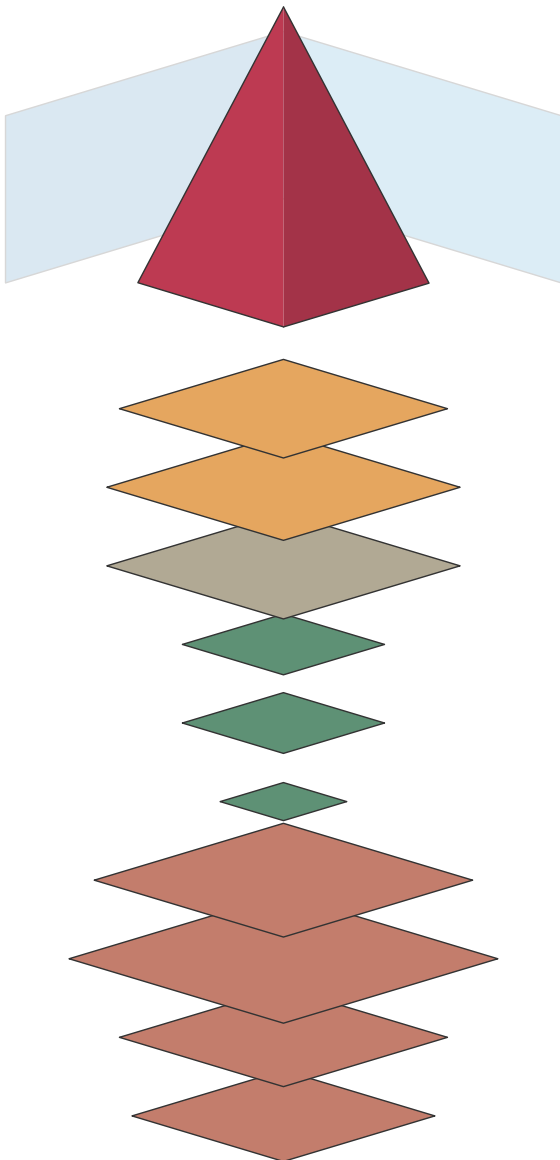


 **GUATEMALA**



 **6.48**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

23<sup>rd</sup> of 193 countries  
8<sup>th</sup> of 35 American countries  
4<sup>th</sup> of 8 Central American countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **5.95**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	7.00
FLORA CRIMES	4.00
FAUNA CRIMES	4.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	2.50
HEROIN TRADE	7.50
COCAINE TRADE	8.50
CANNABIS TRADE	6.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.00

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **7.00**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	7.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.50

 **4.42**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**

114<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  
25<sup>th</sup> of 35 American countries  
4<sup>th</sup> of 8 Central American countries

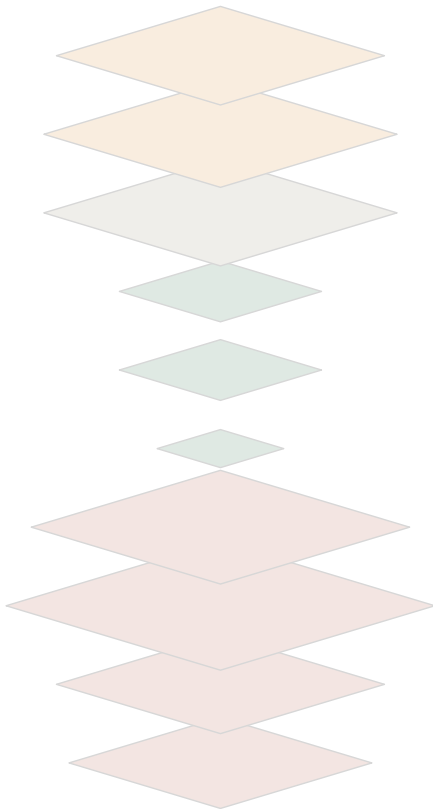
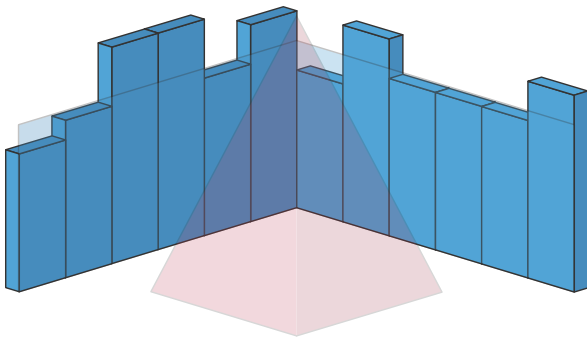


Funding provided by the United States Government.



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**



**4.42**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**

114<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  
25<sup>th</sup> of 35 American countries  
4<sup>th</sup> of 8 Central American countries

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

**6.48**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

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 <b>CRIMINAL MARKETS</b>	5.95
 <b>CRIMINAL ACTORS</b>	7.00



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# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Guatemala is a significant source, transit and destination country for human trafficking, a criminal market that has grown in recent years. Victims tend to be women and girls from across Central America and, to a lesser extent, from Colombia and some African countries. They are forced into sexual exploitation and labour in the agricultural, domestic and textile industries in Guatemala, Belize, Mexico and the United States. Human 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.

Guatemala's human-smuggling market is also large and facilitated by its geographical position along a major migration corridor connecting South and North America. Human smuggling has become a livelihood in some rural areas of Guatemala, with many smugglers operating closely with large crime organizations and corrupt authorities.

### TRADE

Positioned along a major arms-trafficking route from South to Central America and the United States, Guatemala is a source, transit and destination country for illegal arms. Arms traffickers are usually part of well-organized mafia-style groups who employ the same routes as drug traffickers, and often work in coordination with them. There are believed to be many more illicit arms than registered ones in Guatemala, partly as a consequence of the country's internal armed conflict. Arms trafficking is facilitated by a lack of control and understaffing at the country's border posts, and contributes to violence across the country, with more than 80% of homicides being committed with firearms.

### ENVIRONMENT

Guatemala is a source country for illicit flora trafficking, with Rosewood, a rare species that is present only in a small number of areas across the world, constituting a large part of the market. The Rosewood-trafficking market is controlled by large criminal organizations who work in cooperation with local farmers and criminals from China, where demand for this particular wood is high. Rosewood traffickers also transport scarlet macaws, monkeys and reptiles illegally along similar routes, with many of the animals ultimately being sold to foreign buyers. The unclear demarcation of the Guatemala-Belize border, limited cross-border cooperation, and the low priority given to flora-and-fauna

trafficking hinders the Guatemalan security forces' ability to carry out activities against these crimes.

While non-renewable resource crimes are comparably limited, electricity theft and illegal mining are the two main non-renewable-resource crimes that take place in Guatemala. Local communities are largely responsible for the former, and foreign mining multinationals for the latter. Jade is one of the most popular minerals that is extracted illegally – it is estimated that over 95% of production is for the illicit market, with most of it being sent to China.

### DRUGS

After Mexico and Colombia, Guatemala is Latin America's third-largest opium producer. Its heroin trade has grown in recent years and is concentrated along the Guatemalan-Mexican border, at the hands of Mexican cartels and local criminals. The cocaine trade however, is Guatemala's main illicit-drug market. The country is a major transit point for cocaine produced in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. It arrives by sea, land and air on its way to the United States. As much as 90% of cocaine trafficked into the US passes through Guatemala. Local criminal organizations also produce cocaine, as well as synthetic drugs. The domestic cultivation of coca is reportedly on the rise, but local consumption is minimal. Guatemala is a source, transit and destination country for cannabis, mainly for domestic and regional consumption, although the market is relatively small when compared to other drug types. Synthetic drugs are sourced and transited through the country on their way to Mexico and the United States.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Guatemala is home to a number of relatively sophisticated mafia-style groups – most notably, international gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 – who operate mostly in drug-trafficking markets, but also take part in arms trafficking, human trafficking and smuggling, transporting contraband into and out of the country, and extortion. There are both foreign and local gangs in Guatemala, operating predominantly in its main cities. The drug-trafficking groups tend to be organized around a single leader and have moderate membership; whereas those that focus their activities on extortion, money lending and drug peddling are organized in vertical hierarchies, with multiple leaders and large memberships. Some estimates suggest there are between 10000 and 20000 gang members in the country.

While territorial disputes still occur between Guatemala's mafia-style groups, these have been on a downward trend in the past few years, due mainly to a clearer demarcation of their territories and the detention of the most aggressive

drug leaders. The more minor gangs in Guatemala are known to be extremely violent, engaging in torture and using small weapons to carry out selective killings or intimidate their extortion victims. The drug cartels are generally less violent, but use more brutal force and high-powered weapons.

Drug trafficking in Guatemala is controlled largely by Mexican drug cartels –for example, the Cartel de Sinaloa, the Cartel del Golfo and Los Zetas – particularly in border regions such as Zacapa, Alta Verapaz and Petén. Because

Guatemala is predominantly a transit country for drug trafficking, most of the local gangs and other criminal actors collaborate with the larger international criminal groups that dominate the market.

Guatemala’s criminal markets are all supported by corrupt state-embedded actors, who either facilitate or engage directly in criminal operations. Low- and medium-level law-enforcement entities are often associated with gangs, while the drug cartels are reportedly connected across all levels of the state apparatus.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Although the issue of organized crime features in most political campaigns in Guatemala, efforts to fight it have been largely ineffective. Most anti-organized-crime and anti-corruption initiatives have been unsuccessful due to a lack of political support, funding and continuity. In 2019, the Guatemalan authorities ended the mandate of a UN-backed special anti-impunity commission, which had, since 2007, assisted in the high-level investigation and prosecution of key figures (including former presidents and other high-ranking officials) on corruption charges, as well as trained the prosecutor’s office on how to handle complex crimes.

Despite the existence of anti-corruption and pro-transparency laws, and Guatemala’s participation in international treaties and cooperation agreements, organized crime continues to penetrate the country’s political system, particularly via links between drug cartels and members of congress, the army and law-enforcement authorities. Collusion between local-level politicians, security forces and criminal organizations is widespread along Guatemala’s drug-trafficking routes. These challenges are reflected in the low rate of public trust in Guatemala’s authorities.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Guatemala’s does not have robust judicial mechanisms, and its judiciary is therefore not able to deal with a large number of complex cases. Its courts are overloaded, understaffed and limited by lagging bureaucratic procedures and delays, particularly since the departure of the UN’s anti-impunity commission. The state lacks control over its 22 prisons, which suffer from extreme violence, poor living conditions and severe overcrowding, mostly due to rampant corruption and understaffing. Because of these poor conditions, organized crime has flourished inside the prisons, which have become operation centres for the country’s most prominent gangs. Guatemala has a number

of law-enforcement units, including within the national police force, that specialize in tackling organized crime, drug trafficking, extortion and kidnapping. Although some of these units have had limited success, their work continues to be negatively affected by corruption, understaffing, inadequate resources, a lack of trust and poor coordination with the public ministry’s investigators.

Guatemala’s strategic location in a major trafficking corridor between South and North America makes it an important location for criminal operations. In spite of some government programmes that have tried to tackle the issue, its borders are porous and consist of hundreds of blind spots without a state presence. The government also faces serious challenges when it comes to exerting its authority in areas controlled by gangs.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Guatemala’s laws, norms and institutional capacity to combat money laundering are extensive and at least nominally fulfil most international obligations, which makes the country fairly resilient to this activity, as well as to terrorist financing. Legitimate businesses are able to operate relatively freely and to expand, despite restrictive regulations. However, extortion remains widespread in Guatemala, with victims ranging from small to medium businesses (including transport companies, cattle farms, small financial companies and private-security companies), to large multinationals, particularly in the telecommunications sector.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Guatemala has a special unit for crime victims, as well as a witness-protection programme. However, these services tend to be limited in practice and are in many cases provided by civil-society organizations. Crime prevention is a relatively new concept in Guatemala. Until fairly recently,

the authorities focused on hard-line strategies designed to punish rather than prevent problems – for example, drug consumption was perceived as a criminal issue rather than a health one. However, there are now some interventions that focus on community services, vulnerable groups and behavioural change.

Civil society and the media play an important role in fighting organized crime in Guatemala. They keep the public informed and promote solutions, despite working in hostile environments. Guatemala is considered one of the most dangerous countries in the Americas for journalists, with many of them being attacked or even killed for their work. Human-rights activists have also been the victims of attacks, making Guatemala the sixth-most-dangerous country in the world for land-rights activists.

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*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.*