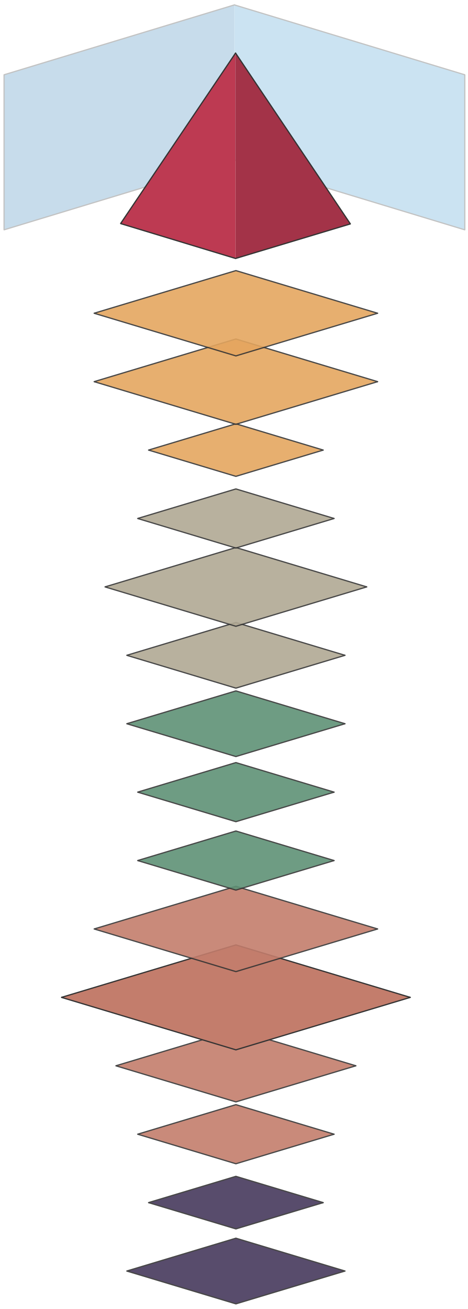
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

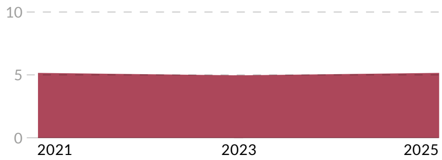
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



5.17 ↗0.15 CRIMINALITY SCORE

91st of 193 countries ↗3
21st of 35 American countries ↘1
4th of 13 Caribbean countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS 5.33 ↗0.20

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.50	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.50	↗0.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	4.00	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.50	↗0.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.00	↗0.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5.00	↗0.50
FLORA CRIMES	5.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	4.50	↗0.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	4.50	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	6.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	8.00	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	5.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	4.50	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	4.00	↗0.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	5.00	0.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS 5.00 ↗0.10

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.00	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.50	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	5.50	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	4.50	↗0.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	4.50	0.00

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

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Funded by the European Union

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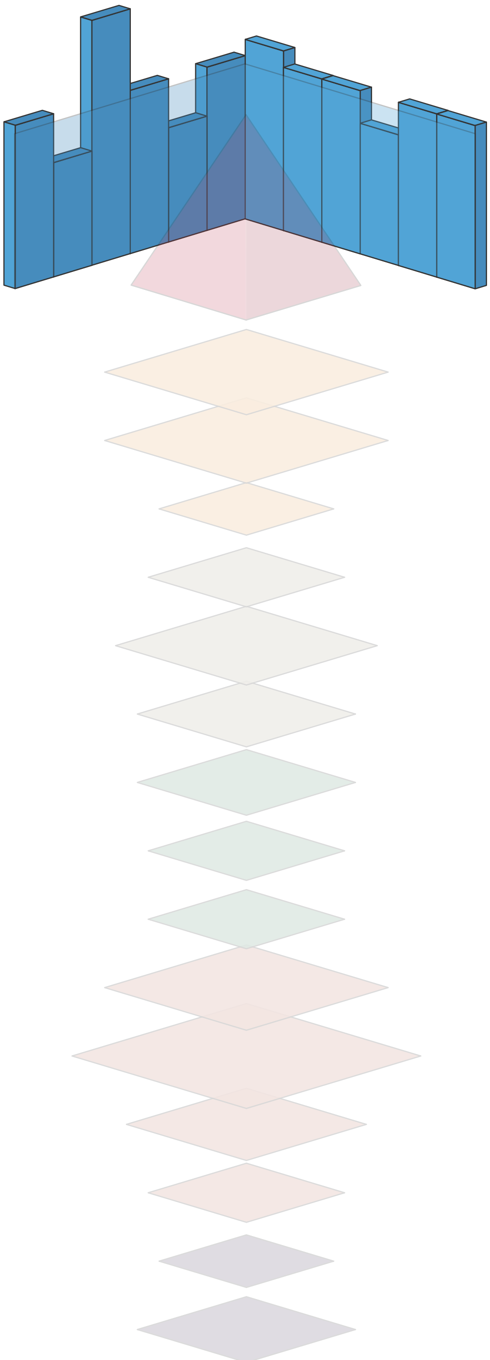
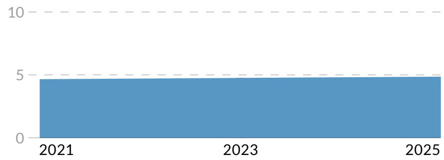


4.92 ↗0.12

RESILIENCE SCORE

91st of 193 countries ↗8
19th of 35 American countries ↗2
11th of 13 Caribbean countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	**5.00**	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	**3.50**	↗0.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	**7.50**	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	**5.00**	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	**3.50**	↘0.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	**5.00**	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	**5.50**	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	**5.00**	↗1.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	**5.00**	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	**4.00**	0.00
PREVENTION	**5.00**	↗0.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	**5.00**	0.00

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Human trafficking remains a complex and persistent issue, and involves sexual exploitation, forced labour and recruitment into criminal networks. The country serves primarily as a source and transit hub, though domestic and foreign victims – particularly women and children – are exploited in agriculture, construction and commercial sex, especially in tourism hubs. Victims are trafficked mainly to the US, Canada, South American countries such as Uruguay and Argentina, and destinations in Europe. Foreign victims, particularly Venezuelans, Haitians and Colombians, face sexual exploitation and irregular labour practices.

The political crisis in Haiti in 2024 and the subsequent border closure have intensified gang influence, leading to shifts in trafficking patterns within the Dominican Republic. While deceptive recruitment for exploitative labour continues, recent trends indicate that gang-controlled networks are increasingly dominating cross-border trafficking activities. The country is also a known destination for sex tourism, which contributes to the exploitation of women and children. Coastal resort areas and tourist towns such as Higüey, La Romana, Puerto Plata and Boca Chica serve as hubs for commercial sex work, with both public and private venues acting as sites for recruitment and potential trafficking.

The Dominican Republic remains a major hub for human smuggling, serving as a source, transit and, to a lesser extent, destination country. The market's value has increased, driven by worsening crises in Haiti and Venezuela, and exacerbated by limited legal migration pathways and strict immigration enforcement. Smuggling routes often involve irregular sea crossings to Puerto Rico, sometimes using intermediary islands along the way. Tactics such as maritime deception and the use of falsified documents are common, and related shipwrecks continue to cause fatalities. Recent cases show smugglers transporting Haitians and Dominicans using boats segregated by nationality. While some initiatives have focused on law enforcement training, persistent corruption and complicity continue to undermine efforts and expand the smuggling market. In recent years, extortion has increased, with clear indications of a sharp rise in extortive practices targeting Haitian migrants in the country.

TRADE

Firearms trafficking remains a serious issue, with most illicit weapons reportedly originating from the US and smuggled via maritime shipments concealed in commercial cargo. Seizures have increased in recent years, with a long-standing import ban contributing to demand in illicit markets. Firearms also enter from Haiti, facilitated by weak border controls. Criminal groups exploit official positions and use falsified documents to import weapons, while seizures of military-grade arms suggest that trafficking networks are also serving broader criminal enterprises, including drug trafficking organizations. Although overall homicide rates have declined, there continue to be firearms-related deaths.

The Dominican Republic also plays a notable role in the production, consumption and trans-shipment of counterfeit goods, particularly medicines, alcohol and cigarettes. Recent years have seen an increase in seizures of counterfeit clothing, electronics and vehicle parts. Despite enforcement efforts, the volume of illicit goods remains high, with millions of counterfeit units seized. Informal pharmaceutical markets persist, comprising a substantial share of national sales. Limited surveillance capacity, cross-border smuggling and high consumer demand for inexpensive goods contribute to continued economic losses and health risks – especially from adulterated alcohol and falsified medications.

Similarly, the illicit trade of excise goods remains a persistent challenge, driven largely by a large informal economy, regulatory gaps and porous borders. Cigarette smuggling has expanded, with seizures numbering in the millions and a marked decline in legal sales over the past decade. Undervaluation of imports – particularly electronics, vehicles and alcohol – has contributed significantly to fiscal losses. Although enforcement operations have intensified, the scale and significance of seizures in recent years suggest that smuggling continues to distort domestic markets.

ENVIRONMENT

The Dominican Republic remains both a transit and destination point for illegal timber, particularly guaconejo, oak and mahogany, with evidence of overvalued timber imports from the Amazon Rainforest possibly masking illicit financial flows. While domestic consumption is limited, timber imports exceed demand, suggesting the potential existence of laundering networks. Charcoal smuggling to and from Haiti continues, involving both large-scale operations and individual actors. Flora trafficking – especially in border regions like Pedernales – is often associated with corruption, document falsification and related crimes such as labour exploitation.

The country also faces ongoing challenges related to fauna crimes, particularly involving the trafficking of sea turtles and American eels – both of which are in high demand in Asia. While the overall value of the illegal fauna market is considered low compared to other criminal markets, recent investigations suggest high profitability and growing international connections. Wildlife trafficking is often linked to tourism, with specimens sold as souvenirs, and increasingly overlaps with organized crime and narcotics. Seizures of trafficked species, including macaws and mammals from South America, have risen. Despite improved enforcement efforts and international cooperation, the growing number of incidents suggests that the market may be expanding.

Although the Dominican Republic is rich in gold, nickel, copper and other non-renewable resources, it faces notable illegal mining issues, particularly involving unauthorized extraction and its role in illicit gold trafficking. Following disruptions in routes through the Dutch Caribbean, the country has become a transit point for Venezuelan gold, with flows continuing despite the easing of sanctions. Gold often moves through free trade zones and the jewellery sector, complicating oversight measures. Illicit mining activity has also contributed to water contamination, poor labour conditions and human trafficking involving irregular migrants. Although large-scale seizures are rare, international criminal networks remain active. The overall value of the illicit non-renewable resource trade remains unclear due to its overlap with legal trade.

DRUGS

The Dominican Republic remains a major transit hub for heroin trafficking to the US, though some networks operate exclusively abroad. While trafficking routes and destination countries remain unchanged since 2020, limited data obscures the size of the market and the volume of seizures. Proceeds from foreign trafficking operations may be laundered domestically. Research suggests opioid use is on the rise, particularly in urban centres, fuelling public health concerns.

The country is also a key trans-shipment hub for cocaine, primarily to the US and Europe. It plays a critical role in international drug routes, especially those from Venezuela, with smugglers using maritime methods like 'go-fast' boats and shipping containers. Domestic drug consumption, particularly in tourist areas, has increased in recent years. Drug trafficking also contributes to high levels of violence. High-profile arrests of government officials underscore the challenges in curbing drug-related activities and corruption.

Cannabis is the most consumed drug in the Dominican Republic, with trafficking originating from Haiti, Jamaica, Colombia and Mexico. It is often transported by truck or speedboat, and seizures most commonly occur along the country's coasts. Recent years have seen an increase in overall cannabis seizures. Transnational criminal networks and local gangs drive the market, with corruption hindering enforcement efforts. Although it is a major drug for domestic consumption, cannabis is not a dominant economic driver in criminal markets, and its overall market value remains unclear.

The Dominican Republic serves as both a producer and trans-shipment point for synthetic drugs, including ecstasy and fentanyl, primarily trafficked to North America. The country's large diaspora, particularly in the US, is heavily involved in distribution efforts and often collaborates with Mexican cartels. While there is minimal data on the market's value, it is considered smaller than that for cocaine and heroin. The tourism sector is also linked to local demand.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crime is a growing issue, with common offenses including data breaches and social media hacking. Government agencies are frequent targets. In recent years, the country has also experienced multiple malware and ransomware attacks. Despite enhanced enforcement efforts, accurately assessing the true scope and scale of this market remains challenging, as available reports often conflate cyber-dependent and cyber-enabled crimes.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Instances of fraud and embezzlement have increased, with investigations uncovering significant cases that speak to the scale of the market in the country. Recent incidents also highlight the growing role of digital platforms in fraudulent activities, with pyramid schemes continuing to be a major challenge. Public procurement fraud has been prevalent, with multiple officials implicated in schemes defrauding the state.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Local street gangs, known as naciones and pandillas, play a notable role in organized crime activities. These groups, primarily composed of young men, have a significant presence both nationally and internationally, with affiliations to gangs such as the Trinitarios, Latin Kings and the Bloods. While not central to transnational drug trafficking, these groups are engaged in smaller, intermediary drug flows. They are hierarchical, with distinct symbols, and are involved in activities like drug dealing, extortion and minor illicit crimes. They operate violently, often using bladed weapons, and have influence in Dominican prisons. Looser networks of criminal entrepreneurs are also involved in activities such as arms and human trafficking, migrant smuggling and the drug trade. Arrests of high-profile figures have led to local traffickers gaining control over regional routes. Dominican cartels, often with loose structures, have links to transnational trafficking networks, especially in the US. Smaller criminal markets, including those tied to natural resources, are facilitated by networks rather than mafia-style groups.

Corruption and state involvement in criminal activity remain significant concerns. In 2024, investigations uncovered a major corruption network involving public officials, money laundering, embezzlement and bribery, underscoring the systemic nature of corruption. The military and the police are also involved in drug trafficking, and there are links between criminal networks and political elites. Transnational networks further shape criminal markets in the country, with Dominican nationals abroad and foreign actors managing drug shipments, profits and illicit trade. Notably, Dominican and Haitian groups collaborate on trafficking cannabis and arms, as well as smuggling illegal timber, with Haitian criminal networks also controlling human smuggling operations. However, political instability in Haiti and closure of the Haiti-Dominican Republic border could alter these dynamics. Meanwhile, Venezuelan criminal influence is on the rise, highlighted by seizures linked to high-ranking Venezuelan officials.

Private sector involvement in criminal activities remains a concern. Companies, often operating under false pretences, such as car repair businesses, have facilitated money laundering schemes. Recent operations have revealed public officials and private companies' involvement in illicit activities, including fraud and narco-trafficking.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The government has prioritized the fight against organized crime, particularly drug trafficking and money laundering. Despite improvements in community-level security and anti-trafficking measures, the overall impact of these measures remains unclear. International assessments indicate mixed progress; while there have been improvements in democratic practices, ongoing concerns remain with regard to governance, the rule of law, corruption control and human rights – particularly discrimination and police violence.

Corruption remains a challenge, with several high-profile operations – such as Falcon, Medusa and Coral – exposing the links between the state and criminal organizations. Although there has been some progress combating corruption, particularly through digital improvements and the public ministry's increased independence, concerns remain about structural issues. The government's anti-corruption plan targets corruption from the previous administration but relies more on political will than enduring structural reform. The country lacks an independent anti-corruption oversight body, and transparency remains limited, particularly regarding access to public information. Recent efforts, such as the introduction of a new digital mechanism and participation in the Inter-American Open Data Programme, have sought to improve the transparency framework.

The Dominican Republic has ratified major UN conventions on trafficking, corruption and narcotics. It maintains extradition agreements with several countries, which have enabled the extradition of high-profile drug traffickers. The country has made strides in complying with international standards, bolstered by collaborations with INTERPOL and EU-funded border security programmes. Efforts to improve public procurement transparency and address counterfeit goods have been initiated with international support. Additionally, while wildlife protection programmes and anti-smuggling efforts are ongoing, their effectiveness has been difficult to assess.

Domestically, the government has taken steps to combat organized crime through legislation addressing drug trafficking, arms smuggling and money laundering. However, efforts to pass regulations enabling the seizure of assets linked to organized crime and corruption have faced obstacles. The country also lacks specific legal provisions criminalizing membership in organized crime groups. Moreover, existing trafficking laws – dating back to 2003 – are outdated.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

While the judiciary is independent, it faces challenges including political interference, corruption and resource constraints. Recent reforms to the penitentiary system aim to integrate traditional prisons and rehabilitation centres. However, overcrowding, food shortages, physical and verbal violence, forced labour and inadequate resources persist, hindering progress. A lack of trained staff further complicates the situation. The country's prison population far exceeds capacity, with many prisoners detained pre-trial. Concerns over judicial independence remain. The Attorney General's Office provides stability, though upcoming changes in management and constitutional amendments are matters of concern for the future.

The Dominican Republic has a national police force which comprises specialized units for narcotics, human trafficking, cybercrime and fraud. Since 2022, the country has enhanced its collaboration with international law enforcement to combat organized crime. It also has specialized prosecutorial offices for areas such as money laundering, arms trafficking and environmental protection, and cooperates with INTERPOL on investigations. Despite some progress, however, corruption, inadequate training and declining public trust in the police remain significant issues of concern.

The Dominican Republic faces challenges in combating trafficking due to its strategic location, porous borders and extensive transportation infrastructure, including eight international airports and 16 seaports. The border with Haiti is particularly vulnerable, facilitating both legal and illegal trade, including of narcotics like heroin and cocaine. The country also struggles with corruption within its security forces, undermining border control efforts. However, it has bolstered security with specialized border units and strong maritime patrols. Additionally, cybersecurity remains a weak point, with minimal progress in protecting digital services and data.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The Dominican Republic remains susceptible to money laundering, fuelled by corruption, tax evasion and a sizeable informal economy. Although the country has updated its anti-money laundering (AML) regulations and participates in regional initiatives, recent reports highlight ongoing deficiencies in its AML framework. While its readmission to the Egmont Group in 2019 signalled progress in strengthening the Financial Intelligence Unit, its asset forfeiture regime continues to fall short of international standards.

Despite experiencing sustained economic growth that reduced poverty and inequality over the past decade, the country still grapples with a significant informal economy. Tourism is a major economic driver, though coastal resorts have been linked to commercial sexual exploitation. While the Dominican Republic enjoys moderate economic freedom, it struggles with the legality of business operations and continues to face issues such as high food and energy costs. Business regulation also remains a concern.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Dominican Republic faces significant shortcomings in addressing human trafficking. Victims lack comprehensive support services, and there are no effective mechanisms for identification or referral to care. The government's witness protection programme is underfunded, offering protection only in extreme cases. Efforts to pass legislation for victim and witness protection have stalled since 2011. While there has been some progress – such as an increase in victim referrals to care services – specialized shelters remain limited. The government has been working with international organizations to improve rehabilitation and gender-sensitive approaches in the prison system.

The country has also implemented various community-focused initiatives focused on crime prevention, including community policing and youth programmes addressing values, violence and gangs. Despite improvements, these efforts sometimes lead to disproportionate targeting of certain demographic groups. The government has also introduced regulations against child marriage and raised awareness of human trafficking. However, challenges persist in addressing human trafficking and drug prevention and improving rehabilitation programmes. While NGOs and government agencies provide support for vulnerable youth, services for formerly incarcerated individuals are limited.

Civil society plays an active role in addressing corruption and monitoring organized crime. The Dominican Republic has established a system of municipal participatory governance to encourage citizen involvement in policymaking. In 2016, the repeal of legislation allowing imprisonment for defamation helped advance press freedom, though journalists – especially those reporting on corruption and organized crime – continue to face threats. Despite improvements in journalist safety and press freedom, challenges including media mogul dominance, impunity and violence against journalists remain.

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.