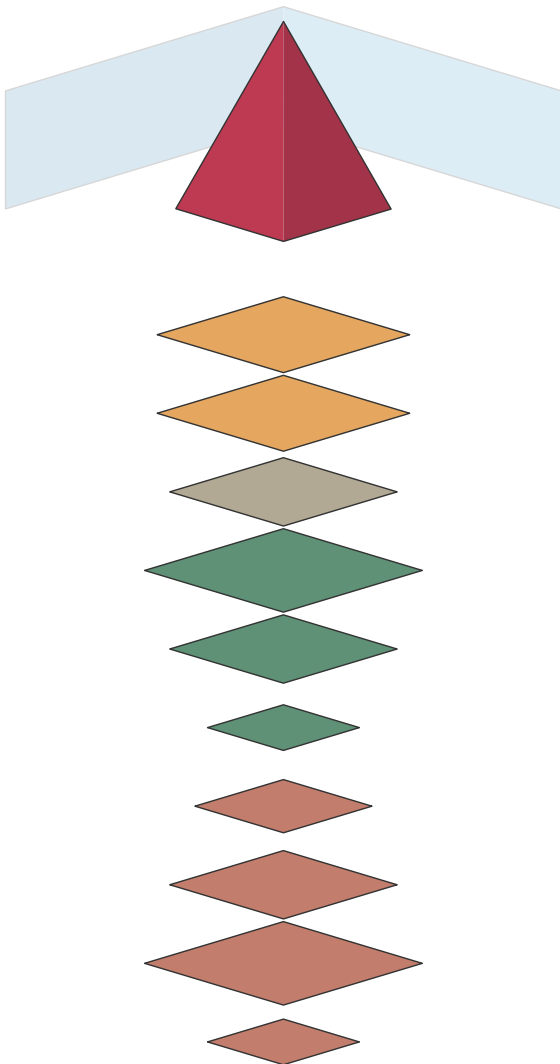




# BELIZE



4.64

## CRIMINALITY SCORE

110<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries

21<sup>st</sup> of 35 American countries

8<sup>th</sup> of 8 Central American countries



## CRIMINAL MARKETS

4.40

HUMAN TRAFFICKING 5.00

HUMAN SMUGGLING 5.00

ARMS TRAFFICKING 4.50

FLORA CRIMES 5.50

FAUNA CRIMES 4.50

NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES 3.00

HEROIN TRADE 3.50

COCAINE TRADE 4.50

CANNABIS TRADE 5.50

SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE 3.00



## CRIMINAL ACTORS

4.88

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS 6.50

CRIMINAL NETWORKS 3.50

STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS 4.50

FOREIGN ACTORS 5.00



3.13

## RESILIENCE SCORE

167<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries

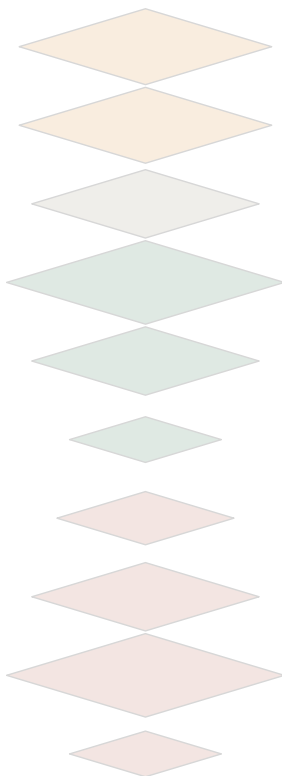
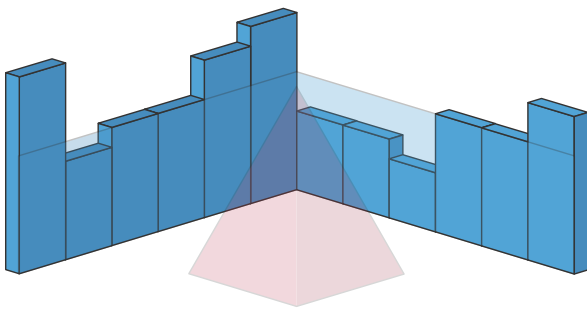
31<sup>st</sup> of 35 American countries

7<sup>th</sup> of 8 Central American countries





# BELIZE



## 3.13

### RESILIENCE SCORE

167<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries

31<sup>st</sup> of 35 American countries

7<sup>th</sup> of 8 Central American countries

<u>POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE</u>	<b>5.00</b>
<u>GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY</u>	<b>2.50</b>
<u>INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION</u>	<b>3.00</b>
<u>NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS</u>	<b>3.00</b>
<u>JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION</u>	<b>4.00</b>
<u>LAW ENFORCEMENT</u>	<b>4.50</b>
<u>TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY</u>	<b>2.00</b>
<u>ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING</u>	<b>2.00</b>
<u>ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY</u>	<b>1.50</b>
<u>VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT</u>	<b>3.00</b>
<u>PREVENTION</u>	<b>3.00</b>
<u>NON-STATE ACTORS</u>	<b>4.00</b>



## 4.64

### CRIMINALITY SCORE

110<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries

21<sup>st</sup> of 35 American countries

8<sup>th</sup> of 8 Central American countries



#### CRIMINAL MARKETS

**4.40**



#### CRIMINAL ACTORS

**4.88**



# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Belize's geographic positioning makes it an ideal passage for human trafficking throughout Central America. Although many independent criminals and regional networks are involved in human trafficking, the market does not have strong ties to complex international human-trafficking operations. Still, victims are recruited and exploited in the country and abroad. The most at-risk groups are females, both Belizean and foreign nationals, children and migrants from Central America, Mexico and Asia. Migrants are exploited in agriculture, domestic and retail work.

In the context of the Central American migrant crisis, estimates indicate a rise in human smuggling in Belize. For the most part, foreign actors based in Central American countries and China seem to run the human-smuggling market in the country, with Belize being the most-preferred destination for undocumented migrants, after the US. The long-standing border dispute between Belize and neighbouring Guatemala has contributed to the country's vulnerability to trafficking and facilitated irregular entries. Additionally, 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. Allegedly, corruption plays a part in human smuggling in Belize, but no cases have been prosecuted.

### TRADE

Local demand for guns exists, but the market is primarily driven by foreign demand. Belize is, for the most part, a transit point for illicit arms trafficked to neighbouring Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras. Evidence suggests that Mexico-bound weapons coming from the US are trafficked through Belize to avoid strict measures along the US-Mexico border. Most recently, a new arms-trafficking route between Nicaragua and Mexico has been identified. 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 in other Central American countries, Belizean authorities have identified cases of military members selling weapons to well-known criminals who are linked to gangs. Corrupt officials in Belize, particularly at the borders, facilitate the movement of arms through the country. The illicit arms market has contributed to the easy access of arms, which has, in turn, become a reason for the high percentage of firearm-inflicted homicides in the country.

### ENVIRONMENT

Independent criminals allegedly pay local community members to cut down Honduran rosewood, which is then smuggled to China for the production of luxury furniture and musical instruments. Related to the illicit harvest, there have been reports of Guatemalan loggers illegally entering Belize to participate in the illegal economy. The environmental effect has been significant - a loss of 90% in Honduran rosewood fields was recorded until 2010. Conversely, the illicit fauna market in Belize exists mainly to satisfy domestic demand. Endangered parrot, monkey and turtle species are persistently poached and sold in the country as pets. No evidence suggests any transnational links. Although smaller by regional comparison, an illegal gold-extraction market exists in Belize, with independent Guatemalans allegedly involved in illegal gold mining. Notably, gold is not extracted on site, but rather ore containing flecks of gold is smuggled into Guatemala and extracted there. The market has a significant effect on the environment, evident in severe deforestation and soil damage.

### DRUGS

Belize serves as a transit point for heroin bound for the US and Mexico. Mexican cartels control heroin flows through the country and might 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 heroin use in destination markets and a limited demand for heroin in Belize. Similarly, it is primarily a transit point for cocaine on the way to Mexico and the US, smuggled by air and sea from Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador, but a small domestic consumption of cocaine exists as well. In recent years, Belize has seen an increase in drug flights landing on clandestine airstrips, especially in the tourist Ambergris Caye district, the country's largest island, and in the northern Orange Walk district near the Mexican border. The low population density and the clandestine strips make it perfect for cargo planes used for smuggling to land or refuel. The country's islands - and its authorities' inability to patrol them - create opportunities for go-fast vessels to move drugs and other illicit goods through Belize's territorial waters. Mostly foreign actors appear to control the cocaine trade. However, Belizean gangs have reportedly begun fighting over the movement of cocaine, prompting a series of drug-related homicides on land and at sea.

Cannabis use in Belize is considerable, with locals and tourists using the drug. Local gangs are believed to control the trade, distributing cannabis grown domestically, as well as a more-expensive marijuana variety smuggled from Mexico. Corruption is arguably a key element in the cannabis trade as high-level police and other officials have

been arrested for facilitating the market. Belize is used as a transit point for chemical precursors – used in synthetic drug production – destined for Mexico. Belizeans are hired to move the precursors that originate from Asia to transit through European countries (Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, etc.). However, precursors coming from Guatemala have been seized as well. The seizures might indicate a growing local market for precursors that is dominated by gangs.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Although more than 40 street gangs have been identified in Belize City, eight of them appear to be most prominent, all modelled on the notorious US Bloods and Crips gangs. Due to various factors, identifying leadership is difficult. However, charges have been brought against influential figures in these groups. There are allegedly 900 to 1400 gang members in Belize City, with the three largest gangs being the Peace in the Valley Bloods, the South Side Gangs and the Gaza New Generation Blood/George Street Gang. Gangs hold 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 crack cocaine, which contribute to a significant degree of violence, including that perpetrated with firearms and grenades. Notably, prominent gang leaders operate with impunity and have a stake in the legal economy or relations with political elites. Foreign actors also operate in Belize. Among the most renowned 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 chemical-precursor trafficking, but domestic groups have started taking a more direct role in transnational activities as well. Information suggests authorities engage with and facilitate criminal operations in Belize. Besides allegations of high-profile politicians tied to organized crime, evidence suggests police and military officials participate in criminal economies at various levels. Belize's strong relationship with the criminal regime in Venezuela has supported the claims of Belizean authorities being complicit in organized crime. Lastly, criminal networks also exist in the country, but these are small scale and mostly hired to smuggle chemical precursors to and through Belize. These networks are concentrated in the main cities of the country - Belize City and San Pedro, and might overlap with Mexican crime networks.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Former political leaders have had strong ties to organized crime and corruption has been flagged as an issue in the country. After mounting pressures, Belize signed the UN Convention against Corruption, but implementation is still problematic. Overall, anti-organized crime has not featured strongly on the political agenda of the country. The 2020 elections resulted in the People's United Party winning a landslide victory but it remains to be seen what stance the new government will take on organized crime. Nevertheless, since gaining independence, Belize has been politically relatively stable. With the worrying levels of corruption, however, a general lack of transparency has been signalled in various reports and surveys and public access to information is somewhat restricted.

Belize is party to most international treaties and conventions pertaining to organized crime. In addition, the country receives assistance from the UK and the US in different areas, including in anti-organized crime, with the US Southern Command supporting Belize with humanitarian assistance, training and exercise programmes, as well as with equipment and technology. Security partnerships with other countries in the region are also established. While on paper international cooperation is sound, corruption interferes with the country's security efforts. Although

the country's national laws and policies are in line with Belize's international commitments, most laws are rarely enforced and have little impact.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Due to the country's colonial history, Belize has an accusatory legal system based on British practice, albeit with some variations. Even though Belize collaborates with the US to improve its criminal justice information management system, justice is slow – more than a third of inmates are held in pre-trial detention without being convicted. In addition, the justice system is allegedly inefficient; high-profile organized-crime-related cases are often dismissed due to political influence. Conversely, the penal system has markedly improved since 2000 and inmates now have adequate housing, functioning sewer infrastructure and showers. The US in particular has assisted Belize, financially and technologically, but corruption in the country remains an obstacle to effective law enforcement. A mobile interdiction team, an interagency border security unit, was established in 2012. The unit has the task of interdicting illicit drugs and other contraband trafficked within and across the country's points of entry, but its members are detailed to police units, leaving fewer resources to monitor the borders.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Despite reforming its tax regime and being removed from the EU's tax-haven blacklist, Belize remains highly vulnerable to money laundering. Evidence points to foreign actors using the country to launder money since at least 2012, while malfeasance in the highest echelons of the country's tax service persists. Belize has made use of US technical assistance to the country's semi-autonomous interagency group mandated to investigate and prosecute illicit financial transactions, the Financial Intelligence Unit, and has expanded staffing, training and interagency cooperation. The unit, however, has little to show for in terms of prosecuted cases. In addition, doing business in Belize is difficult because the country's economic regulatory capacity is not conducive to entrepreneurship.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Under its 2018-2020 action plan against human trafficking, Belize is developing a comprehensive system of victim-assistance services. Although victim identification has improved, certain gaps persist, for example authorities disregarding credible reports by NGOs of potential trafficking. A victim identification and assistance protocol specific to migrant children has been drafted in collaboration with an international partner. There is a programme in Belize – the Conscious Youth Development Programme – that provides psychosocial support as well as conflict mediation to young people involved with gangs, and their families, but support measures, overall, are quite limited. In terms of prevention, under the same 2018-2020 action plan, authorities have made a commitment to reduce both demand for and vulnerability to human trafficking, to conduct country-specific research on the issue, as well as track and assess how human trafficking-related policies are being implemented. Enhancing its investigative and prosecutorial capacities using a victim-centred approach is on the agenda of the action plan. Drug-prevention efforts – reducing the supply-and-demand and beefing up control measures – are guided by the country's health ministry's National Drug Abuse Control Council. The council provides assistance to special projects that focus on the training of experts in prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of drug abuse. Yet, while prevention mechanisms exist, they do not seem to have been well-implemented in practice. Belize performs relatively well in press freedom, but the media environment has worsened since 2014. Media polarization makes coverage of sensitive issues controversial, while threats, harassment and intimidation of journalists occur occasionally.

---

*This summary was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.*