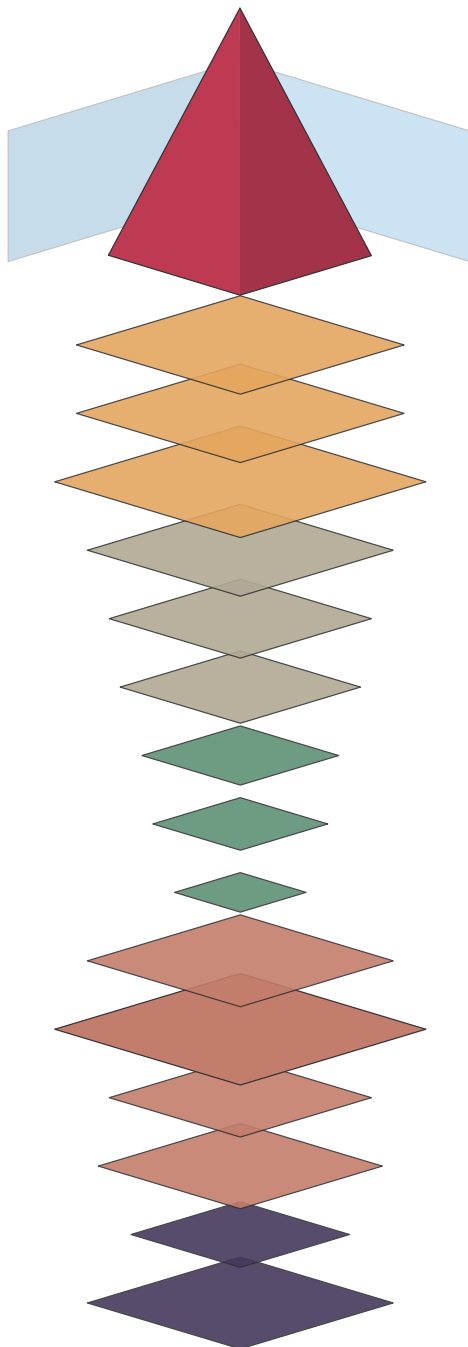
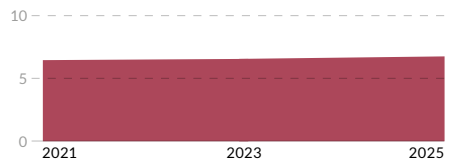


GUATEMALA



6.77 $\nearrow 0.17$
CRIMINALITY SCORE

25th of 193 countries $\nearrow 1$
9th of 35 American countries -
4th of 8 Central American countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS **6.23** $\nearrow 0.13$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.50 $\nearrow 0.50$
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.50 0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	8.50 $\nearrow 0.50$
ARMS TRAFFICKING	7.00 0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.00 $\nearrow 0.50$
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5.50 $\nearrow 0.50$
FLORA CRIMES	4.50 0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	4.00 $\searrow 0.50$
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3.00 0.00
HEROIN TRADE	7.00 $\searrow 0.50$
COCAINE TRADE	8.50 0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	6.00 0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.50 $\nearrow 0.50$
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	5.00 0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.00 $\nearrow 0.50$



CRIMINAL ACTORS **7.30** $\nearrow 0.20$

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	8.00 $\nearrow 0.50$
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00 0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00 0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	8.00 0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.50 $\nearrow 0.50$



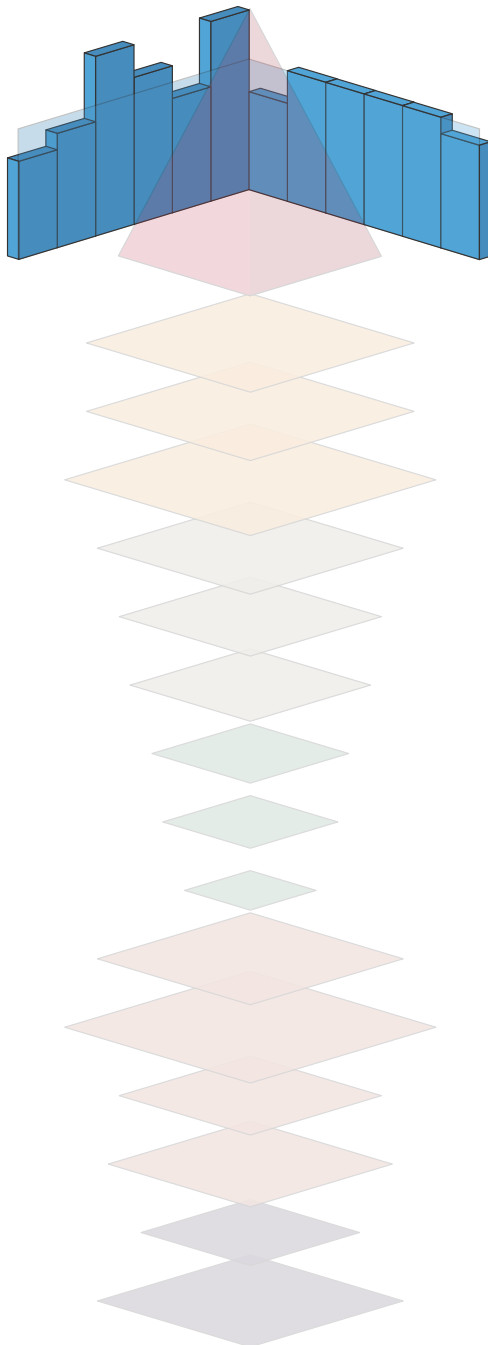
This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.



Funded by the European Union

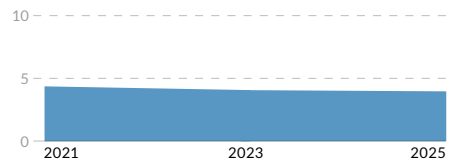
ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

GUATEMALA



4.00 $\downarrow 0.08$ **RESILIENCE SCORE**

130th of 193 countries $\downarrow 3$
27th of 35 American countries $\downarrow 1$
4th of 8 Central American countries -



<u>POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE</u>	3.00	0.00
<u>GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY</u>	3.50	0.00
<u>INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION</u>	5.50	0.00
<u>NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS</u>	4.50	0.00
<u>JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION</u>	3.50	0.00
<u>LAW ENFORCEMENT</u>	5.50	$\uparrow 0.50$
<u>TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY</u>	3.00	$\downarrow 0.50$
<u>ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING</u>	4.00	$\downarrow 0.50$
<u>ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY</u>	4.00	0.00
<u>VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT</u>	4.00	0.00
<u>PREVENTION</u>	4.00	0.00
<u>NON-STATE ACTORS</u>	3.50	$\downarrow 0.50$



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Guatemala serves as an origin, transit and destination country for human trafficking. The majority of cases revolve around sexual exploitation and labour trafficking, with significant involvement from organized criminal groups, including mafia-style gangs and loosely structured networks with international connections. Law enforcement, including police and military officials, have been implicated in facilitating these operations due to corruption, further complicating efforts to combat the crime. Migrants in transit, particularly from Venezuela, Honduras and El Salvador, are especially vulnerable and are often trafficked into forced labour, sexual exploitation or used for criminal activities such as drug distribution and extortion. The use of social media to recruit victims, particularly children, has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. Modern slavery remains a serious issue in Guatemala, with indigenous communities, particularly Mayan populations, disproportionately affected due to systemic inequities.

Guatemala is also a key origin and transit country for human smuggling, with an increase in smuggled migrants, mainly from Venezuela and Honduras. These individuals typically seek passage to the US through smuggling networks operating in cooperation with state authorities. Reports indicate that corrupt officials facilitate the transit of migrants, making enforcement efforts challenging. Smuggling operations are increasingly organized via social media, allowing smugglers to communicate and coordinate logistics efficiently. In 2024, Guatemalan authorities dismantled significant migrant smuggling rings, leading to high-profile arrests, including corrupt police officers. The distinction between human trafficking and smuggling remains blurred in media and enforcement efforts, making targeted interventions difficult.

Extortion is one of Guatemala's most pervasive criminal markets, with cases rising sharply since 2023. Organized gangs, such as Mata Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18, orchestrate large-scale extortion operations, while independent actors and small criminal networks exploit social media to impersonate gang members. The majority of extortion crimes originate within the prison system, with inmates using telecommunication services to threaten businesses and civilians. The food industry is particularly affected, with nearly all major companies reporting extortion demands. Government efforts to combat extortion include dedicated police units and prison crackdowns, but results remain limited. Extortion is a key revenue source for organized crime and is often linked to violence, forced displacement and targeted killings.

TRADE

Guatemala is a transit and destination country for arms trafficking, with weapons originating primarily from the US and South America. Organized crime groups, particularly gangs, use these arms to fuel violence and facilitate drug trafficking. Corruption within state institutions exacerbates the problem, as legal arms destined for law enforcement are frequently stolen and diverted to illicit markets. Although the government has increased international cooperation efforts, thousands of seized firearms remain at risk of being trafficked due to ineffective destruction policies. The illicit arms trade contributes significantly to the country's ongoing violence and instability.

Counterfeit goods are widespread in Guatemala, particularly falsified pharmaceutical products and branded clothing, largely sourced from China. The counterfeit drug market poses significant health risks as low-quality medicines infiltrate pharmacies and clinics. Although seizures have increased, enforcement remains inconsistent due to limited resources.

The illicit trade in excise goods is a major issue, driven by weak state control and high demand for lower-cost products. Smuggled goods include tobacco, liquor, foodstuffs and cosmetics, leading to significant tax revenue losses. Criminal networks, including MS-13 and Barrio 18, are increasingly involved in this trade, utilizing smuggling routes shared with drug traffickers. Although enforcement efforts have intensified, including binational operations and border crackdowns, smuggling persists, undermining local industries and the national economy.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes are present in Guatemala, including illegal logging of valuable woods such as mahogany and cedar. Organized logging networks export illicit timber, and corruption within local institutions allows these operations to continue largely unchecked. Violence against environmental defenders has increased, as loggers intimidate or attack rangers and activists. Enforcement efforts remain sporadic and underfunded.

Fauna crimes are a moderate concern, with Guatemala serving as a hub for wildlife trafficking, particularly in the Petén region. Endangered species, including wild cats, monkeys and exotic birds, are extracted and sold through intermediaries to international buyers. Although some animals have been rescued and reintroduced to the wild, there is limited information on the criminal actors behind these operations. Enforcement remains weak due to porous borders and inadequate reporting mechanisms. While there is no information about the actors committing wildlife trafficking in Guatemala for the reporting period,

there are indications of the existence of intermediaries transporting and selling the animals to foreign buyers, which suggests the involvement of international networks.

Illegal mining, particularly jade and sand extraction, is one of Guatemala's most lucrative non-renewable resource crimes. Criminal groups, often equipped with heavy machinery, operate unlicensed mines, leading to environmental degradation and social conflicts. Corruption within the mining sector allows illicit operations to continue despite police raids. The government has pledged to review mining concessions to curb illegal activity, but tangible reforms have yet to materialize.

DRUGS

Guatemala is a significant heroin producer and transit hub, with poppy cultivation concentrated in the northern regions. Mexican cartels, particularly the Sinaloa Cartel, control production and distribution, often recruiting local farmers who rely on poppy as a primary income source. Despite government eradication efforts, heroin production remains high, and traffickers increasingly use clandestine airstrips to transport shipments.

Cocaine trafficking is Guatemala's most profitable illicit market. The country serves as a major transit hub for South American cocaine, with routes extending to the US and Europe. Mexican cartels vie for control of trafficking corridors, leading to frequent violent clashes. Cocaine seizures remain substantial, but corruption within state institutions enables traffickers to operate with relative impunity. High-ranking officials have been implicated in facilitating shipments and laundering proceeds.

Cannabis cultivation and trafficking remain widespread, with production primarily for domestic distribution. Despite periodic police and military eradication efforts, the market remains resilient. The dismantling of key criminal organizations has not significantly disrupted the trade, highlighting enforcement limitations.

Guatemala is a key transit point for synthetic drug precursors, mainly fentanyl and methamphetamine ingredients. Mexican cartels coordinate large-scale imports of precursors from China, using Guatemala as a transit hub before shipping to Mexico and the US. In fact, Guatemala's once-thriving opium poppy cultivation has collapsed as Mexican cartels shift to trafficking fentanyl, which is cheaper, more profitable and easier to produce using imported chemicals. This shift has devastated rural farmers who relied on poppy income, while cartels now use Guatemala as a key transit point for fentanyl precursors. Although authorities have seized significant quantities, regulatory and institutional weaknesses prevent comprehensive control over the synthetic drug trade.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cybercrime in Guatemala is rapidly growing, with malware and ransomware attacks affecting both government and private institutions. The lack of a comprehensive legal framework leaves the country vulnerable to cyber threats, with foreign actors conducting the majority of attacks. In 2024, ransomware incidents targeted the ministry of finance and the ministry of education, disrupting operations.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crime in Guatemala is characterized by systemic corruption, tax evasion and fraud. High-level officials and private sector elites have been implicated in embezzlement schemes, using shell companies and offshore accounts to launder illicit funds. The informal economy further facilitates tax evasion, contributing to substantial revenue losses.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Guatemala hosts multiple criminal groups, including transnational gangs like Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18. Both maintain hierarchical structures, with leadership operating from abroad or prisons. MS-13 functions through decentralized cells following shared rules, while Barrio 18 is managed from prison by a command structure known as the Rueda. These gangs are entrenched in illicit markets – drug trafficking, extortion, arms smuggling and human trafficking – sustained by territorial control and violent disputes over strategic areas. In 2024, authorities uncovered new tactics, such as express kidnappings via unauthorized taxi fleets to boost extortion revenue. Despite arrests, gang members retain significant influence, particularly in prisons where recruitment thrives. In the northwestern regions, local groups like Los Pochos are also known to be active, collaborating with Mexican cartel to traffic drugs and smuggle humans.

Guatemala's criminal networks are less hierarchical than mafia-style groups but remain highly influential in various illicit markets. These fluid, adaptable groups engage in human trafficking, drug smuggling, cybercrime and environmental crimes such as illegal logging. Unlike organized gangs, criminal networks avoid direct territorial control, operating through opportunistic partnerships both domestically and internationally. One such group, Grano de Oro, which specialized in marijuana trafficking, was dismantled in 2023. Cybercrime networks, such as the group Trigona, have been implicated in large-scale cyberattacks, affecting both public and private institutions. Additionally, criminal networks capitalize on corruption by working with state actors to launder money, often through mining companies or real estate transactions. Although law enforcement has increased efforts to target these networks, their decentralized nature makes them difficult to dismantle entirely.

State-embedded actors play a significant role in sustaining Guatemala's criminal markets. Corruption within law enforcement, judiciary and political institutions enables illicit trade, particularly in drug trafficking, human trafficking and arms smuggling. Law enforcement officials have been implicated in facilitating arms smuggling, while high-level politicians have been accused of providing fraudulent mining licenses and aiding cocaine traffickers. Government entities have also been implicated over the years in cases of embezzlement and misuse of public funds, and recently there have been allegations of interference in Guatemala's democratic process, with corrupt political networks attempting to manipulate elections. The victory of Bernardo Arévalo in 2023 was met with legal resistance from entrenched political elites with a history of corruption. Although the new administration has taken steps to reduce the influence of corrupt actors, their presence remains deeply entrenched.

Foreign criminal actors maintain strong operational ties in Guatemala, leveraging local networks for drug trafficking, human smuggling and illegal resource extraction. Mexican cartels, including the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, exert control over trafficking routes in the northwestern regions, using local groups to manage operations. The US has been identified as a major source of cyberattacks targeting Guatemalan institutions, while

Russian-linked entities have engaged in bribery to secure mining contracts. In 2024, Turkish criminal networks emerged as new players in Guatemala's organized crime landscape, increasing their role in cocaine smuggling from Ecuador and Peru to Europe. These groups have also begun participating in the fentanyl trade, working closely with established criminal actors such as Hezbollah and the Sinaloa Cartel. The expanding influence of Turkish syndicates highlights Guatemala's growing importance as a transnational drug trafficking hub. Although foreign actors have not been implicated in direct political interference, their involvement in criminal markets continues to destabilize the country.

Private-sector actors remain deeply enmeshed in illicit financial flows, facilitating money laundering through the national banking system and investment schemes. Criminal organizations exploit mining companies, agricultural exports and cattle breeding operations to launder illicit profits. In 2024, authorities uncovered increasing use of cryptocurrency to launder heroin trafficking proceeds, further complicating efforts to regulate financial crime. The agricultural sector, particularly coffee production, has also been infiltrated by criminal groups using legitimate export businesses as fronts for money laundering. Despite growing awareness of private-sector complicity, enforcement remains inconsistent, with financial institutions and regulatory bodies failing to implement stringent anti-money laundering measures.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Guatemala has experienced significant political changes in recent years, particularly with the election of President Bernardo Arévalo in 2023. His administration has committed to addressing corruption and strengthening the rule of law, although entrenched political networks continue to resist these reforms. The previous administration faced widespread allegations of corruption, including links to organized crime, bribery scandals involving Russian mining companies and financial irregularities in vaccine procurement. Political instability was further exacerbated by attempts from judicial and political elites to obstruct Arévalo's certification and inauguration. Since taking office in 2024, the new government has implemented reforms targeting corruption within political institutions and law enforcement, yet challenges persist due to systemic corruption and resistance from entrenched actors. The administration has also prioritized dismantling extortion networks operating from within the prison system.

Government transparency and accountability remain weak despite recent reforms. The political and judicial systems have historically been intertwined, leading to widespread

corruption and political manipulation of the justice system. While the mere presence of the administration has hindered corruption networks from fully consolidating control over key branches of government, its limited authority over often-compromised institutions has prevented the implementation of robust anti-corruption measures needed to avert backsliding. For instance, the establishment of a code of ethics for public officials in 2024 marked a step towards improving governance, but the dismissal of anti-corruption prosecutors and continued resistance from the attorney general's office have hindered progress. The lack of transparency in public expenditures and the misuse of the public prosecutor's office for political purposes further underscore the persistence of corruption. Guatemala continues to face significant transparency and corruption challenges, as evidenced by the persistent deterioration in these areas.

International cooperation plays a vital role in Guatemala's resilience against organized crime. The country is a signatory to multiple international treaties, including the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and CITES, and actively participates in regional security initiatives such

as the Central American Security Initiative. Extradition agreements with the US and European countries have facilitated the prosecution of human traffickers and drug traffickers. Despite these efforts, Guatemala's participation in international reporting mechanisms remains inconsistent, particularly regarding arms trade agreements. In 2024, the government strengthened its regional cooperation with El Salvador and Honduras, focusing on biometric data-sharing to improve border security and combat transnational crime.

Though Guatemala has various legal frameworks to address organized crime, legislative progress has stalled in recent years. The newly elected congress has prioritized political disputes over advancing policies against criminal networks. However, discussions on stricter penalties for gang-related crimes and potential terrorist designations for MS-13 and Barrio 18 signal a renewed focus on crime prevention. Enforcement of intellectual property laws remains inadequate, with persistent challenges in tackling counterfeit goods and online piracy. Additionally, Guatemala lacks specific legislation addressing cybercrime, limiting its ability to prosecute digital offenses effectively.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The Guatemalan judicial system is plagued by inefficiency, corruption and political interference. Criminal organizations have long infiltrated the judiciary, contributing to high impunity rates and selective enforcement of laws. Judicial independence remains compromised, as seen during the 2023 elections when courts were used to obstruct political transitions. In 2024, congress appointed new supreme court justices, amid concerns over the selection process's susceptibility to political influence. Prison conditions continue to deteriorate, with severe overcrowding and rampant gang control over facilities. Criminal organizations such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 use prisons as operational hubs, facilitating extortion and recruitment efforts with the complicity of corrupt prison officials.

Law enforcement efforts have shown mixed results in combating organized crime. Specialized units such as the national division against the criminal development of gangs (DIPANDA) and narcotics enforcement teams have achieved some successes, yet systemic corruption within the police force undermines broader efforts. Despite receiving technical support from the US in training, law enforcement continues to struggle with key challenges in areas like human trafficking and wildlife crimes, largely due to limited resources and inadequate staffing. However, progress has been noted in addressing extortion, reflecting some improvement in enforcement efforts. In 2024, the government of Guatemala intensified its commitment to combat extortion through the creation of the special group against extortion, an elite unit within the national civil police. In addition, coordinated prison raids were carried out to isolate inmates orchestrating extortion schemes and other crimes from within detention centres.

Guatemala's territorial integrity is compromised by porous borders and transnational criminal activity. The country's strategic location makes it a vital corridor for drug trafficking, human smuggling and arms trade. Weak border security, coupled with corruption among border officials, facilitates illegal crossings, particularly at the Guatemala-Mexico border, where over 21 documented 'blind spots' exist. Mexican cartels have increased their presence in border regions, fuelling violence and challenging state authority. Although Guatemala has taken steps to improve surveillance and military presence in key areas, corruption and limited resources hinder effective border enforcement.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Anti-money laundering efforts in Guatemala remain insufficient, with no significant legislative advancements since 2020. The country continues to face pressure from international financial bodies to strengthen its regulatory framework to prevent financial crimes. The International Monetary Fund urged Guatemala to align its money-laundering policies with international standards to avoid potential blacklisting. Although the financial sector includes a specialized unit for financial investigations, enforcement mechanisms remain weak, allowing criminal networks to exploit the banking system for illicit transactions. The increasing use of cryptocurrencies for money laundering, particularly in drug trafficking operations, poses an additional challenge.

The country's economic regulatory capacity is hindered by systemic corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies and weak rule of law. Business and property rights protections are selectively applied, benefiting political elites while marginalizing small business owners and indigenous communities. Organized crime heavily impacts the private sector through extortion and fraud, particularly targeting small businesses, the food industry and waste management companies. Additionally, cybercrime continues to rise, affecting both private enterprises and financial institutions. Weak labour protections and lack of investment in rural economic development further contribute to Guatemala's susceptibility to organized crime's economic influence.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support services in Guatemala have expanded, yet resources remain inadequate to meet demand. The institute for victims provides legal and psychological assistance, but its reach is limited due to budget constraints. Although NGOs play a crucial role in assisting victims of human trafficking and drug-related crimes, government funding for these organizations has declined. Law enforcement cooperation with NGOs has improved in some areas, particularly regarding human trafficking cases. However, victim protection programmes remain underfunded, and shelters for trafficking survivors, particularly for adult victims, are scarce. Recent legislative

reforms have enhanced missing persons alerts, but broader victim support systems require further investment. As for support provided to drug users, authorities have continued to develop care services for people with drug addiction problems through the only treatment service in the country, located in Guatemala City. Drug users in Guatemala continue to be seen as criminals rather than victims, and drug consumption as a criminal rather than a health problem.

Crime prevention efforts remain primarily focused on law enforcement rather than long-term social solutions. Guatemala maintains action plans addressing human trafficking, labour exploitation and drug-related crimes, yet their effectiveness is hampered by inconsistent funding and limited enforcement. Military deployments at the Mexico border aim to curb cartel influence, but the state has yet to implement comprehensive community-based crime prevention initiatives. Environmental crimes, particularly illegal logging in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, continue unabated due to weak enforcement and lack of government prioritization.

Non-state actors, including civil society organizations and the private sector, play an increasingly vital role in addressing organized crime. However, journalists and human rights defenders continue to face harassment, threats and criminal prosecutions for exposing corruption and criminal activities. Guatemala saw increased government and criminal group repression of investigative journalism in recent years. The country ranks among the most dangerous in Latin America for human rights defenders, with frequent targeted killings of activists. Despite these risks, civil society remains active in monitoring government accountability, particularly in anti-corruption efforts. Indigenous communities have also taken the lead in environmental protection, implementing local conservation initiatives in the absence of strong government enforcement. Guatemala has taken steps to integrate civil society into crime prevention initiatives, including launching the Citizen Observatory for Anti-Corruption in 2024. This programme, supported by local NGOs and international partners, aims to enhance public oversight of government transparency and budget allocations. Additionally, private-sector actors have increased engagement in anti-human trafficking efforts, particularly within the tourism and hospitality industries. However, greater collaboration between the state and civil society is necessary to strengthen resilience against organized crime.

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