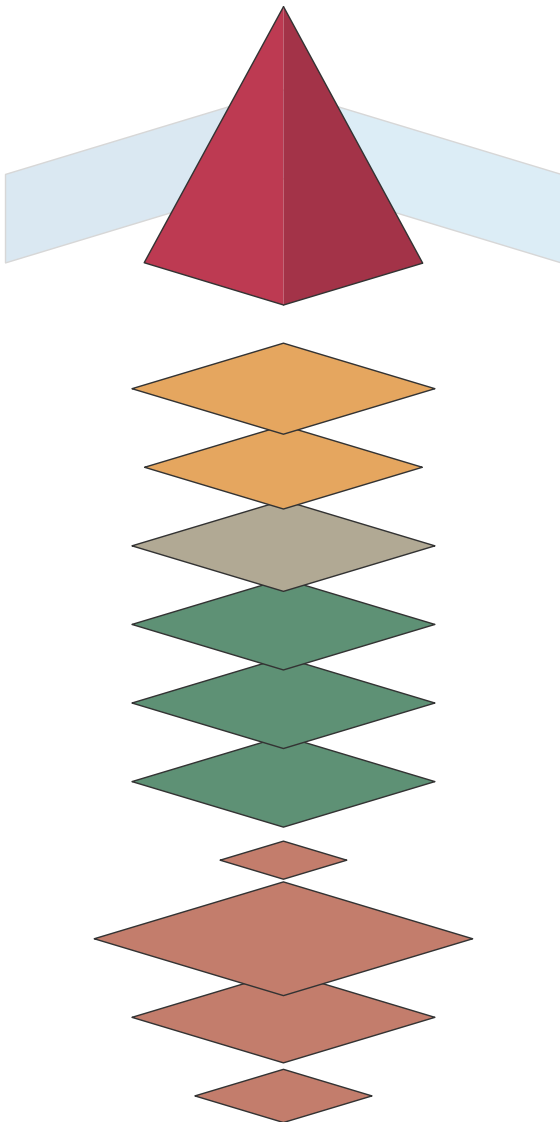




 **NICARAGUA**



 **6.06**
CRIMINALITY SCORE
40th of 193 countries
11th of 35 American countries
5th of 8 Central American countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **5.50**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	5.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	6.00
FLORA CRIMES	6.00
FAUNA CRIMES	6.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	6.00
HEROIN TRADE	2.50
COCAINE TRADE	7.50
CANNABIS TRADE	6.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.50

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **6.63**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	9.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.00

 **2.46**
RESILIENCE SCORE
175th of 193 countries
33rd of 35 American countries
8th of 8 Central American countries

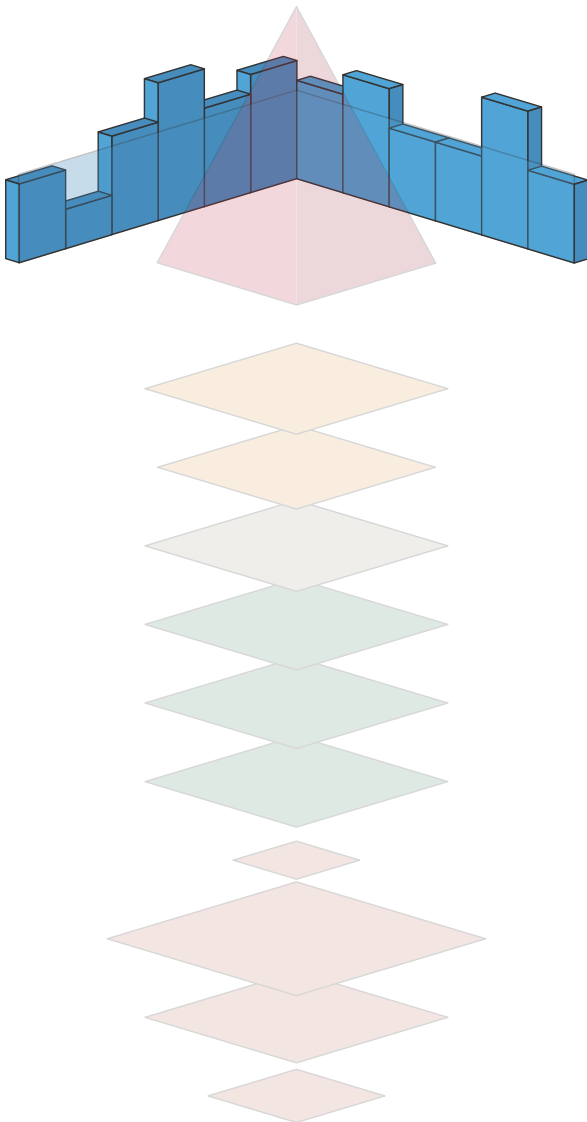


Funding provided by the United States Government.



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.

 **NICARAGUA**



 **2.46**
RESILIENCE SCORE

175th of 193 countries
33rd of 35 American countries
8th of 8 Central American countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	2.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	1.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	2.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	3.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	2.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	3.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	2.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	3.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	2.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	2.00
PREVENTION	3.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	2.00

 **6.06**
CRIMINALITY SCORE

40th of 193 countries
11th of 35 American countries
5th of 8 Central American countries

 CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.50
 CRIMINAL ACTORS	6.63



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Nicaragua's human-trafficking market is robust, with crime groups exploiting both domestic and foreign victims in the country as well as Nicaraguans living abroad. Additionally, the lack of effective investigation, prosecution and prevention efforts, rampant poverty and large groups of people without birth certificates or any identification papers make the situation particularly acute. A large proportion of victims are women and children vulnerable to sex trafficking, although labour exploitation is also prevalent, particularly within the agriculture, construction, mining and domestic-service industries, both within the country and in Costa Rica, Panama and the United States.

Nicaragua is also a source and transit country for human smuggling. It is part of an international route used by Cuban, Haitian, African and Asian irregular migrants on their way to the United States. In spite of that, the human-smuggling market is small compared to the rest of Central America.

TRADE

The arms-trade market in Nicaragua is substantial, with large amounts of legal and illegal weapons, including handmade ones, circulating in the country. Nicaragua has also been identified as the starting point for flows of illicit arms that go to Costa Rica and Mexico, often aided by state officials. Notably, foreign actors are believed to be in charge of organizing the market, while local groups organize the transport and logistics.

ENVIRONMENT

Nicaragua is home to a developed flora-crimes market, with around half of the timber felled locally trafficked illegally, due to the high demand coming mainly from China. Additionally, shipments of illicit wood are used to traffic drugs, while the market is largely facilitated by corruption. Violence associated with land grabbing is a persistent issue in Nicaragua, and in 2020, several indigenous community members were killed by an armed group with alleged links to land grabbers engaged in illegal logging. Animals, particularly felines, parrots, red-eyed tree frogs and turtles, are also illegally trafficked within Nicaragua and to other countries for consumption or as pets – a situation exacerbated by the lack of employment opportunities – despite the government implementing a number of wildlife protection strategies. In addition, Nicaragua has one of the highest rates of illegal gold production in Central America, which contributes to another very valuable illegal market. The country

fuels the illicit gold market in Costa Rica by providing the mercury used in gold extraction. Nicaragua is also a hub where criminal proceeds from illegal gold extraction can be laundered with the help of corrupt officials.

DRUGS

Nicaragua is a trans-shipment point for cocaine, owing to its strategic geographical location on the route connecting producing countries in South America and consumer markets in North America. Local crime organizations tend to collaborate with nationals from Costa Rica and Honduras to transport cocaine through Nicaragua, while Mexican cartels also have a strong presence in the country. The market is believed to have grown in recent years, partly aided by official corruption and involvement at the highest state level. Cannabis is the most widely consumed drug in the country and is particularly popular among teenagers, mostly because of its low price. Local groups control production in the country, which satisfies local demand. Additional quantities of cannabis are also trafficked from Honduras and Costa Rica, but groups from Nicaragua are again the organizers of these flows.

Heroin and synthetic-drug markets are limited due to the relatively high price. The legal status of ketamine in Nicaragua makes it a source country, with ketamine mostly trafficked into Costa Rica, while methamphetamine produced in Nicaragua is distributed on the country's Caribbean coast.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Nicaragua is home to a small number of mafia-style groups. Los Tarzanes is the most notorious, specializing in logistics and transport of cocaine from Colombia, marijuana from Jamaica into Nicaragua, Honduras and Mexico, precursor chemicals for methamphetamine production, weapons and other contraband. Other types of criminal networks are particularly prevalent in drug, human, wildlife and timber trafficking and tend to work with international counterparts including from Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Mexico. In addition, the prevalence of homegrown, paramilitary-style armed groups has increased in recent years, particularly since the start of the political and human-rights crisis in April 2018. Although the nature of the groups is contentious, there is growing evidence that these pro-government armed groups are operating across the country, using violence to silence critics and operating with support from the authorities at all levels. Overall, however, Nicaragua does not experience the same levels of violence at the hands of criminal actors as do other countries in Central America.

State-embedded actors, going all the way to the highest levels of power, including members of the judiciary and parliamentarians, are deeply engaged in criminal markets in Nicaragua. Furthermore, a number of foreign actors, including Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel and the Zetas and

Colombian and Venezuelan organizations, have established a presence in Nicaragua and control the cocaine-trafficking market in the country. These actors actively collaborate with local groups that provide them with services such as transportation and contacts.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Although Nicaragua does experience far lower levels of violence relative to other countries across the region, the country faces serious leadership and governance challenges, with the current presidential administration accused of colluding with drug-trafficking organizations, facilitating human-rights abuses and promoting corrupt practices. Despite official promises to combat organized crime through anti-drug-trafficking programmes, aiming to secure the country's borders, high-level members of the administration have come under fire for allegedly facilitating or actively participating in these crimes. In addition, authorities have been accused of grave human-rights violations after violently responding to a wave of protests that began in April 2018 in opposition to proposed changes to the social-security system. In the aftermath of the protests, more than 320 people died thousands of people were injured and hundreds were arbitrarily detained. Most of those who died were killed by agents of the state or members of armed groups aligned to the government. Furthermore, Nicaragua has transitioned further and further towards authoritarianism under President Ortega and governance has been affected by a lack of transparency across government institutions, a lack of integrity in public officials and the government's increased barriers to the access of public information, with official figures in areas including health, employment and gender equity either manipulated or simply not published since 2016.

Although the country is party to most relevant international treaties and conventions pertaining to organized crime and has extradition agreements with specific countries, Nicaraguan nationals cannot be extradited. This has helped high-profile individuals accused of crimes including corruption and money laundering to escape justice. While the country is working with international partners, including Honduras, to reduce illicit activities at the border, and Russia, on capacity-building for law enforcement, a number of international actors have severely criticized the country's human-rights and corruption record, including by threatening or imposing sanctions. At the national level, Nicaragua's legal framework includes some laws aimed at tackling organized crime, but these fail to include crimes against natural resources, such as illegal gold-mining, timber trafficking and wildlife trafficking. Meanwhile,

some recently approved laws severely limit the work of human-rights and political organizations.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Nicaragua's judiciary is extremely corrupt and ineffective, with its members appointed by Congress, which is controlled by the governing party. While there are no specialized anti-organized-crime units in the judiciary, the courts are prone to corruption and manipulation by criminal groups, drug cartels and politicians. Furthermore, the state of the penitentiary system is very poor, with severe overcrowding and inhumane conditions persisting, including the lack of fresh water. All this contributes to prisons becoming breeding grounds for crime organizations and fuelling corruption. Nicaragua's navy has been described as effective with regards to drug seizures, while the country's police force has a less positive reputation. Members of the police have been accused of working alongside paramilitary groups to commit arbitrary arrests, torture and extrajudicial killings, although some argue that the police were successful in reducing levels of violence in poorer urban neighbourhoods through running drug-awareness and -prevention programmes. As with the most other countries in the region, drug traffickers benefit from Nicaragua's strategic location, extensive coastline and corrupt officials to move drugs through the country.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Nicaragua is believed to have one of the highest risks of money laundering and terrorist financing in the world and has been on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list since February 2020. Efforts to tackle these crimes, including through the country's regulatory framework, seemingly only target people who are seen as opposed to the government, while high-profile figures have only been investigated for these crimes abroad. In addition, although Nicaragua's anti-corruption legislation is robust on paper, covering bribery, abuse of office and gifts to public officials, among others, it is not enforced effectively. Thus, rampant corruption within the country's political elites is a major impediment to the functioning of state institutions. This also creates a challenging business environment for foreign companies, which might explain the fact that many

companies have left the country in recent years, contributing to increased unemployment and poverty.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Even though the government developed a National Strategy for the Comprehensive Attention to Victims of Trafficking in Persons, it does not seem to be offering much real support in practice. Notably, there are very few, if any, human-trafficking investigations that lead to prosecutions, very few victims of trafficking are identified by the state, access to support is all but impossible and there is little to no cooperation on the part of the state with civil society on the issue of human trafficking. Although an agreement is purportedly in place between the government and several thousand businesses to monitor and report child sexual exploitation in the tourism sector, in practice no activity has been carried out. Nicaragua is, however, believed to be implementing some programmes aimed at reducing drug demand, including in areas such as prevention, treatment and social integration.

Although press freedom is guaranteed by the country's constitution, the government has sought to limit it through various administrative and judicial mechanisms. The vast majority of media outlets are owned and controlled by the government or its allies, and media freedom is restricted through the persecution of journalists, the abuse of libel and defamation laws and judicial harassment. The persecution of social activists and people seen as political opponents is severe, with scores reporting attacks, torture and unfair imprisonment, and a number of iconic human-rights organisations have lost their legal status, which has led to many leaving the country out of fear.

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.