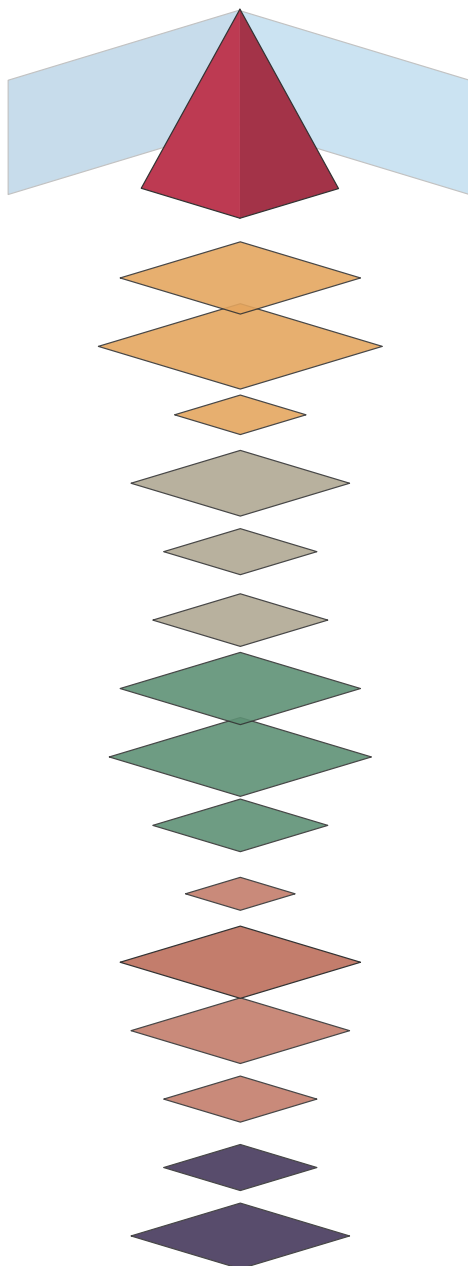




BELIZE



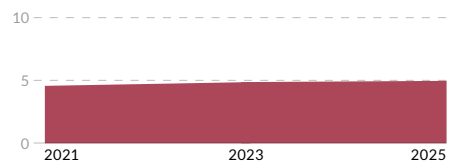
4.97 $\nearrow 0.10$

CRIMINALITY SCORE

103rd of 193 countries $\nearrow 3$

23rd of 35 American countries -

8th of 8 Central American countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS

4.53 $\nearrow 0.10$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.50	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	3.00	$\searrow 0.50$
ARMS TRAFFICKING	5.00	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	3.50	0.00
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	4.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	5.50	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	6.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	4.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
HEROIN TRADE	2.50	$\searrow 1.00$
COCAINE TRADE	5.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
CANNABIS TRADE	5.00	$\searrow 0.50$
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	3.50	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	5.00	$\nearrow 1.00$



CRIMINAL ACTORS

5.40 $\nearrow 0.10$

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	6.50	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	3.50	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	5.50	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5.50	0.00



This project was funded in part
by a grant from the United
States Department of State.

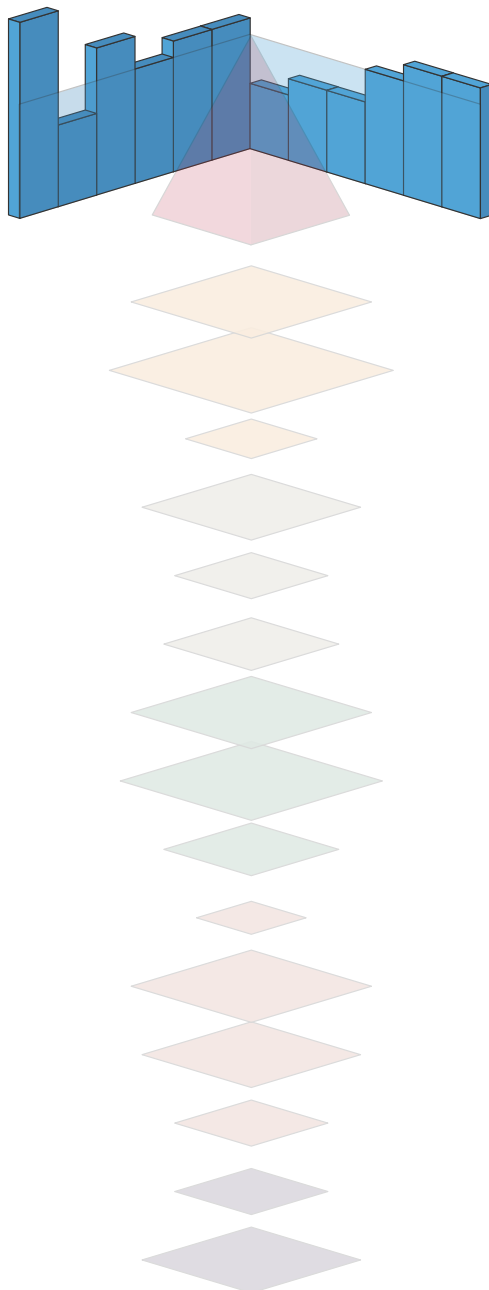


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BELIZE



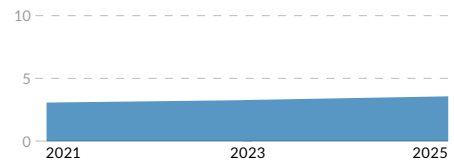
3.58 $\nearrow 0.29$

RESILIENCE SCORE

147th of 193 countries $\nearrow 8$

29th of 35 American countries $\nearrow 1$

6th of 8 Central American countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	6.00	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	2.50	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	4.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	3.50	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	4.00	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.00	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	2.00	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	2.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	2.50	$\nearrow 1.00$
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	3.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
PREVENTION	4.00	$\nearrow 1.00$
NON-STATE ACTORS	4.00	0.00



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Belize is a country of origin, transit and destination for human trafficking, with victims subjected to sexual exploitation and forced labour. Although illicit trafficking activities in Belize remain small-scale and largely unconnected to transnational organized networks, the country's geographic position within Central America makes it a critical passage for trafficking. Women and minors from Central America, particularly from Honduras, are increasingly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Many victims are lured with false job promises and are exploited in bars, nightclubs and hotels. Domestic trafficking remains a concern, with Belizean children found in commercial sexual exploitation and hazardous labour in agriculture, construction and mining. Language barriers prevent Belize from being a major player in international trafficking networks, but independent actors and regional criminal groups continue to operate within its borders.

Human smuggling has increased in Belize in the context of broader migration crises in Central America. The country is a transit point for migrants fleeing economic hardship, violence and climate shocks, particularly from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. Smugglers facilitate irregular migration through Belize's porous borders with Mexico and Guatemala, often utilizing taxi networks and falsified documents. Corrupt officials have been implicated in providing fraudulent immigration stamps and facilitating illicit border crossings. While some Belizeans seek to be smuggled into the US, there are cases of migrants falling victim to extortion and robbery once they cross into Mexico. Border disputes between Belize and its neighbours exacerbate vulnerabilities in the smuggling market.

Extortion is present but remains less violent than in neighbouring countries. Gangs have historically targeted businesses, particularly Chinese-owned establishments, in Southside Belize City. Nevertheless, these illicit activities do not appear to be systematic, with extortion-related violence remaining limited in Belize.

TRADE

Arms trafficking remains a challenge in Belize, with the country serving as both a transit point and a supplier of weapons to criminal groups. Though local gang involvement in international arms trafficking is limited, small-scale actors facilitate the movement of firearms. Belize's porous borders enable the smuggling of US-origin weapons into Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras. The country's role in

arms trafficking has contributed to the proliferation of high-grade weaponry, including rifles and grenades, which are accessible to gangs and civilians alike. Corrupt officials at border crossings have been implicated in facilitating the movement of arms. Despite declining homicide rates, firearm-related violence remains high, with illegal guns involved in most homicides in Belize.

Belize has historically been a transit point for counterfeit electronics and electrical goods originating from China and Singapore. The country is also a hub for counterfeit cigarettes moving through Panama. Although there is no evidence linking the counterfeit market to organized criminal groups, reports indicate rising levels of counterfeit pharmaceuticals in the country. Illicit trade in excise goods, particularly alcohol and cigarettes, is a significant issue. The Corozal Free Zone serves as a hub for smuggling operations, with contraband tobacco products originating from China, India, Vietnam and the UAE. Additionally, sugar smuggling into Mexico has led to shortages in Belize's domestic market, with some state-embedded actors allegedly enabling this trade. Tax evasion linked to this market is estimated to cause significant revenue losses in the region.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes are a growing concern in Belize, with illegal logging and deforestation driven by both domestic and transnational actors. The illicit timber trade, particularly involving rosewood, mahogany and cedar, is concentrated along the Guatemala-Belize border, where Guatemalan loggers engage in cross-border incursions to extract valuable timber. The Chiquibul Forest Reserve remains a hotspot for illegal logging despite increased efforts by Belizean authorities to curb the activity. Organized networks exploit weak enforcement and vast forested areas, contributing to environmental degradation.

Fauna crimes include the trafficking of endangered species such as jaguars, scarlet macaws, turtles and exotic parrots. The illegal wildlife trade is largely driven by demand in Asian markets, with jaguar body parts being smuggled for use in traditional medicine. The Chiquibul region is particularly vulnerable to wildlife poaching, with increased incursions from Guatemala. Belize's coastal resources are also under pressure from illegal fishing, particularly the illicit conch and lobster trade.

Non-renewable resource crimes, particularly illegal gold mining, are centred in the Chiquibul Forest. Independent criminal actors smuggle gold ore into Guatemala for processing. Weak penalties and lenient enforcement encourage continued illegal mining, with environmental consequences including deforestation and soil degradation.

Belize has also witnessed cases of fuel smuggling, with authorities intercepting illicit shipments intended for sale in the black market.

DRUGS

Belize is primarily a transit country for heroin moving from Mexico to the US, though consumption remains low, likely due to the presence of other narcotics available in the market. The limited number of heroin seizures suggests that Belize plays a relatively minor role in this market. Evidence points to the control of Belize's heroin trade by Mexican cartels who hire local Belizeans to smuggle heroin to the Mexican and US markets.

By contrast, the cocaine trade is notably active in the country. Belize serves as a major transit point for South American cocaine bound for Mexico and the US, with traffickers utilizing clandestine airstrips and maritime routes. Drug plane landings remain frequent, particularly in northern districts, and Belizean authorities struggle to intercept traffickers due to limited resources. The expansion of local cocaine production, with reports of coca plantations and drug processing laboratories in southern Belize, suggests a shift from transit to limited production. Corrupt officials have been implicated in facilitating cocaine shipments.

The cannabis trade remains significant despite recent legalization efforts. The passage of the Cannabis and Industrial Hemp Control and Licensing Act in 2022 allowed for regulated cannabis production and sale, but illicit trafficking persists. Mexican Purple Haze marijuana is smuggled into Belize, fetching high prices in the domestic market. Local gangs continue to control parts of the illegal trade despite the legal framework.

The synthetic drug market is growing, with Belize increasingly used as a transit point for precursor chemicals destined for Mexico. Seizures indicate the involvement of independent actors and small-scale traffickers in precursor smuggling. Crystal meth seizures have risen, suggesting an expanding local market.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cybercrime is an issue in the country, with organized criminal groups carrying out various offenses in the form of government website breaches and ransomware attacks, including a notable incident against Belize Electricity Limited. Fraudulent banking schemes have targeted local account holders, with cybercriminals siphoning funds through intermediaries. The country remains vulnerable to cyber threats due to weak cybersecurity infrastructure.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Belize has a long-standing reputation as a tax haven, with financial crimes ranging from phishing scams and embezzlement to tax evasion and real estate fraud. Large-scale fraud cases, including the 'Sanctuary Belize' scandal, highlight vulnerabilities in the country's regulatory framework. Although Belize was removed from the EU blacklist of non-cooperative jurisdictions in 2024, financial transparency remains an issue. Corrupt officials continue to facilitate illicit financial activities, underscoring the challenges Belize faces in effectively combatting financial crimes.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Belize has over 40 street gangs, but a handful of dominant groups – modelled after US gangs like the Bloods and Crips – control much of the marijuana and crack cocaine micro-trafficking. Their decentralized structure, shaped by fluid alliances and leadership instability following assassinations, fuels frequent violence. Many members are armed, and grenade attacks have been documented. Concentrated in Belize City, these gangs engage in drug trafficking, extortion and territorial disputes, with 900–1 400 members operating largely as subordinates to Mexican cartels. Fragmentation has intensified conflicts, especially in Southside Belize City, while limited law enforcement resources hamper efforts to curb the violence.

Criminal networks are mainly prevalent in the synthetic drug market and perpetrate low levels of violence. There are local criminal networks dedicated to trafficking in wildlife, cannabis, crack cocaine, cocaine and financial crimes such as phishing attacks. Notably, in recent years Belize has become a hub for the regional contraband cigarette trade with Mexico destined for Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador markets, generating millions of dollars in profits, due to the complicity of customs agents.

Corruption is a systemic issue in Belize, with state-embedded actors playing a crucial role in enabling organized crime. The perception of corruption has worsened in recent years, with law enforcement agencies and political parties ranking among the most mistrusted institutions. Political figures have also been implicated in facilitating criminal activities, with high-profile cases involving bribery, embezzlement and fraud. Law enforcement and military personnel have been directly linked to drug trafficking operations, with several cases over the years illustrating this trend. There have also been reports of government-owned assault rifles appearing at drug plane landing sites, further underscoring concerns about corruption within security institutions.

Foreign criminal groups, particularly Mexican cartels, play a dominant role in Belize's transnational organized crime activities. The Sinaloa Cartel has maintained a presence in the country for over a decade, using Belize as a key transit point for cocaine trafficking. Money laundering operations

linked to Mexican drug organizations have also been documented. Transnational groups such as MS-13 have reportedly used Belize's Corozal Free Zone to smuggle goods across Central America, indicating growing regional gang influence. Additionally, authorities have uncovered drug trafficking operations led by foreign actors, including Ecuadorian cartel members. Belize's San Pedro Island, a popular tourist destination, has attracted foreign criminal elements, with arrests of international traffickers occurring there. Moreover, Colombian networks have collaborated with Belizean actors to establish coca plantations and drug processing labs, suggesting an evolution in the country's role from merely a transit hub to a limited production site. Chinese criminal actors have also been linked to money laundering schemes, particularly involving drug-related financial operations for Mexican cartels.

Private-sector actors play a significant role in financial crimes in Belize, particularly in money laundering and tax evasion. Offshore banking and shell corporations have allowed illicit funds to be moved through the country with minimal oversight. Although Belize was recently removed from the EU's blacklist of tax havens, concerns persist over its regulatory effectiveness in preventing financial crime. Real estate fraud has also been a major issue, with Belizean nationals implicated in fraudulent investment schemes targeting foreign investors. Moreover, fraudulent business operations, such as bogus real estate projects, continue to exploit regulatory gaps in Belize's financial sector. The lack of enforcement in financial regulations allows criminal actors to exploit Belize's business environment for illicit financial activities. The offshore banking sector remains a key enabler of organized crime, facilitating the laundering of drug proceeds and illicit wealth.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Belize's governance framework reflects both democratic stability and systemic vulnerabilities. Despite efforts to strengthen political institutions, governance weaknesses persist, particularly in addressing corruption and organized crime. The country shows relatively strong political stability and active citizen participation, reflecting a functioning democratic system. However, weaknesses in the rule of law and regulatory quality hinder effective governance, creating opportunities for illicit activities. Reports of arbitrary detentions, corruption and human rights abuses continue to challenge governance credibility. The government has undertaken measures to address these issues, but enforcement remains inconsistent. The government's official stance rejects involvement in drug trafficking or money laundering. However, Belize's strategic location in Central America makes it a hub for smuggling activities, facilitated by weak regulatory enforcement and corruption among authorities. Efforts to strengthen governance have included constitutional amendments to restrict convicted criminals from holding public office, though political opposition has complicated implementation. Recent constitutional reform initiatives aim to enhance government accountability, though their effectiveness remains uncertain. Cybersecurity has emerged as a priority, with the government launching national strategies to combat cybercrime. Authorities have also taken steps to address rising homicide rates, yet gang-related violence continues to be a significant challenge.

Corruption remains a significant impediment to governance, with limited legal frameworks to address systemic abuses. Existing anti-corruption laws focus primarily on financial mismanagement rather than broader institutional integrity.

Calls for stronger enforcement mechanisms, particularly regarding public procurement and financial disclosures, have gained momentum. Transparency laws exist, but enforcement is weak. While the Right to Information law provides avenues for public scrutiny, exclusions and enforcement gaps limit its effectiveness. Reports indicate that corruption allegations against high-ranking officials have led to minimal legal consequences, undermining public trust in government institutions and reinforcing perceptions of impunity among political elites. Recent legislative efforts, including the establishment of the Good Governance Unit, aim to enhance transparency, but systemic issues persist. International scrutiny has further pressured Belize to improve governance standards.

Belize maintains international partnerships to combat organized crime, benefiting from foreign aid and technical assistance. The US and UK provide support for law enforcement training and border security enhancements. Regional collaborations with CARICOM, the Organization of American States, and the Central American Integration System facilitate intelligence sharing and joint enforcement operations. Belize actively participates in international human trafficking prevention initiatives, working alongside the International Organization for Migration and regional coalitions. Collaborative efforts have focused on enhancing victim protection and cross-border enforcement measures. Despite these initiatives, extradition challenges persist, with US authorities facing difficulties in securing the transfer of Belizean nationals wanted for drug trafficking. International organizations continue to provide capacity-building support for Belizean law enforcement agencies. However, gaps in domestic enforcement hinder the effectiveness of these

partnerships. Although Belize has increased participation in INTERPOL operations, border security weaknesses remain a significant concern, allowing transnational criminal groups to operate with relative ease.

Belize has a range of legal frameworks addressing organized crime, including anti-drug trafficking, human trafficking and financial crime regulations. However, enforcement challenges undermine their effectiveness. Existing laws targeting human smuggling are minimal, leaving gaps in regulatory oversight. Efforts to align with international standards have led to the introduction of national action plans, though implementation remains inconsistent. Environmental crime legislation has been strengthened, particularly concerning wildlife and fisheries protection. Belize has committed to international conventions on biodiversity conservation and marine resource management. Nonetheless, enforcement remains sporadic, with reports of continued illegal logging and fishing activities.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Recent judicial reforms aim to modernize Belize's legal system, including the establishment of a Senior Courts framework. Although these measures seek to improve efficiency, delays in judicial proceedings and high rates of pretrial detention continue to strain the system. Concerns over selective prosecution and political influence further undermine confidence in the judicial process. Although there have been efforts to enhance judicial capacity, implementation challenges persist. The establishment of a Senior Courts framework represents a step towards modernization, but the country's judiciary remains under-resourced, and financial constraints hinder meaningful progress. Belize's prison system has undergone improvements under NGO management, but reports of inhumane treatment persist. Cases of extended solitary confinement and inadequate legal representation have raised human rights concerns. Although rehabilitation programmes exist, resource limitations affect their reach and effectiveness. Law enforcement has faced criticism for excessive force, arbitrary detentions and procedural inconsistencies, further straining public trust in the justice system.

Belize's law enforcement agencies face significant resource and personnel challenges. Although international support has improved training and equipment, structural weaknesses persist. Corruption within police ranks continues to undermine enforcement efforts, with reports of officers accepting bribes and engaging in illicit activities. Efforts to combat drug trafficking have been hindered by Belize's limited surveillance capabilities. Public perceptions of police misconduct have worsened, with rising complaints of abuse and extortion. Despite internal accountability mechanisms, disciplinary actions against officers remain limited. Civil society organizations have called for enhanced oversight and reforms to address systemic issues within law enforcement institutions.

Border security remains a critical vulnerability, with weak enforcement facilitating transnational smuggling operations. Maritime and aerial smuggling routes, particularly along the borders with Mexico and Guatemala remain difficult to monitor due to inadequate radar and interdiction resources. Although drone technology has been introduced to enhance border security, enforcement agencies remain heavily reliant on international intelligence sharing. Law enforcement agencies struggle to maintain consistent surveillance, creating opportunities for organized crime networks. Nevertheless, in 2024, the Belize Defence Force stated it would strengthen patrols along the northern border to prevent the incursion of Mexican cartels. Despite these national efforts and international assistance in strengthening border security, enforcement remains inconsistent. Corruption among border officials has further compromised efforts to curb trafficking activities. Ongoing territorial disputes with Guatemala complicate security coordination, limiting effective cross-border enforcement.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Belize has taken steps to address money laundering risks. For instance, the key legislation was revised to better align with international standards. Furthermore, the country enhanced the powers of supervisory authorities to improve oversight of the financial and non-financial sectors. The country also worked on strengthening the beneficial ownership regime to improve transparency and the international cooperation for more effective information sharing with foreign counterparts. Despite these steps, enforcement challenges undermine their effectiveness. The country's offshore banking sector remains a key concern, providing avenues for illicit financial flows. International pressure has led to increased scrutiny of Belize's financial sector, with efforts to enhance compliance with global anti-money laundering standards. However, gaps in regulatory enforcement continue to enable financial crimes. Despite legislative reforms, the effectiveness of Belize's financial intelligence unit remains limited, with few successful prosecutions.

Belize has sought to improve its economic governance, but structural weaknesses remain. Although international evaluations have acknowledged Belize's progress in financial regulation, concerns over economic stability persist. The removal of Belize from international tax haven blacklists reflects some advancements, yet the country continues to face reputational risks linked to financial secrecy. Efforts to strengthen investment regulations have been met with challenges, particularly regarding enforcement consistency. Although Belize's economy has shown resilience, regulatory gaps in financial oversight continue to create opportunities for illicit financial activities. Regulatory weaknesses and limited transparency still make Belize an attractive hub for criminal financial activities.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Belize has taken steps to improve victim protection and support services, particularly for trafficking victims. Services provided include social work assistance, shelter, healthcare, legal aid and repatriation services, all funded by the state. Authorities have also enhanced coordination across departments, updated standard operating procedures, and implemented new referral and identification guidelines. Training for frontline personnel has been provided in collaboration with NGOs and international organizations. Despite these advances, notable gaps remain. Authorities have disproportionately focused on screening foreign nationals. Some shelters have been reluctant to host male victims due to past safety concerns, although all male victims have ultimately been accommodated. Fear of detention or deportation has deterred some victims from coming forward, and the absence of legal provisions for work permits for refugees and undocumented migrants has left victims vulnerable to exploitation. In the area of drug policy, Belize has established drug demand reduction strategies encompassing prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, with attention to gender and cultural factors. However, the country lacks programmes for social reintegration, mechanisms for evaluating programme effectiveness, and meaningful collaboration with civil society in policy development. It also falls short of promoting comprehensive national measures aligned with international standards.

Over the past years Belize has prioritized crime prevention and citizen security, driven by data-focused initiatives like the Belize Crime Observatory Strategic Action Plan and the ongoing National Security and Defence Strategy (2022–2027). The government has strengthened anti-trafficking efforts through the A-TIP Council, increasing funding, identifying more victims and expanding public awareness campaigns. Preventive measures included a migrant amnesty programme and new visa restrictions for high-risk groups, though enforcement gaps and limited resources have hindered full implementation. Belize also advanced in cybersecurity through the establishment of a national task force, the launch of a cybercrime investigation centre and digital forensic capabilities. Despite progress, challenges remain, including official complicity, limited victim screening, and weak oversight of labour recruiters and high-risk establishments.

Civil society in Belize plays a key role in combating organized crime by promoting transparency and institutional integrity. NGOs, and faith-based organizations, contribute significantly to community outreach. Initiatives further strengthen collaboration between the public, media and law enforcement. Despite being regarded globally as a ‘free’ country, press freedom faces challenges. The media is polarized, and journalists sometimes face threats. The recent Defamation Act, which expands what qualifies as defamation, has

raised concerns about restrictions on the press and declining transparency.

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.