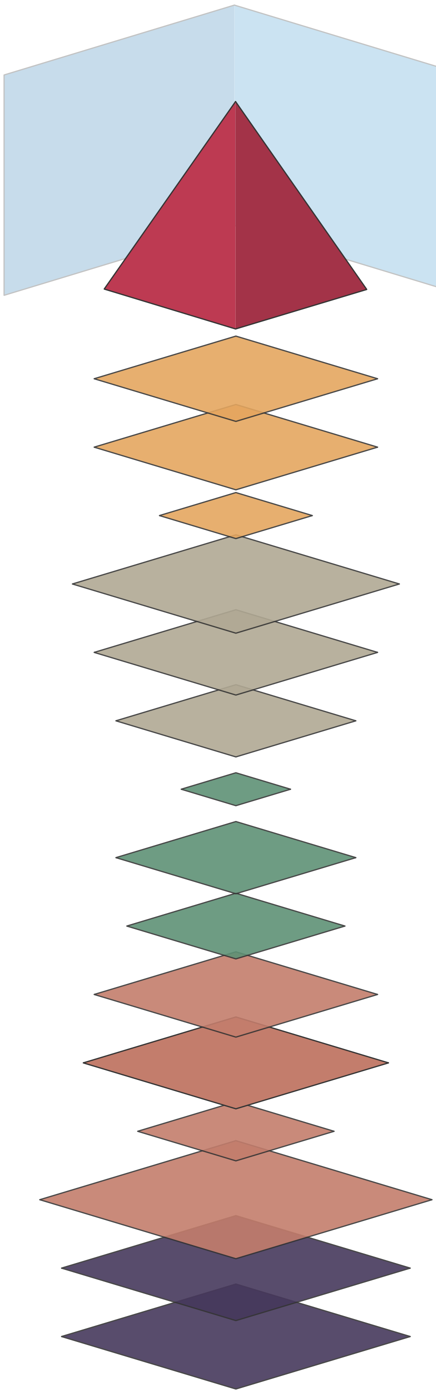
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

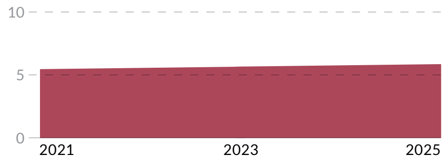
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

UNITED STATES



5.87 ↗0.20
CRIMINALITY SCORE

60th of 193 countries ↗7
14th of 35 American countries ↗2
1st of 2 North American countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS	**6.13**	↗0.30
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.50	↗0.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.50	↗1.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	3.50	↗0.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	7.50	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.50	↗0.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5.50	↗0.50
FLORA CRIMES	2.50	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	5.50	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	5.00	↗0.50
HEROIN TRADE	6.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	7.00	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	9.00	↗0.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	8.00	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	8.00	↗0.50

CRIMINAL ACTORS	**5.60**	↗0.10
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.50	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	4.50	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.00	↗0.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.00	0.00

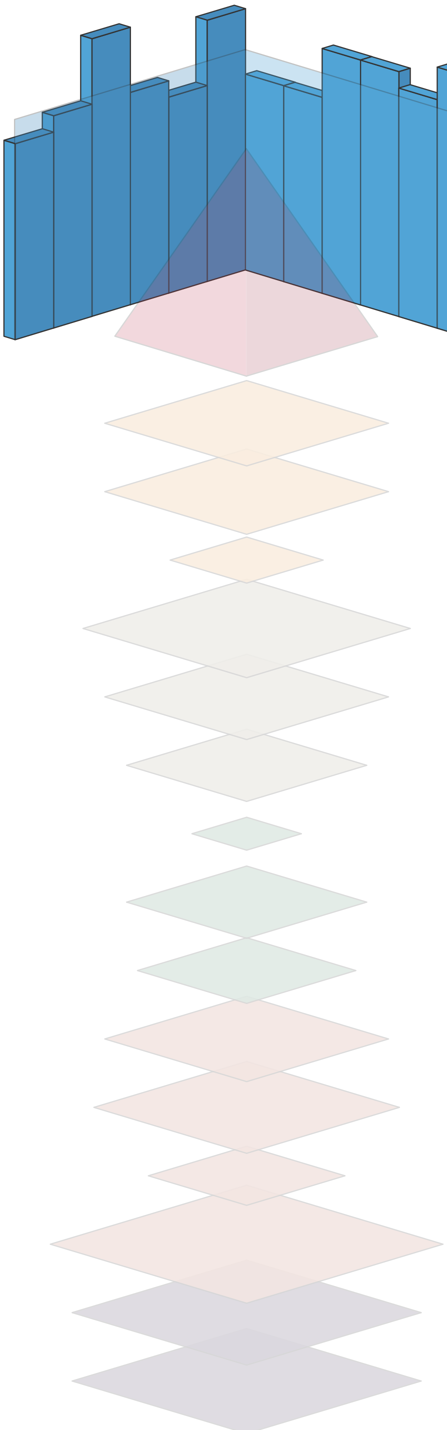
This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.

enact

Funded by the European Union

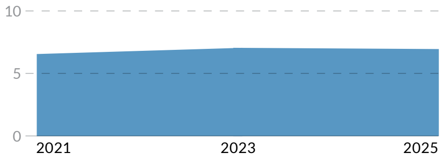
ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

UNITED STATES



6.96 ↘0.17 RESILIENCE SCORE

27th of 193 countries ↘3
3rd of 35 American countries -
2nd of 2 North American countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	**6.00**	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	**6.50**	↗0.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	**8.50**	↘0.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	**6.50**	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	**6.00**	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	**8.00**	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	**6.00**	↘0.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	**6.00**	↘0.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	**7.50**	↘0.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	**7.50**	0.00
PREVENTION	**7.00**	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	**8.00**	↘0.50

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

The United States remains a notable hub for human trafficking, acting as a destination, transit and source country. This market is primarily driven by local demand and transnational networks, with significant activity concentrated along the US–Mexico border. Corrupt state officials and private sector actors often play a role in this dynamic, exploiting vulnerable populations. Victims originate from various global regions, with Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico being the most common source countries. The border crisis has exacerbated trafficking, with unaccompanied minors, migrants and asylum seekers being especially vulnerable. Perpetrators include criminal organizations, domestic gangs, large employers and individuals in positions of authority. Common sectors for labour exploitation include agriculture, construction, hospitality and domestic work, while sex trafficking is facilitated through brothels, massage parlours, online platforms and street-level operations. Victims are lured with false job offers and coerced into servitude across various industries. Efforts to combat trafficking face challenges due to gaps in legal frameworks, particularly in visa programmes and immigration detention facilities, which increase the vulnerability of migrant victims.

The human smuggling market is primarily concentrated along the US–Mexico border, with Latin American criminal organizations, 'coyotes' (human smugglers) and clan-based networks controlling routes. The demand for smuggling services has surged due to increasingly restrictive migration policies. Smugglers provide varying service levels, from 'all-inclusive' packages to 'pay-as-you-go' models. Mexican cartels, such as the Jalisco New Generation Cartel and the Sinaloa Cartel, tax and oversee smuggling operations, often engaging in poly-criminality by combining human smuggling with drug and arms trafficking. The growing number of border encounters indicates a rising demand for these illicit services. Violence remains pervasive, with migrants subjected to kidnapping, extortion and forced labour along smuggling routes. Extortion and protection racketeering in the US are not highly consolidated but occur in localized criminal enterprises involving mafia-style groups, gangs and organized retail crime networks. Cases involving Italian–American crime families, Latin American organizations and transnational migrant extortion rackets have emerged, particularly along the US–Mexico border. These episodes highlight a resurgence in organized retail crime and high-level extortion schemes. Criminal actors engage in loansharking, labour union extortion and migrant ransom schemes, often using intimidation and violence.

TRADE

The US is a key player in the global arms trafficking market, acting as both a supplier and transit point. Over half of firearms seized in Mexico originate from the US, with smuggling facilitated through 'straw purchases' and the 'ant trade', where small quantities are smuggled to avoid detection. Smuggling routes exploit weak state gun laws, facilitating illegal flows to Mexico, Haiti and the Caribbean. Firearms trafficking intersects with human and drug smuggling, fuelling violence and organized crime. The demand for firearms domestically fuels gang conflicts and organized crime, with trafficked weapons contributing to urban violence and cartel warfare.

The counterfeit goods market in the US has expanded, with luxury items, pharmaceuticals and electronic goods being the most commonly counterfeited. E-commerce has fuelled this trade, with most counterfeit seizures occurring in international mail and online marketplaces. China, Turkey, Thailand and the Philippines are major suppliers in this trade. The market is linked to labour exploitation, with counterfeit production involving poor working conditions. Counterfeits, especially pharmaceuticals, pose significant public health risks, particularly with the rise in illicit fentanyl-laced medications.

The illicit trade of excise goods, particularly cigarettes and alcohol, is well-established, primarily driven by state-to-state smuggling rather than international trafficking. Smuggling occurs primarily between states with varying tax rates. High-tax states like New York, California and Massachusetts experience the highest inbound smuggling rates, while lower-tax states like Virginia and Wyoming serve as sources. Smuggling networks range from small-scale actors to organized criminal groups. Authorities are increasingly concerned about potential expansion by Mexican cartels into US tobacco trafficking. This market contributes to substantial tax revenue losses and intersects with money laundering schemes.

ENVIRONMENT

The US has a growing but under-reported flora criminal market, primarily driven by plant poaching. High-value species such as cacti, Dudleya succulents, Goldenseal, ginseng and Venus flytraps are increasingly targeted, with evidence from online marketplaces and discreet black markets revealing large-scale illicit trade. Illegal logging also occurs but is limited due to the dominance of legal timber industries. Small, loosely organized domestic actors primarily operate in secluded areas, making detection difficult. While some poached plants are trafficked abroad, particularly to Asia and Mexico, most profits remain within the US.

Fauna crimes are more extensive, with the US serving as both a source and destination country for illicitly traded species. Domestic trafficking targets species such as black bears, bighorn sheep, elk and sturgeon, while imports often come from Latin America and the Caribbean. The US–Mexico border sees frequent seizures of totoaba bladders and exotic species. High-value items, including totoaba bladders, shark fins, illegal caviar and black bear parts, fetch tens of thousands of dollars on the black market.

Non-renewable resource crimes primarily involve illegal gold mining and smuggling. The US is a major importer of illicit gold from Latin America, with organized crime groups in Colombia, Peru and Venezuela laundering profits through the US financial system. Other illicitly traded minerals include copper and silver. The illegal trade of uranium and rare earth metals is also a concern, particularly with smuggling routes linked to China and Russia. Foreign criminal networks, aided by domestic groups, control the trade, which is closely linked to drug trafficking, arms smuggling and human trafficking.

DRUGS

The US has a large and entrenched heroin trade, primarily supplied by Mexican criminal groups, with contributions from Colombia and Afghanistan. The trade involves both foreign and domestic criminal organizations, with most traffickers being US citizens. Although heroin use has been increasingly overshadowed by fentanyl and targeted by active countermeasures, the supply of this drug persists at concerning levels.

The cocaine market remains extensive, supplied mainly by Colombian and Peruvian criminal groups, with Mexican networks facilitating its transit. Cocaine trafficking routes reaching the US are complex. The drug is trafficked through Mexico and the Caribbean, often involving trans-shipments. Criminal groups manage distribution, linking cocaine trade to arms trafficking and illegal gold mining. Domestic consumption is significant, despite declining demand due to synthetic drugs. The US sees tens of thousands of annual overdoses related to cocaine, often laced with synthetic opioids. Recent law enforcement seizures have been substantial, but cocaine remains widely available.

The cannabis market is fragmented due to varying state laws on legalization. Although the legal market is growing, illicit supply chains persist, particularly with Chinese criminal networks and Mexican suppliers fuelling an underground trade.

The synthetic drug market, led by fentanyl and methamphetamine, represents the greatest drug-related threat in the US. Fentanyl overdoses account for the majority of US drug-related deaths, with the Sinaloa Cartel and Jalisco New Generation Cartel dominating production. Precursor chemicals from China and India fuel this market, while Mexican criminal groups oversee large-scale trafficking operations. Synthetic drugs are increasingly laundered through money laundering networks, often using cryptocurrency. Methamphetamine production within the US has declined, but cartel-controlled manufacturing in Mexico has surged, ensuring steady supply. Despite significant DEA seizures and arrests, cartels continue adapting by disguising shipments and using front companies.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

The US cyber-dependent crime market is a major threat, impacting critical infrastructure sectors such as healthcare, finance, transportation and defence. Cyberattacks, including ransomware, malware and data breaches, result in billions in losses. Foreign groups, primarily from Russia and China, play a key role, employing sophisticated hacking strategies and mainly targeting government infrastructure, financial institutions and private corporations. A 2024 breach of the US Treasury highlighted vulnerabilities in third-party cybersecurity. Despite federal task forces combating cybercrime, challenges persist due to its evolving nature, placing the US among the top global cyber-dependent crime markets.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in the US are highly consolidated, involving fraud, identity theft, tax evasion and embezzlement. States most affected include California, Florida and Texas. Shopping and imposter scams have surged, with Vermont and Wyoming leading in cases. The market is highly lucrative and undermines tax revenue and business integrity, with estimated losses in the hundreds of billions of dollars annually. Criminal networks exploit loopholes in state regulations, leveraging shell companies and offshore accounts. Although all states criminalize financial crimes, regulatory inconsistencies enable illicit activities. The scale of imposter scams, shopping scams, job scams and investment schemes continues to expand, requiring more robust oversight. Reports show a 25% rise in financial losses to fraud in 2024, with victims losing billions of dollars annually to these schemes.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

The US hosts a vast and varied organized crime landscape, encompassing street gangs, motorcycle gangs, prison gangs and international mafias. These groups exert territorial control at a local level, often engaging in violent conflicts and leveraging prison networks for influence. Criminal enterprises include drug and arms trafficking, extortion, human trafficking and protection rackets, with some groups imposing illicit 'taxes' on businesses. Corruption within prison systems and law enforcement facilitates their operations, weakening institutional control. Although certain factions operate as independent entities, others maintain transnational ties, particularly with foreign criminal networks. The persistent threat posed by these groups stems from their access to weapons, organized hierarchies and ability to evade law enforcement through corruption and systemic vulnerabilities.

Criminal networks in the US operate more fluidly than hierarchical mafia-style groups, specializing in illicit markets such as drug distribution, human smuggling and cybercrime. These loosely organized entities often collaborate with transnational organizations, adapting to market fluctuations and law enforcement strategies. Many of these networks are linked to domestic street gangs or foreign cartels, facilitating the movement of narcotics across borders. In particular, drug-related syndicates maintain operational alliances with Mexican cartels, playing a pivotal role in fentanyl and cocaine trafficking. Due to their adaptable structures, these networks are difficult to dismantle, frequently shifting tactics to evade prosecution. Violence remains a hallmark of these groups, often employed as a means of market control and intimidation. The decentralized nature of criminal networks poses challenges for law enforcement, as their members operate in fluid, overlapping circles that lack identifiable leadership structures.

Although the US has relatively strong institutional safeguards against organized crime infiltration, corruption among public officials remains a concern. Allegations have been raised regarding business dealings with foreign entities, though definitive proof remains scarce. Low level officials, particularly in law enforcement and border control, have been implicated in aiding smuggling operations or accepting bribes. Corruption prosecutions have declined in recent years, raising concerns about enforcement effectiveness. Nevertheless, regulatory oversight mechanisms and independent investigative bodies work to limit the impact of state-embedded actors on organized crime. Despite isolated incidents, state-embedded actors in the US do not exert widespread influence over criminal markets.

Transnational criminal organizations significantly shape the US organized crime landscape, with Mexican cartels, Balkan mafias and Asian crime syndicates maintaining a deep-rooted presence. Mexican cartels, including the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, dominate drug trafficking operations, supplying heroin, cocaine and synthetic drugs to domestic markets. Balkan criminal groups engage in weapons smuggling and human trafficking, leveraging their established European networks. Asian criminal syndicates, particularly those from China and Southeast Asia, contribute to cybercrime, financial fraud and drug precursor smuggling. Russian and Eastern European cybercriminals play a crucial role in cyber-enabled crimes, including ransomware attacks and election interference. The pervasive nature of these foreign actors underscores the complexity of transnational crime in the US, with international partnerships fuelling illicit trade and financial crime.

The private sector in the US has both facilitated and been exploited by organized crime through financial misconduct, corporate tax evasion and regulatory loopholes. Industries such as real estate, luxury goods and financial services have been implicated in laundering illicit proceeds. The role of US-based financial institutions in offshore tax evasion has been highlighted in investigations such as the Pandora Papers, which exposed the use of certain states as tax havens. Moreover, some businesses along the US–Mexico border have been linked to human trafficking operations, knowingly or unknowingly enabling criminal networks. Although public-sector corruption remains relatively low, corporate malfeasance and opaque financial practices create vulnerabilities that organized crime groups exploit. The complex nature of private-sector crime, particularly in high-value markets, continues to pose significant challenges to regulatory enforcement and oversight.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The US government, under President Joe Biden's administration, maintained an active stance against organized crime, particularly in addressing drug and human trafficking. Presidential directives emphasized combating transnational criminal networks, reflecting the country's prioritization of organized crime as both a domestic security issue and a political matter. However, the federal structure, along with varying state-level laws, hampers cohesive enforcement and governance efforts. The regulatory quality indicator remains high, but internal political divisions and factionalized elites pose challenges to unified governance. The US has not experienced internal conflict recently but remains engaged in external conflicts, including Ukraine and Palestine, while geopolitical tensions with Russia, North Korea and China continue.

The US has implemented several anti-corruption mechanisms, including the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Centre and a national strategy on countering corruption. Indicators suggest moderate corruption control, though public distrust towards the political elite persists, fuelled by concerns over transparency and regulatory oversight. Judicial independence and budget transparency remain high, yet recent court rulings have raised concerns regarding the limitations of prosecutorial power in tackling corruption. Although government initiatives, such as reinstating regular White House press briefings, have improved transparency efforts, legislative efforts to enhance ethics and oversight remain stalled.

The US adheres to international standards on organized crime, corruption and illicit trade, participating in multiple international conventions, including the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and various anti-corruption treaties. It maintains a broad network of extradition treaties, though cooperation is limited with certain countries. Although the country re-engaged with global institutions under the Biden administration, some challenges remained unresolved, particularly regarding migration policies and diplomatic tensions with Mexico. The US has also played a pivotal role in addressing cybercrime and environmental crime, spearheading international funding initiatives to strengthen transnational crime prevention.

The US maintains a comprehensive legal framework to combat various forms of organized crime, including drug trafficking, cybercrime and human trafficking. However, regulatory gaps in firearm laws and immigration policies remain significant challenges. Although the country has enacted stringent anti-drug trafficking laws, inconsistencies between state and federal laws, particularly regarding cannabis regulation, create enforcement difficulties. Cybercrime legislation remains complex due to overlapping jurisdictional authorities, and although significant corporate investments have bolstered anti-counterfeit enforcement, gaps persist in regulating online marketplaces and digital fraud. Nevertheless, the US maintains a strong commitment to fighting organized crime and continues to adapt its legal framework to address emerging threats.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Despite a robust legal system, public dissatisfaction with the judiciary remains high, with concerns over judicial bias, mass incarceration and racial disparities in sentencing. The US prison system faces significant challenges, including overcrowding and high rates of recidivism. Prison gang activity and violence within detention facilities further compound these issues. Additionally, judicial independence is increasingly under pressure, with political influence over state-level judicial appointments raising concerns.

US law enforcement operates through a vast network of federal, state and local agencies, with specialized units addressing different aspects of organized crime. Despite strong funding and resources, challenges such as racial bias, excessive force and police misconduct undermine public trust in law enforcement. Police-related deaths remain a critical issue, disproportionately affecting minority communities.

With extensive land borders shared with Canada and Mexico, the US faces continuous challenges in managing migration flows, drug trafficking and human smuggling. Despite significant investments in border security, transnational criminal networks continue to exploit regulatory loopholes. The country remains a global leader in cybersecurity, yet cyber threats from foreign actors persist, highlighting vulnerabilities in digital infrastructure. The US government has prioritized cyber defence, with significant investments in intelligence and counter-cybercrime initiatives.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The US has implemented robust anti-money laundering measures, yet enforcement remains hindered by resource limitations within financial oversight agencies. The US dollar’s prominence in global finance makes the country particularly vulnerable to illicit financial activities. Recent reforms, including the introduction of beneficial ownership registries, aim to address financial opacity, but challenges remain in effectively curbing illicit financial flows. Major banks have faced penalties for failing to report illicit transactions.

While the US remains one of the world’s largest and most dynamic economies, economic inequality continues to grow, particularly among individuals without higher education, who face lower wages and increased financial pressures. Rising healthcare costs and housing affordability issues further contribute to socio-economic disparities. The US is widely recognized for its strong level of economic freedom. However, regulatory institutions face increasing scrutiny, with concerns over political influence undermining public confidence in the Federal Reserve and other financial bodies.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The US maintained victim support services during the Biden administration, with federally funded programmes providing comprehensive assistance to victims of trafficking and other crimes. These services covered medical and mental health care, shelter, legal aid, job training and financial support. However, NGOs remain the primary service providers, with non-profits and faith-based organizations leading in victim and witness support. The US legislative framework for combating modern slavery is strong, meeting most global standards. The Witness Security Program offers robust protection, with no known breaches of security or recorded harm to participants. Despite these efforts, access to long-term victim support, particularly for survivors of labour trafficking, remains inconsistent across states.

The Biden administration implemented preventive mechanisms to combat drug and human trafficking, mainly focusing on research-backed initiatives. Although investment in addiction treatment and awareness campaigns has increased, drug addiction and trafficking remain major issues, particularly concerning opioids and fentanyl. The country has also invested heavily in cybercrime prevention, enhancing cooperation between federal agencies and private sector partners. Environmental crime prevention has gained traction, with the US spearheading international initiatives against illegal logging and wildlife trafficking. Financial sanctions and enhanced regulatory measures have also been introduced to target illicit environmental trade networks.

The US maintains strong constitutional protections for press freedom, though violations persist, including journalist arrests and assaults. Media polarization has deepened, undermining public trust and contributing to widespread misinformation. Although the Biden administration improved media transparency, issues such as the decline of local news, social media's impact on journalism and online harassment remain unaddressed. Journalists face increasing threats, particularly in politically charged environments. Labour unions continue to face declining membership and legislative challenges, weakening their influence in advocating for worker protections. Despite these setbacks, civil society organizations remain active in criminal justice reform, environmental advocacy and human rights efforts. Political violence, including far-right extremism, appears to be rising.

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.