



Criminal Threats to the Caribbean in 2025

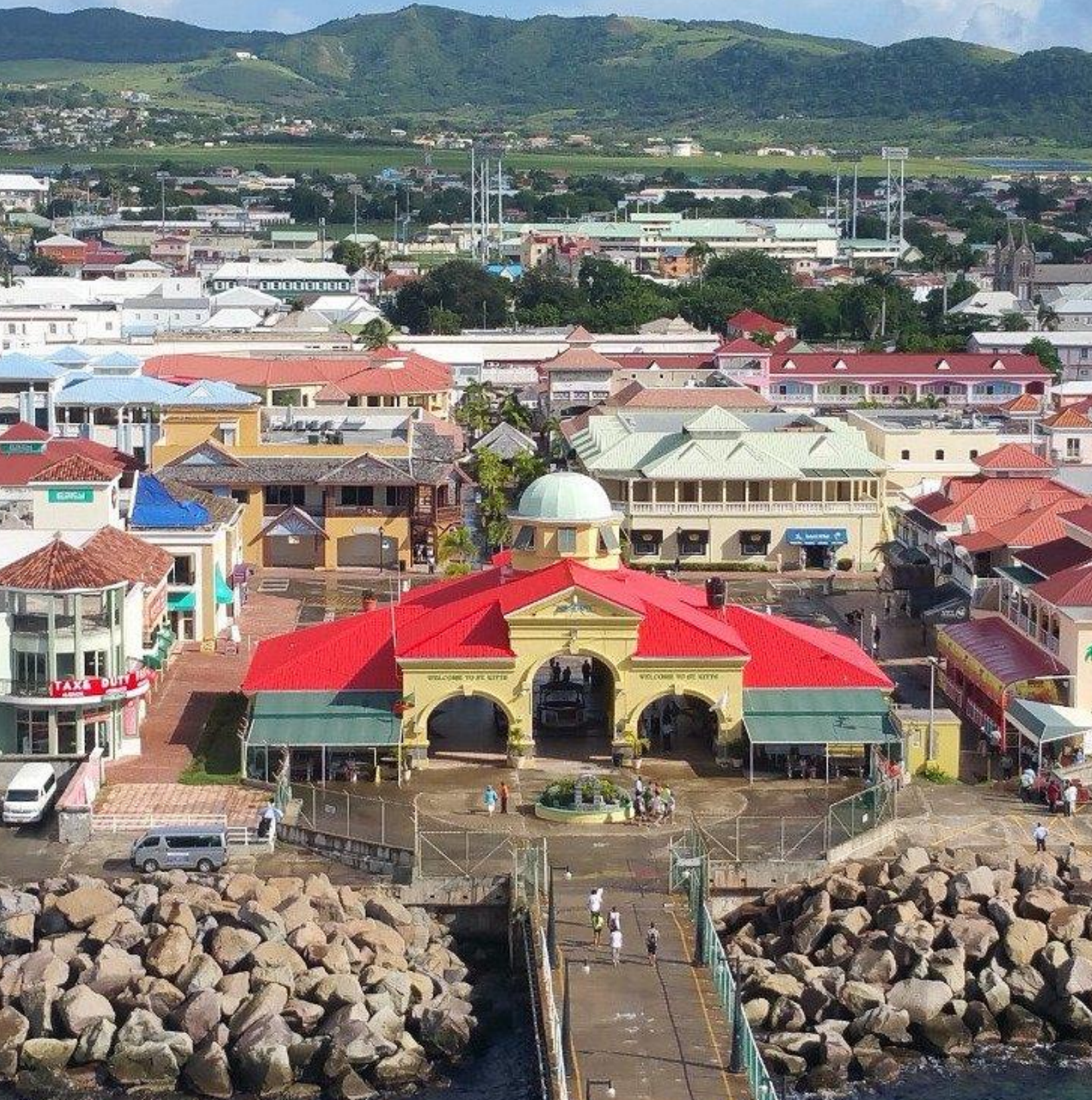




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Executive Summary

In 2025, the Caribbean will see a significant increase in transnational organized crime (TOC). The Dutch Caribbean, with Venezuela as its closest neighbor, is particularly vulnerable to shifting criminal dynamics in the region, although its level of resilience is much higher than other nations in the region.

Eight factors are going to affect criminal dynamics throughout the Caribbean in 2025. A determinant factor, especially for those Caribbean nations near Venezuela, is the prospect of another six years of rule by the Maduro regime after contested elections. Facing the probability of greater international isolation and sanctions, the Venezuelan government will need to rely yet more on criminal rents to stay afloat.

Record increases in cocaine production will have an outsized impact on transnational crime through the Caribbean. The 1,000-ton increase in cocaine production in Colombia is worth some \$25 billion to TOC groups and will almost certainly lead to a greater sophistication and increased corruptive power across Latin America and the Caribbean.

This cocaine bonanza has not been accompanied by a fall in prices, demonstrating that the global market is still expanding. Europe has overtaken the United States as the biggest cocaine market, and there are systematic efforts by TOC to develop new markets in Asia. Feeding these markets is a new generation of global criminal networks, many headed by European mafias.

With the growing volume of cocaine leaving South America, the need for new routes has pushed TOC into new nations as they look for varied departure points to circumvent interdiction efforts. While this is clearest in South American nations like Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, the Caribbean is very vulnerable, and will see more cocaine pass through its territory in 2025.

Latin America, and the Caribbean in particular, have struggled to formulate regional responses and to rival the cooperation that TOC is showing.

Washington has traditionally played a leading role in developing strategy and corraling nations to work together. However, now, and perhaps more so under a new Trump administration, the focus will be placed on migration to the United States, rather than TOC, though there is obviously a huge overlap.

Democracy is also fragile in many nations of the region, challenged not just by populism and autocracy, but by organized crime systematically penetrating the state. Political instability is the criminals' friend, as it undermines state strategies and security capacity and often pushes law enforcement efforts further down the list of government priorities.

Already one of the most violent regions in the world, the Caribbean will likely see no let up in homicides during 2025.



1. Maduro's Re-Election: Impact on Migration and Criminality

President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela was re-elected on 28 July in a presidential election that is widely regarded as stolen. The protests that took place after the election result and the violent state response that followed look likely to spark another wave of migration from the country,¹ from which some 7.7 million people have already fled (as of June 2024).² Indeed, experts expect Venezuelan migration through the Darién Gap – where Venezuelans make up two-thirds of migrants – to rise following Maduro's win.³ Venezuelan migration to Brazil saw an immediate increase, from 9,197 in July to 12,325 in August.⁴

In January 2025, Maduro used state forces and affiliated criminal groups to repress political opposition ahead of his inauguration. The son of opposition candidate Edmundo González was kidnapped while taking his children to school in Caracas.⁵ Another opposition leader, María Corina Machado, was knocked off her motorcycle and kidnapped for several hours after leading a protest against Maduro.⁶

The development of multiple criminal economies in Venezuela could impact the Caribbean in various ways. Drug trafficking, particularly cocaine trafficking coming from Colombia, and human smuggling and human trafficking, are the primary threats to the Caribbean region. As migration numbers look set to increase and trade embargoes are reimposed, the Venezuelan state may come to rely even more heavily on illicit economies and criminal actors who manage them.⁷

Venezuela's Criminal Groups

Venezuelan criminal groups particularly threaten the Dutch Caribbean given the proximity of Venezuela to the region, including the ABC islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao.

Elements of Venezuelan organized crime have sought to gain a foothold in parts of the Caribbean in the last few years. The first example was the Evander gang, which sent

¹ Jeremy McDermott, "[Predictions for the Criminal Landscape After Venezuela's Election](#)," InSight Crime, 29 July, 2024.

² World Vision, "[Venezuela Crisis: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help](#)," World Vision, August 14, 2024.

³ Rachel Schmidtke and Caitlyn Yates, "[After the Darien: Aid and Pathways for Migrants in Panama and Costa Rica](#)," Refugees International, 11 October, 2024.

⁴ International Organization for Migration, "[Monitoramento de Fluxo de Venezuelanos em Pacaraima](#)," Accessed on 17 December, 2024.

⁵ Edmundo González, "[Venezuelan opposition leader says his son-in-law has been kidnapped in Caracas](#)," Associated Press, 7 January 2025.

⁶ Tom Phillips, "[Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado 'kidnapped', allies say](#)," The Guardian, 9 January 2025.

⁷ Venezuela Investigative Unit et al., "[Rise of the Criminal Hybrid State in Venezuela](#)," InSight Crime, July 2023.



emissaries to coastal towns in Trinidad and Tobago to set up drug trafficking routes before being dismantled in 2019.⁸

Tren de Aragua (TdA),⁹ Venezuela's largest homegrown organized crime gang, is a more persistent threat and has successfully entrenched itself in other areas of Latin America, particularly Chile and Peru.^{10,11}

In March 2022, the group controlled drug routes leaving from the city of Güiria on the coastal state of Sucre, close to Trinidad and Tobago. At the time, local officials told InSight Crime that all gangs in Guiria were likely working with TdA. Though Colombian authorities have since arrested Carlos Antonio López Centeno, alias “El Pilo,” the TdA leader in the region, the gang may still control drug routes there.

Falcón Smuggling Networks

Venezuela's coastal state of Falcón is close to the ABC islands, as well as Colombia's Catatumbo region, a hub for cocaine cultivation and production. The state is one of the main departure points for narcotics from Venezuela, with the participation of local and foreign drug trafficking organizations.

Venezuelan security forces in Falcón appear to be regulating favored drug trafficking organizations handling the cocaine trade, and have taken steps to remove competition, targeting the Paraguaná Cartel and Sabana Alta Cartels. Among the groups to have survived this crackdown is the Guajira Cartel, suggesting its operations have official blessing. A small criminal group called the Lobos (not connected to Ecuador's Lobos gang) has also stayed under the radar, focusing on human smuggling and trafficking. It has set up operations abroad, especially in Curaçao and Aruba.

Many gangs have operated from the Venezuelan states of Sucre and Delta Amacuro, located near Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana, in the past decade. Criminal economies running through these states have included cocaine trafficking, human trafficking and smuggling, arms trafficking, and the contraband of animals and minerals.

As of 2023, a few groups aligned with the Venezuelan government control most of these routes and collect “taxes” for every vessel leaving these states. While some routes were formerly under the control of TdA, they may have changed hands following the gang's apparent split from the state after government forces stormed Tocorón prison, the home base of the TdA, in September 2023.¹²

⁸ Venezuela Investigative Unit, “[Venezuela Gang Muscles Into Trinidad and Tobago, Others May Follow](#),” InSight Crime, 20 May 2019; José Gregorio Ruiz, “[Abatido Evander Barradas y 5 integrantes de su banda](#),” El Periódico del Delta, 14 April 2019.

⁹ InSight Crime, “Tren de Aragua: Venezuela's Most Powerful Criminal Gang,” InSight Crime, 12 July, 2024.

¹⁰ Venezuela Investigative Unit, “[High-Profile Chile Murder Shows Tren de Aragua's Sophistication](#),” InSight Crime, 11 March, 2024.

¹¹ Venezuela Investigative Unit, “[How Peru Is Tackling the Danger of Venezuela's Tren de Aragua](#),” InSight Crime, 6 December, 2022.

¹² Jeremy McDermott, “[Venezuelan Military 'Invades' Notorious Prison](#),” InSight Crime, 20 September 2023.



Venezuela is a well-known cocaine route from Colombian toward other South American nations – before potentially moving through the Caribbean – including Guyana.¹³ Continued seizures of drugs in the Caribbean departing Venezuela involving Venezuelan vessels and nationals are frequently linked to corrupt military officials, whose networks are known as the Cartel of the Suns (Cartel de los Soles).¹⁴ State institutions have also been linked to cocaine shipments leaving for farther flung destinations from the Simón Bolívar International Airport of Maiquetía, located in the state of La Guaira, near Caracas.¹⁵

Increased Migration

The likelihood of increased emigration from Venezuela following the re-election of Nicolás Maduro could provide TdA cells with the means to extend further into the Caribbean. As already noted, the group has successfully exploited migrants along the routes out of Venezuela throughout South America, as far as Peru and Chile.

Venezuelan migration to the Caribbean is mostly to five countries: Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Aruba, and Curaçao.

In 2023, Aruba and Curaçao had the highest per capita intake of refugees and migrants globally.¹⁶ The Dominican Republic has the largest diaspora of Venezuelans in the Caribbean, reaching 124,000 in 2023. Additionally, Guyana and Trinidad host migrants from Venezuela. Across the sub-region, there is a shared concern among countries about their ability to effectively accommodate and support these refugees.¹⁷

¹³ Sean Doherty, "[Increased Foreign Presence Around Guyana Is Helping Net More Cocaine](#)," InSight Crime, 5 September 2024.

¹⁴ InSight Crime, "[Cartel of the Suns](#)," InSight Crime, 14 May, 2022.

¹⁵ Venezuela Investigative Unit, "[A 3-Ton Cocaine Seizure in Venezuela Highlights Asia Trafficking Routes](#)," InSight Crime, 2 September 2024.

¹⁶ Eirik Christophersen, "[These 10 Countries Receive the Most Refugees: 2014–2023](#)," Norwegian Refugee Council, 30 October, 2024.

¹⁷ R4V, "[Integration Background Note](#)," October 2023.



2. Record Cocaine Production in Colombia

Adding to the increased threat from Venezuela, Colombia, the world's foremost coca cultivating and cocaine producing nation, has hit new and historic heights in the manufacture of the drug. The most recent estimates available from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) revealed that in 2023, Colombia, increased its coca cultivation by 10% and cocaine production by a staggering 53%. Annual cocaine production potential now stands at 2,664 tons. While seizures are also increased, they are not keeping pace with production, meaning more cocaine will flow toward markets including Europe.¹⁸ Much of the cocaine that is produced in Colombia exits directly into the Caribbean or moves through Venezuela first.

Cocaine in the Caribbean

This increase in cocaine production has already been reflected in record seizures made across the Caribbean.

By July 2024, seizures in the French Caribbean had surpassed the total number for the year previous.¹⁹ This included a mammoth 10.5-ton seizure from a fishing vessel some 600 nautical miles off the coast of Martinique. Six Brazilians, two Colombians, and one Venezuelan made up the crew.²⁰

Similarly, the Dominican Republic recorded its highest seizure figures ever in 2024,²¹ including the country's largest-ever single seizure of 9.5 tons in December.²²

Jamaica too made its largest-ever single cocaine seizure in 2024, netting 2.6 tons of cocaine in August, following multi-ton seizures in 2023.²³ In November 2023, Barbados seized a record 3.5 tons of cocaine from a fishing vessel with a Venezuelan crew.²⁴

Data is limited on Haiti, which is now in free fall as local gangs battle international security forces and carry out massacres of civilians. But a 300-kilogram load of cocaine found in

¹⁸ Lara Loaiza, "[Colombia's Coca Crops Grew, But Cocaine Production Exploded, Latest Figures Show](#)," InSight Crime, 18 October, 2024.

¹⁹ Sergio Saffon, "[What Is Behind the Surge in Cocaine Seizures in the French Caribbean in 2024?](#)," InSight Crime, 30 July 2024.

²⁰ Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics, "[MAOC-N Supports Record Cocaine Seizure by the French Authorities in the Atlantic](#)," 27 August, 2024.

²¹ Robin Torrusio, "[Dominican Republic Breaks Seizure Record Amid Renewed Caribbean Trafficking](#)," InSight Crime, 26 November, 2024.

²² Dirección Nacional de Control de Drogas, "[Contundente Golpe: DNCD Interviene Contenedor con 9.5 Toneladas de Cocaína; Cargamento es el Más Grande en la Historia de RD y la Región](#)," 7 December, 2024.

²³ Tanesha Mundle, "[Five Men, Including Septuagenarian, Charged in \\$11b Cocaine Seizure](#)," Jamaica Gleaner, 20 August, 2024.

²⁴The Daily Herald, "[Antilles-Guyane Patrol Vessel Seizes 3.5-Ton Cocaine Haul](#)," 3 December, 2023.



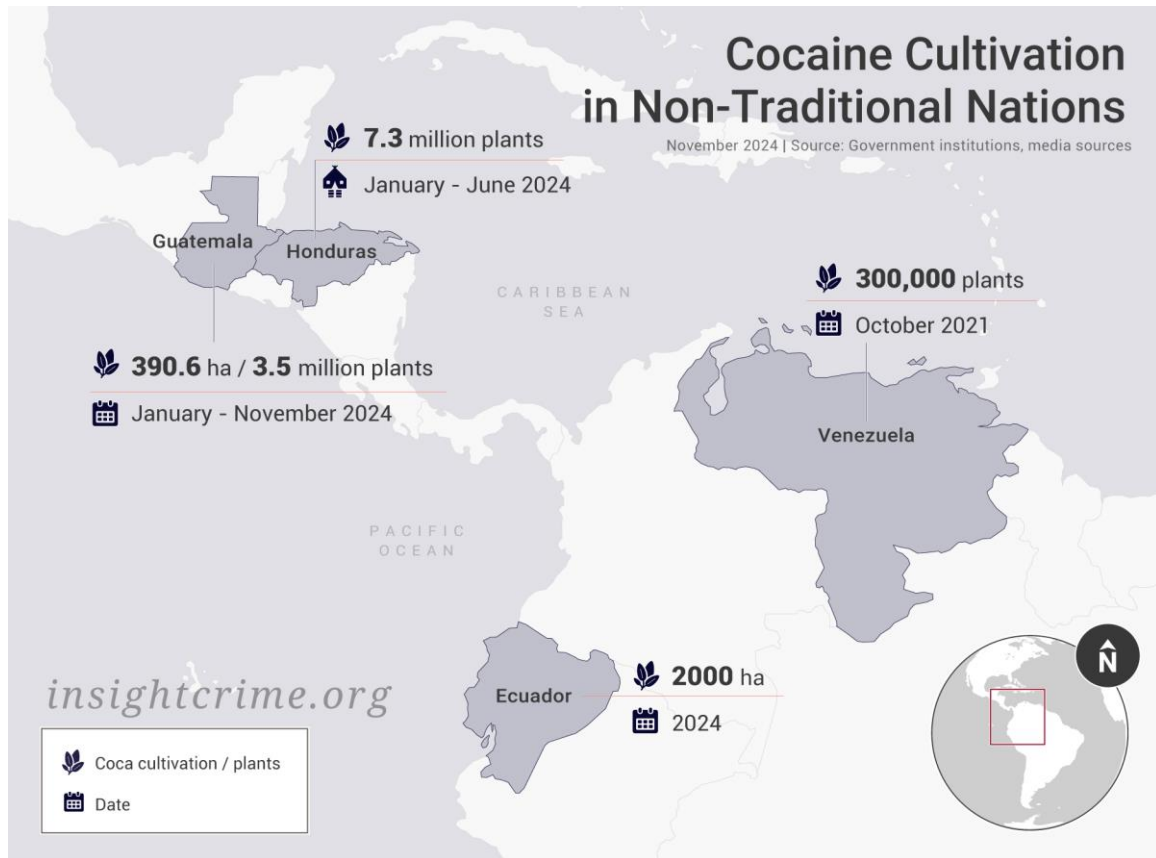
Antwerp in September 2023 in a container traveling from Port-au-Prince demonstrates that the country still plays a role in transatlantic trafficking.

In 2024, Guatemala, which has a small Caribbean coastline, registered greater total cocaine seizure figures than those in 2022 and 2023 combined.²⁵

Other major regional transshipment countries, including Ecuador and Peru, recorded their largest-ever seizures in 2024.

Additional Cocaine Cultivation Concerns

While the Andean nations are the premier coca-producing countries on the planet, drug trafficking organizations are making progress in expanding coca cultivation outside of Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia.



²⁵ Ministerio de Gobernación de Guatemala, "[Trabajo Coordinado Permite Incautación Histórica de 3,095 Kilogramos de Cocaína](#)," 19 November, 2024.



Honduras

- First discovered a significant coca plantation in 2017
- Coca plant seizures peaked in 2021 at 6.5 million.
- In 2023, authorities seized and destroyed 3.6 million coca plants.²⁶

Guatemala

- In 2022, Guatemalan authorities destroyed over 4 million coca plants.²⁷
- Authorities destroyed at least 7.3 million coca plants between January and November 2023.²⁸
- By May 2024, Guatemala had eradicated over 1.5 million coca bushes.²⁹

Venezuela

- Multiple strains of coca have been sown, especially in Zulia and Apure, where authorities dismantled 17 cocaine laboratories in the first four months of 2022.
- The Venezuelan government denies any industrial-scale coca plantations and official information is hard to obtain; no official data on coca cultivation was made available to the public in 2024.
- Authorities seized several large-scale cocaine production facilities in early 2024 in Táchira, Apure, and Amazonas.³⁰

Container Traffic

Cocaine moves through the Caribbean in a variety of ways. Container traffic, moved on large container ships, is the most utilized form of drug transport.

Traffickers contaminate containers with cocaine at the Caribbean's main ports, such as Kingston in Jamaica, the Multimodel Caucedo Port in the Dominican Republic, and San Juan in Puerto Rico, though smaller container ports are also used.

Several countries and organizations are making attempts to improve port security. In November 2024, the Port of Spain in Trinidad and Tobago received two new scanners from France,³¹ while the UNODC's Container Control Program continues to play a role in the region, having achieved record-breaking seizure figures for ports in the program in 2022.³²

²⁶ El Herald, "[Plantaciones, laboratorios y narcorutas de coca en Honduras](#)," 22 March, 2023.

²⁷ Alex Papadovassilakis and Gavin Voss, "[Guatemala Sees Record Coca, But No Cocaine](#)," InSight Crime, 10 February, 2023.

²⁸ Agencia Guatemalteca de Noticias, "[Más de 7 millones de arbustos de hoja de coca destruidos este año](#)," 28 June, 2023.

²⁹ Ministerio de Gobernación de Guatemala, "[Lucha contra el narcotráfico: erradicación de cultivos ilícitos asciende a más de Q192 millones en lo que va de 2024](#)," 22 May, 2024.

³⁰ Venezuela Investigative Unit, "[Venezuela's Move to Cocaine Production: Crops, Chemists and Criminal Evolution](#)," InSight Crime, 3 May, 2022.

³¹ Caribbean Today, "[New Scanners For Ports in Trinidad and Tobago](#)," 7 November, 2024.

³² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "[UNODC-WCO CCP Breaks Records in the Fight Against Drug Trafficking](#)," 20 December, 2022.



Corrupting port officials is essential to move illegal, and sometimes even legal, loads through Caribbean ports and airports, according to a Caribbean security expert.

There are, however, additional trafficking modes employed by drug traffickers to move product through the region.



Small Vessels

Small vessels are increasingly being used to move cocaine through the Caribbean. Generally, cocaine is moved from Venezuela by small vessel toward Caribbean islands with major container ports, where traffickers then contaminate containers.

Go-fast boats are another mode of transport for cocaine from Venezuela due to their agility and speed. To avoid detection, go-fasts often slow down during the day, making them more



difficult to notice from the air as they produce no wake.³³ Traffickers also use fishing vessels, small “artisanal” motorized boats and sometimes inter-island cargo ships.

There are some well-plotted routes for small vessels through the Caribbean.

According to an officer of Saint Lucia’s Drug Unit, fishing vessels or motorized boats travel from Venezuela to Grenada, and from there up to Saint Lucia. Some boats head to Trinidad and Tobago instead, where the product is transferred to a different vessel before being moved northwards. From Saint Lucia, the illicit goods are taken to Martinique and then sent to Europe. When dropping off product, these small boats are met at sea by vessels from the island who bring the cargo to shore.³⁴ St. Lucia may see as much as 75% of all drugs flowing through the eastern Caribbean as it is a hub for cocaine and marijuana originating from Colombia and Venezuela.³⁵

According to security experts, traffickers often pay the skippers of these vessels with products that can either be sold along the way, such as marijuana, or that can be brought back and sold in Venezuela, such as liquor or baby formula.

Drug Trafficking Routes from the Caribbean to Europe

September 2024 | Source: InSight Crime investigations, UNODC, CSIS



³³ CarteNav, "[Seizing 37 Tons at Sea: A Deep-Dive of the Dutch Caribbean Coast Guard’s C4ISR Maritime Surveillance](#)," 27 August, 2024.

³⁴ InSight Crime Telephone Interview, Saint Lucia Police Drug Unit officer, 4 December 2023.

³⁵ InSight Crime interview, Royal Saint Lucia Police Force officer, Castries, Saint Lucia, 25 May 2023.



Air Routes

Trafficking networks use direct flights from the Caribbean to the United States and Europe to smuggle cocaine using human couriers.

In 2022, trafficking from French Guiana to France contributed up to 30% of the cocaine consumed in the European nation.³⁶ However, security on commercial flights between Cayenne and Paris, which was a known route for cocaine trafficking, has since been stepped up.

Air trafficking from other Caribbean islands to Europe has also presented a threat, including from Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao to the Netherlands,³⁷ and from Jamaica to the United Kingdom.³⁸

³⁶ Douwe den Held, "[Europe's Weakest Border? Smuggling Between Suriname and French Guiana](#)," InSight Crime, 16 May, 2023.

³⁷ SXM IslandTime, "[85 kilograms of cocaine on board TUI flight from Curaçao intercepted](#)," 24 July, 2023.

³⁸ National Crime Agency, "[Three due in court over Heathrow £3.6m cocaine seizures](#)," 1 May, 2024.



3. New Global Cocaine Networks Impacting the Caribbean

The global cocaine bonanza described above and the plentiful routes to move drugs out of Latin America has generated new financial opportunities for criminal organizations both in the region and abroad.

More cocaine than ever is flowing to Europe, where in 2022, one kilogram of cocaine could fetch up to \$40,000 on average, and up to \$80,000 in certain parts of the continent.³⁹

An increasingly large amount of this is moving via the Caribbean.⁴⁰ The demand is being driven by foreign criminal syndicates, including Italian and Albanian mafias, who buy loads from wholesalers and contract local groups to move the cocaine through the region. This is driving violence in the Caribbean region and potentially strengthening local criminal outfits.

The Caribbean region faces significant criminal threats from various international mafia groups, each leveraging the area's strategic position for their own gain.

Changing Dynamics, Increasing Cooperation

Though the mafias described may be competitors, they also work together to reduce financial risk, sharing cocaine loads and costs. In doing so, they morph from into crime networks that move toward the same end. The partnerships between Italian mafias and other groups are now more dynamic, with groups using one another's logistics and contacts, reflecting a move toward more collaborative crime networks rather than strict territorial control.⁴¹

This is an increasing trend, which marks an evolution in the transatlantic drug trade. By cooperating, these groups can increase the size and frequency of drug loads moving toward Europe, thus increasing the likelihood that those drugs make it through customs and onto the continent's streets.

Italian Mafia Groups

Italian organized crime groups, notably the 'Ndrangheta and Camorra, have a longstanding presence in Latin America and the Caribbean and have evolved their role within the cocaine supply chain over time. Their presence has been noted in the Caribbean, in the Dominican Republic, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, and Guyana.

³⁹ InSight Crime, "[The Cocaine Pipeline to Europe](#)," May 2022.

⁴⁰ Robin Torrusio, "[Dominican Republic Breaks Seizure Record Amid Renewed Caribbean Trafficking](#)," InSight Crime, 26 November, 2024.

⁴¹ Mario Saiz, "[The Rise of Global Crime Networks: European Mafias in the Americas](#)," InSight Crime, 18 November, 2024.

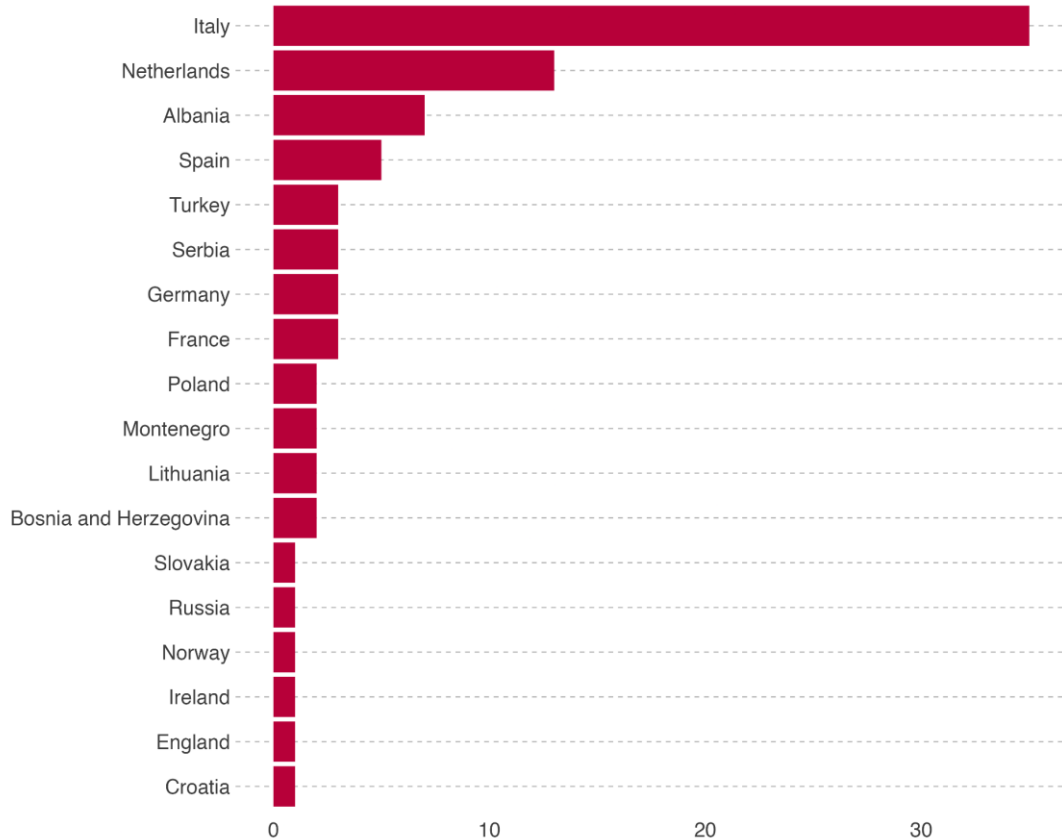


Europeans arrested in Latin America and the Caribbean (2013-2024)*

*Data for 2024 is only available through October

December 2024 | Source: InSight Crime media monitoring

insightcrime.org



The 'Ndrangheta has also been implicated in establishing cocaine trafficking routes through the Dominican Republic. In April 2014, authorities arrested Nicola Pignatelli, a key 'Ndrangheta operative, who was allegedly developing a cocaine pipeline through the country.⁴² In 2020, eight members of the Contini Clan were arrested, after having lived in the Dominican Republic for years and sending their kids to school there.⁴³

European interests have also emerged in Curaçao. Italian crime groups have reportedly collaborated with local gangs, such as the No Limit Soldiers (NLS), a Curaçao-born drug trafficking group. The NLS also used the country's membership of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to traffic cocaine to Europe.

⁴² Kyra Gurney, "[Dominican Republic Capture Points to Growing Italy Mafia Influence](#)," InSight Crime, 1 May, 2014.

⁴³ Douwe den Held and Anastasia Austin, "[César Peralta, the Best Middleman in the Dominican Republic's Cocaine Trade](#)," InSight Crime, 7 September, 2022.



Balkan Groups

Balkan criminal groups, particularly those from Albania, have become a strong threat within Latin America, and particularly in Ecuador, one of the region's foremost cocaine departure points. They have established an entrenched presence in the country to direct cocaine shipments toward Eastern Europe, leveraging the presence of local gangs, including the Choneros, Lobos, and Tiguerones, to move cocaine through the country and into ports. Flush with cash, Ecuador's local gangs have strengthened dramatically and begun to battle directly with the state. They have set off car bombs, stormed a TV station live on air, and murdered a presidential candidate, as well as numerous other political figures. The country is currently in a "state of internal armed conflict" against over 20 criminal gangs designated as "terrorist organizations," while the homicide rate jumped 74.5% in 2023 against the year previous.⁴⁴

As of yet, there is little evidence to suggest that Balkan traffickers have gained a foothold in any Caribbean nation, though there have been Balkans-linked cocaine seizures. In November 2024, the Dominican Republic arrested an Albanian attempting to traffic 40 packets of cocaine to Madrid on a commercial flight.⁴⁵ In 2020, Albanian Sandër Pemaj was imprisoned for his part in trafficking 1.2 tons of cocaine from the Caribbean to Greece,⁴⁶ while an international police operation stopped a Montenegrin vessel carrying 5 tons of cocaine near Aruba that same year.⁴⁷

With Balkan groups strengthening in the region, they remain a potential threat in the Caribbean due to the region's well-established cocaine trafficking routes.

⁴⁴ Juliana Manjarrés and Christopher Newton, "[InSight Crime's 2023 Homicide Round-Up](#)," InSight Crime, 21 February, 2024.

⁴⁵ Dirección Nacional de Control de Drogas, "[Intervienen extranjero viajaría a España con 40 paquetes presumiblemente cocaína](#)," 17 November, 2024.

⁴⁶ BalkanWeb, "[Dosja Sky ECC në Greqi: Sandër Pemaj Kishte Kontakt me 80 Persona, Zbardhen Bisedat për Trafikun e Kokainës](#)," 20 November, 2024.

⁴⁷ Samir Kajosevic, "[Montenegrin Crew of Cocaine Ship Arrested in Caribbean](#)," Balkan Insight, 26 February, 2020.



4. Criminal Economies in the Caribbean Context

Multiple other criminal economies are present in the Caribbean region. They are often linked to, and benefited by, the drug trade.

Human Smuggling and Trafficking

Human smuggling and trafficking across the Caribbean can be expected to increase in 2025 due to Venezuela's continuing economic crisis as Maduro enters his third term in office.

Between 2019 and 2022, 69% of Venezuelan migrants reported having hired smuggling services for their journey out of the country.⁴⁸ Since then, the explosion of both the land route through Darién Gap from Colombia to Panama, and the maritime route via San Andrés, a small Colombian island east of Central America, has seen human smuggling grow.⁴⁹

Authorities regularly seize small smuggling boats moving between Venezuela and Curaçao and Aruba. Migrants making these trips frequently drown or are abandoned on other Caribbean islands en route. Others risk being trafficked and forced into sex work.⁵⁰

Some Caribbean nations struggle to counter the threat of human smuggling and trafficking. For example, the US Department of State placed Sint Maarten and Curaçao on the lowest tier in its 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report.⁵¹

Arms Trafficking

The Caribbean region remains extremely vulnerable to arms trafficking from the United States, with 73% of the guns found at crime scenes and then traced, traced back to the United States.⁵²

Arms are regularly bought on the US mainland on its legal market and then smuggled to the Caribbean. So-called straw buyers are often used by arms traffickers. These include

⁴⁸ Mixed Migration Centre, "[The role of smuggling in Venezuelans' journey to Colombia and Peru](#)", January 2022

⁴⁹ Venezuela Investigative Unit, "[Smuggled Migrants Face Deadly Waters in San Andrés, Colombia](#)," InSight Crime, January 17, 2024.

⁵⁰ InSight Crime, "[Dutch Caribbean Remains a High-Risk Route for Venezuelan Migrants](#)", October 2023

⁵¹ US Department of State, "[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Curaçao](#)", 2023.

⁵² US Government Accountability Office, "[Caribbean Firearms: Agencies Have Anti-Trafficking Efforts in Place, But State Could Better Assess Activities](#)," GAO-25-107007, 15 October 2024.



members of the Caribbean diaspora living in the United States. Weapons are moved on by commercial flights, private aircraft, cargo containers, and by the postal services.

High-power rifles are uncommon in the Caribbean, as Caribbean gangs often lack resources and further focus on urban warfare. For this reason, 88% of seized arms in the Caribbean are handguns.⁵³ Trinidad and Tobago constitutes an exception, where high-powered long rifles are more widespread. There, weapons are US manufactured and have usually been smuggled from Venezuela, mere kilometers away. The authorities in Trinidad and Tobago show little sign of being able to impede arms trafficking to the country, and the country is estimated to hold 12,000 illegal firearms.⁵⁴

Synthetic Drugs

Synthetic drug trafficking is present in the Caribbean, though on a very small scale. Seizures of ecstasy pills are sporadic but do occur in countries including Barbados and the Dominican Republic.⁵⁵ Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Antigua and Barbuda, have reported seizures of MDMA (an abbreviation of synthetic drug 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, found in ecstasy pills). The drugs have in some cases been seized in combination with other synthetic drugs, such as amphetamine, methamphetamine, and ketamine.⁵⁶

Synthetic drugs, including “tusi,” a pink synthetic drug powder that usually includes MDMA⁵⁷ and ketamine, have grown more popular in South America, especially in Chile.⁵⁸ With availability rising to meet this growing demand, these party drugs could be more commonly seen in the Caribbean in the future.

Eco-Trafficking

Various forms of ecological trafficking are present in the Caribbean. Apart from wildlife trafficking, illegal logging also poses a challenge. Conservation initiatives are often undermined by weak institutions and a lack of funding and technical capacity.⁵⁹

Illegal wildlife trafficking is not present in all Caribbean islands. However, wildlife trafficking has slowly increased in the region.⁶⁰ In May 2024, the US Coast Guard recovered 113 tropical birds that were to be trafficked from Puerto Rico to the Dominican Republic.⁶¹ Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated fishing also takes place in parts of the Caribbean.⁶²

⁵³ The Guardian, “[Killers with high-powered guns leave a trail of destruction in T&T](#)”, August 2022

⁵⁴ Trinidad Express, “[12,000 Illegal Firearms in T&T](#)”, 13 July 2022

⁵⁵ UNODC, “[Synthetic Drugs and new Psychoactive Substances in Latin America and the Caribbean 2021](#)”, 2021

⁵⁶ UNODC, “[April 2019 – Trinidad and Tobago: Minister of National Security alerts public on health risks of synthetic drugs](#)”, April 2019

⁵⁷ Alessandro Ford, “[Tusi: The Pink Drug Cocktail That Tricked Latin America](#),” InSight Crime, 6 July, 2022.

⁵⁸ Venezuela Investigative Unit, “[Ecstasy Seizures Highlight Emerging European-Chilean Trafficking Connection](#),” InSight Crime, April 26, 2021.

⁵⁹ Global Americans Report, “[Strengthening Caribbean Forestry: Challenges and Opportunities](#)”, April 2024

⁶⁰ ROUTES, “[Taking Off: Wildlife Trafficking in the Latin America and Caribbean Region](#)”, May 2021

⁶¹ US Attorney’s Office, District of Puerto Rico, “[Four Individuals Indicted for Smuggling Tropical Bird Species from the United States to the Dominican Republic](#)”, May 2024

⁶² InSight Crime, “[IUU Fishing Crimes in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)”, American University & InSight Crime, 2022.



Money Laundering

The Caribbean remains attractive for money laundering purposes. Economies are cash-intensive and have lax oversight and legislation. Almost all Caribbean countries are flagged as being of high risk of money laundering by the Basel Anti-Money Laundering (AML) Index.⁶³

Many Caribbean countries do not require full transparency for political financing, allowing large donations to be made without disclosing their origin.⁶⁴ Several nations, including the Bahamas, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Lucia are introducing blockchain currencies, which could further facilitate criminal transactions due to the difficulty in tracing their origins.⁶⁵

The gaming sector offers particularly high vulnerability to money laundering in St. Kitts and Nevis, as it is cash intensive and involves large quantities of tourists.⁶⁶ Curaçao is a world leader in online gambling, also called iGaming, and offers a vast offshore industry with little oversight. Repeated criticisms have been made of the industry.⁶⁷

⁶³ Basel AML Index, "[Global Ranking in 2024](#)", 2024

⁶⁴ Basel AML Index, "[Latin America and the Caribbean](#)"

⁶⁵ US Department of State, "[2022 INCSR–Volume II: Money Laundering](#)", March 2022

⁶⁶ CFATF GAFIC, "[Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing measures: St. Kitts and Nevis](#)", January 2022

⁶⁷ Yogonet, "[Fast Offshore analysis: Curaçao reopens online gambling licensing portal amid regulatory change](#)", July 2024



5. The Spread of Transnational Crime Into ‘Safe’ Nations

Alongside this spread of drug and other illicit economies, criminal organizations are now expanding into nations of the Caribbean and Latin America that had not previously registered their presence, such as the Bahamas, Costa Rica, Chile, and Uruguay. This is marking a dramatic shift in regional security dynamics. Crime groups are exploiting gaps in governance and reshaping local and international drug trafficking routes within these nations.

The Bahamas

The Bahamas, famous for its beaches and tourism, has increasingly found itself at the center of TOC activities. Although in 2023 there was a 14% drop in homicides, homicide rates were increasing significantly for the previous five years due to turf wars between gangs looking to control cocaine trafficking routes.⁶⁸ Criminal groups exploit the geography of the Bahamas using go-fast boats, container ships, and airplanes to move drugs.⁶⁹

Heightened violence has placed significant strain on law enforcement capabilities.⁷⁰ Corruption and resource limitations further exacerbate the issue, with reports of officials aiding or ignoring illicit activities.⁷¹

The Bahamas has attempted to adopt tougher security measures, and works in partnership with the United States,⁷² but these initiatives have achieved only partial success in curbing the activities of transnational criminal networks.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica has also seen its image as among the safest countries in Central America tarnished as it has become a focal point for cocaine trafficking, particularly through its Caribbean port of Limón.⁷³ Situated between South America’s cocaine-producing nations and consumer markets in North America, Costa Rica has been drawn into the transnational drug trade, facing rising levels of violence and organized crime.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ InSight Crime, "[InSight Crime’s 2022 Homicide Round-Up](#)," 8 February, 2023.

⁶⁹ InSight Crime, "[Caribbean Profile](#)", InSight Crime, 2 November 2023.

⁷⁰ Mimi Yagoub, "[Authorities Blame Gangs for the Bahamas’ Bloody Start to 2017](#)", InSight Crime, 16 February 2017.

⁷¹ Gavin Voss, "[Bahamas Police in Turmoil Over US Drug Trafficking Case](#)", InSight Crime, 12 December 2024.

⁷² Michael Lohmuller, "[Bahamas Gets US Help to Combat Human Trafficking](#)", InSight Crime, 29 April 2015.

⁷³ María Fernanda Ramírez, "[Port of Limón Has Become Costa Rica’s Drug Trafficking Epicenter](#)", InSight Crime, 15 April 2020.

⁷⁴ Alessandro Ford, "[Costa Rica’s Limón Province Becomes Murder and Drug Trafficking Center](#)", InSight Crime, 23 May 2022.



Homicide rates in Costa Rica rose in 2024, nearing record highs.⁷⁵ Much of this violence stems from clashes between local and transnational criminal groups competing for the control of lucrative trafficking routes.⁷⁶ With an estimated 5,000 gang members now operating within its borders,⁷⁷ Costa Rica faces significant security challenges, although still not on the same level of neighbors like Honduras or Guatemala.

The country's vulnerabilities are exacerbated by corruption, particularly within its law enforcement agencies.⁷⁸ Political scandals involving drug seizures and links to organized crime have affected public trust and have highlighted the challenges the government faces.⁷⁹ Despite efforts to combat these issues, resource limitations and the increasing structural sophistication of criminal networks continue to limit progress.⁸⁰

Chile and Uruguay

Although not located in the Caribbean, other Latin American nations previously considered safe, such as Chile and Uruguay, have experienced troubling surges in organized crime.

Chile, previously one of the safest countries in the region, has become a critical transit point for cocaine, with criminal organizations such as Venezuela's TdA engaging in drug trafficking, human smuggling, and other illicit activities.⁸¹ Homicide rates in Chile climbed from 3.2 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2014 to 5.1 in 2022, and kidnappings have surged by 135% over the past decade.⁸² High-profile incidents, including the sentencing of individuals linked to Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel in 2023, highlight the country's strategic role in the narcotics trade.⁸³

Similarly, Uruguay's strategic location and modern port infrastructure, particularly in Montevideo, have made it a key gateway for cocaine shipments to Europe.⁸⁴ Groups like the First Uruguayan Cartel (Primer Cartel Uruguayo - PCU), led by Sebastián Marset, have entrenched themselves in Uruguay's criminal underworld, taking advantage of the country's efficient ports and exploiting vulnerabilities such as limited resources, corruption in customs agencies, and the complicity of officials.⁸⁵

⁷⁵ Peter Appleby, "[Will Costa Rica Follow the Same Criminal Path as Ecuador?](#)", InSight Crime, 7 November 2024.

⁷⁶ Alessandro Ford, "[Costa Rica's Limón Province Becomes Murder and Drug Trafficking Center](#)", InSight Crime, 23 May 2022.

⁷⁷ Peter Appleby, "[Will Costa Rica Follow the Same Criminal Path as Ecuador?](#)", InSight Crime, 7 November 2024.

⁷⁸ Katya Bleszynska, "[Costa Rica Cocaine Theft Ring Relies on Crooked Agents](#)", InSight Crime, 13 April 2021.

⁷⁹ Parker Asmann, "[High-Profile Corruption Probe Tests Costa Rica's Justice System](#)", InSight Crime, 22 June 2021.

⁸⁰ InSight Crime and Javier Villalba, "[Los Moreco, a new type of criminal group in Costa Rica](#)", Open Democracy, 7 June 2019.

⁸¹ Laura Ávila, "[How Tren de Aragua Controls the Destiny of Migrants from Venezuela to Chile](#)", InSight Crime, 25 July 2022.

⁸² Centro de Estudios y Análisis del Delito, "[Estadísticas Delictuales](#)", Gobierno de Chile, last seen 13 December 2024.

⁸³ Joel Cano, "[Así coordina el primo irlandés de Los Chapitos el tráfico de drogas a Europa](#)", La Semana del Sur, 19 February 2024.

⁸⁴ Yuri Neves, "[Europe Busts Point to Uruguay as Cocaine Transit Point](#)", InSight Crime, 1 August 2019.

⁸⁵ Ministerio de Interior, "[El Gobierno Nacional dejó operativos los nuevos escáneres para el Puerto de Montevideo](#)", Gobierno de Uruguay, 2 October 2024; Reuters, "[Uruguay government members resign over passport scandal probe](#)", Reuters, 5 November 2023; Vanessa Buschschlüter, "[Sebastián Marset: Fugitive sends video thanking police for 'tip-off'](#)", BBC, 3 August 2023; Lucas Silva and Pablo Manuel Méndez, "[Fiscalía inició investigación interna por desaparición de un audio de Marset](#)", La Diaria, 23 October 2023.



Massive cocaine seizures traced back to Uruguayan shipping containers highlight the growing involvement of both nations in global trafficking networks, with significant implications for regional and international security.

Implications for Regional Security

The infiltration of organized crime into nations like the Bahamas, Costa Rica, Chile, and Uruguay signals a broader shift in the dynamics of Latin American criminal networks. Rising cocaine production in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia has created a need for new transit routes and logistical hubs.⁸⁶ As traditional trafficking corridors become more heavily policed, criminal groups are exploiting countries previously overlooked due to their stability and rule of law.⁸⁷

The Caribbean has become a direct casualty of these developments. Small vessels, narco submarines, containerized shipments, and air routes originating from South America are increasingly used to move narcotics through the Caribbean towards international markets.⁸⁸ This activity will likely lead to increased violence and instability in the Caribbean, further straining the capacity of local governments and law enforcement.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Christopher Newton and Juliana Manjarrés, "[InSight Crime's 2023 Cocaine Seizure Round-Up](#)", InSight Crime, 20 March 2024.

⁸⁷ Jeremy McDermott, James Bargent, Douwe den Held and Maria Fernanda Ramírez, "[The Cocaine Pipeline to Europe](#)," InSight Crime, February 2021.

⁸⁸ Mario Saiz, "[Narco-Subs Sail the Caribbean](#)", InSight Crime, 19 September 2024; InSight Crime, "[Caribbean Profile](#)", InSight Crime, 2 November 2023.

⁸⁹ Robin Torrusio, "[Dominican Republic Breaks Seizure Record Amid Renewed Caribbean Trafficking](#)", InSight Crime, 26 November 2024.



6. Political Instability Undermines International Efforts Against TOC

The Caribbean is facing rising threats from organized crime while political instability in both cocaine-producing nations of Latin America, particularly Colombia, and key transit nations in the Caribbean is undermining international efforts against TOC.

In Colombia, President Gustavo Petro's Total Peace (Paz Total) policy, which aims to force peace agreements with the country's multiple criminal armed groups, is falling well short of its target.⁹⁰ In September 2024, one of the country's strongest armed groups, the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional – ELN), which has presence in both Colombian and Venezuela, ended peace talks with a deadly attack on a military base.⁹¹ The group has since reignited a war with the 33rd Front faction of the demobilized Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – FARC).⁹² Questions remain over how genuine the involvement of a major drug trafficking organization, the Gaitanist Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia – AGC), is in achieving peace.⁹³ And, while negotiations have continued, multiple other armed groups have entrenched themselves in coca cultivation zones and strengthened their efforts against enemies during ceasefires with the national government.

Peru, the world's second-largest coca cultivator, remains embroiled in a years-long political crisis. In 2020, the country had three presidents within the space of five days. In 2022, an attempted coup by then-President Pedro Castillo, who had five prime ministers despite being in office for just 18 months, led to further political and social chaos. Castillo's successor and Peru's first female president, Dina Boluarte, has struggled to right the ship. In that time, the government has enforced repeated states of emergency due to rising homicides and extortion.⁹⁴ Attacks by armed groups on gold mining corporations have expanded,⁹⁵ and TdA has established itself in the country.⁹⁶ Coca cultivation has increased, and, by mid-November this year, Peru had seized at least 133 tons of cocaine, well beyond the 100 tons interdicted in all of 2023.⁹⁷

Bolivia, the third-largest coca cultivator, has both a legal and illegal coca economy. It is also a key cocaine transit country. It is experiencing a drawn out political crisis that has been exacerbated by economic difficulties, putting the country's anti-crime efforts on the back

⁹⁰ Sara Garcia, "[Two Years On, Petro's 'Total Peace' Brings More Conflict in Colombia](#)," InSight Crime, 8 August, 2024.

⁹¹ Henry Shuldiner, "[ELN Attack Destroys Chances for Peace With Strengthening Colombian Guerrilla Group](#)," InSight Crime, 18 September, 2024.

⁹² Lara Loaiza and Henry Shuldiner, "[Renewed War for Colombia's Cocaine Center](#)," InSight Crime, 20 January 2025.

⁹³ Sara Garcia, "[Power Play or Peace? AGC's Role in Colombia's Fragile Negotiations](#)," InSight Crime, 16 October, 2024.

⁹⁴ Jerónimo López, "[Why Do Latin American Governments Keep Betting on States of Emergency?](#)," InSight Crime, 15 October, 2024.

⁹⁵ Charlotte Newell, "[Peruvian Gold Mining Gangs Launch Increasingly Brazen Attacks](#)," 23 January, 2024.

⁹⁶ Venezuela Investigative Unit, "[Three Stages in the Construction of the Tren de Aragua's Transnational Empire](#)," InSight Crime, 4 October, 2023.

⁹⁷ Ministerio del Interior del Perú, "[Récord histórico: PNP decomisó más de 133 toneladas de droga en lo que va del 2024](#)," Gobierno de Perú, 9 December 2024.



burner. A feud between Evo Morales, former Bolivia president, and Luis Arce, the current president, has caused a schism within the ruling party, leading to a near political stasis and weakening state opposition to expanding organized crime. The line between the country's legal and informal coca sectors has blurred.⁹⁸ By early December 2024, the country had seized 64 tons of cocaine, more than double that of 2023.⁹⁹ At the same time, deficient cooperation between Bolivian security forces and state failure to fix longstanding institutional issues has hampered anti drug-trafficking efforts.¹⁰⁰

Political instability can also be seen in the Caribbean region itself.

In Haiti, ¹⁰¹ gangs are consolidating their political and territorial control over the capital, Port-au-Prince.¹⁰² Gangs have carried out large-scale massacres, attacked commercial jets, and taken over major infrastructure. Over 700,000 people are now internally displaced,¹⁰³ and those who are able to leave the country will, possibly with the help of human smuggling networks. Near-total state collapse means there is little capacity for regional anti-crime efforts in Haiti.

Similarly, Cuba poses regional instability problems as decades-long economic difficulties and brain drain continue to bite. Amid widespread discontent in Cuba, President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez further criminalized dissent against the government in May 2022. In 2024, after a year in which inflation ran at 30% on an island that imports 70% of its food, the government announced it was in a “war-time economy.”¹⁰⁴ The country's national statistics office reported that 10% – one million people – left the island between 2022 and 2023.¹⁰⁵ Given the hardships faced by the Cuban population, attempts to flee are likely to continue.

⁹⁸ Alessandro Ford, "[What Lies Behind Bolivia's Expanding Cocaine Trade?](#)," InSight Crime, 2 September, 2021.

⁹⁹ Pedro Figueroa, "[Bolivia rompe récord en incautación de cocaína con 64 toneladas este año](#)," *Los Tiempos*, 8 December, 2024.

¹⁰⁰ Sean Doherty, "[Why Bolivia's \\$215 Million Radars Are Not Targeting Drug Flights](#)," InSight Crime, 19 June, 2023.

¹⁰¹ Parker Asmann, "[Haiti President Assassinated in Port-au-Prince](#)," InSight Crime, 7 July, 2021.

¹⁰² Alex Papadovassilakis, "[Haiti Gangs Push for Power Amid Political Chaos](#)," InSight Crime, 25 November, 2024./

¹⁰³ International Organization for Migration, "[Over 700,000 Displaced in Haiti, Half are Children as Humanitarian Crisis Worsens](#)," 2 October, 2024.

¹⁰⁴ Carla G. Colomé, "[The government of Cuba declares itself in a 'war-time economy'](#)," *El País*, 2 July, 2024.

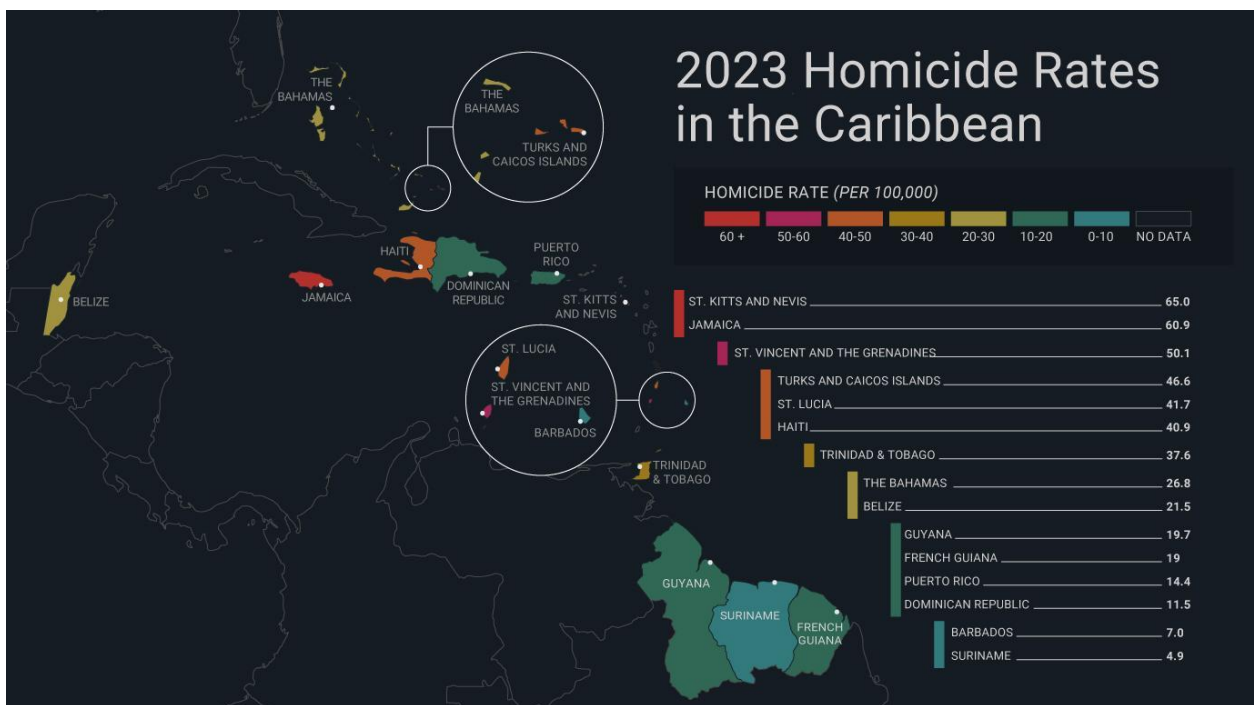
¹⁰⁵ Nora Gámez Torres, "[Cuba admits to massive emigration wave: a million people left in two years amid crisis](#)", Miami Herald, 24 July, 2024.



7. Increasing Homicides

A string of startling increases in homicide rates in Caribbean nations is perhaps the most obvious symptom of the ever-growing influence of organized crime in the region, which experts have claimed is responsible for at least half of all murders in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁰⁶

Caribbean nations made up eight of the top ten most homicidal countries in InSight Crime’s 2023 Homicide Round-Up, pushing out countries like Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil, where organized crime has a long and heavily-armed history, into the teens.



In the roundup, St. Kitts and Nevis, Jamaica, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines took first, second, and third place respectively.¹⁰⁷

Jamaica produces an unwavering level of violence and has routinely placed as the most violent country in the region. In 2022, Prime Minister Andres Holness said that gangs were responsible for 70% of all murders in the country, with extortion increasingly common and access to weapons easy.¹⁰⁸

St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, are, however, more recent entries to the region’s most violent nations. Gang violence and tit-for-tat revenge killings accounted

¹⁰⁶ Dario Migliorini, "Organized Crime Blamed for Half of Latin America’s Homicides," InSight Crime, 22 December, 2023.

¹⁰⁷ InSight Crime, "InSight Crime’s 2023 Homicide Round-Up," 21 February, 2024.

¹⁰⁸ Chris Dalby, "What Lies Behind Jamaica's Perpetual Loop of States of Emergency?," InSight Crime, 8 December, 2022.



for most of the murders, with disputes likely connected to the growing surge of cocaine being transported through and near these islands as cocaine routes emerge.¹⁰⁹

It is important to note that due to the small populations of most Caribbean nations, small numbers of additional murders can have a large impact on the homicide rates of countries.

However, while gangs on these islands are domestic and largely unsophisticated, they could evolve rapidly if given access to the global drug trafficking networks that connections with the region's larger TOC groups would provide. Ecuador's descent into violence offers one such cautionary tale.

¹⁰⁹ Jeremy McDermott and Steven Dudley, "[GameChangers 2023: The Cocaine Flash-to-Bang in 2024](#)," InSight Crime, 5 January, 2024.



8. Criminal Governance and Corruption

The Caribbean is susceptible to criminal governance and corruption. The increasing flow of cocaine and illicit money threatens to strengthen criminal networks across the region.¹¹⁰

The former British Virgin Islands Premier Andrew Fahie was recently sentenced to 11 years in a US prison for his involvement in cocaine trafficking and money laundering,¹¹¹ in a case that highlights how criminal organizations leverage reach the highest levels of power. Similar allegations have emerged in the Bahamas, where the Chief Superintendent of the Royal Bahamas Police Force and other government officials were implicated in cocaine trafficking operations targeting the United States.¹¹²

In late 2024, authorities in Curaçao arrested Michelangelo Martines, an elected politician, on suspicion of drug trafficking and money laundering.¹¹³

The trial of Michael Misick, the former premier of Turks and Caicos Islands, is scheduled to begin in December 2024, more than a decade after he was arrested in Brazil following allegations of systematic corruption from which he earned tens of millions of pounds.¹¹⁴

According to the World Justice Project, 80% of the Caribbean population believe that their elected politicians are in some way corrupt.¹¹⁵ Indeed, Caribbean nations received among the lowest scores for transparency in the greater Latin American region in Transparency International's most recent annual breakdown.¹¹⁶

Weak institutions, governance challenges, and limited resources create opportunities for criminal groups to embed themselves within state structures and corrupt.¹¹⁷ In many cases, criminal organizations directly fund political campaigns or bribe officials, ensuring favorable policies and limited enforcement of anti-crime measures.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁰ InSight Crime, "[Caribbean Profile](#)", InSight Crime, 2 November 2023.

¹¹¹ US Drug Enforcement Administration, "[Former BVI Premier Sentenced to Prison for Conspiring to Import Cocaine into the U.S.](#)", 6 August 2024.

¹¹² Gavin Voss, "[Bahamas Police in Turmoil Over US Drug Trafficking Case](#)", InSight Crime, 12 December 2024.

¹¹³ Correspondent, "[Parliament Member Martines also arrested on suspicion of drug trafficking](#)", Curaçao Chronicle, 6 November 2024.

¹¹⁴ Kenneth Mohammed, "[Trouble in paradise: corruption in the Caribbean has become normalised](#)," *The Guardian*, 4 March, 2023.

¹¹⁵ World Justice Project, "[World Justice Project's Corruption in the Caribbean Report Shows Majority Believe Public Officials Corrupt](#)," 20 April, 2023.

¹¹⁶ Transparency International, "[Corruption Perceptions Index 2023](#)," 30 January, 2024.

¹¹⁷ UNODC, "[Explainer: How corruption facilitates organized crime](#)," United Nations, 2024.

¹¹⁸ Ibid



9. The Possible Effects of a New Trump Administration

The victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential elections on November 5, 2024, pushed Latin America and the Caribbean back to the top of the US political agenda, and presents far-reaching consequences for the region.

Deportation

On his first day in office on January 20, 2025, President Trump launched a crackdown on immigration to the United States, making it clear his intentions to deport the 11.7 million undocumented migrants already in the country, and reducing legal pathways to achieve citizenship. As of September 2023, Mexico, El Salvador, India, Guatemala, and Honduras make up the five countries with the largest unauthorized populations in the United States.¹¹⁹

The proposed mass deportation could be economically devastating to large parts of Latin America that rely on remittances. Some countries of the region would be more susceptible to this than others. Remittances account for 24% of gross domestic product in El Salvador,¹²⁰ 19% in Guatemala,¹²¹ and 4% in Mexico.¹²² Should those remittances be removed, crime, which thrives in poverty, could grow.

Between 2019 and 2022, the Caribbean was the region with the highest increase in unauthorized immigrants at 300,000. Should these migrants be deported, they could provide organized crime with easy targets for recruitment.

Organized crime groups are also likely to profit from any clampdown on immigration. As in the recent past, US immigration policies have incentivized these groups, particularly those active in human smuggling.¹²³ Trump's closure of the US Customs and Border Protection Agency's CBP One app, which provided the route for legal entry into the United States for migrants located in certain Mexican states, stranded thousands of migrants and put them in harm's way of the organized crime groups that stalk the US-Mexico border. Hard-line immigration policies enable criminal groups to more easily victimize migrants and corrupt immigration officials.¹²⁴ They can also spark migration activity as migrants seek to arrive in the United States before policies are put in place. This would likely lead to an uptick in migration through the Caribbean.

¹¹⁹ Jeffrey S. Passel and Jens Manuel Krogstad, "[What we know about unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S.](#)," Pew Research Center, 22 July, 2024.

¹²⁰ World Bank, "[El Salvador Overview](#)," 10 October, 2019.

¹²¹ World Bank, "[Guatemala Overview](#)," 10 October, 2019.²³

¹²² Juan José Li Ng, "[Mexico | Remittances Would Grow More Than Double That of the Mexican Economy in 2024](#)," BBVA Research, 2 January, 2024.

¹²³ Steven Dudley, Parker Asmann, Victoria Dittmar, "[Unintended Consequences: How US Immigration Policy Fosters Organized Crime on the US-Mexico Border](#)," InSight Crime, June 2023.

¹²⁴ Ibid.



Arms Trafficking From the US

As stated above, the US is the primary source country for weapons illegally entering the Caribbean.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has joined Mexico's civil law case to sue US arms manufacturers in the hope of forcing companies and authorities to clamp down on arms smuggling.¹²⁵ However, the case has been rejected multiple times. Progress is, in effect, non-existent.

With Trump's return, advances are likely to be slowed further. He is a pro-gun president with demonstrable links to domestic pro-gun groups, such as the National Rifle Association (NRA), and has promised to roll back gun-control policies.¹²⁶ Indeed, during his first presidency he took steps to safeguarding around arms when he unsigned the Arms Trade Treaty,¹²⁷ an international agreement that seeks to monitor and reduce illicit arms trade.

Any issues related to arms trafficking are likely to take a back seat during his presidency.

'Invasion'

As the US opioid crisis continues, members of the Republican Party have floated the possibility of "invading" Mexico with teams of special forces to assassinate organized crime group leaders and launching bomb attacks to destroy fentanyl laboratories.¹²⁸ President Trump has also threatened taxes of 25% on all Mexican products entering the United States should Mexico not take steps to deal with the transnational drug trafficking organizations that produce fentanyl in the country and sell it in the United States.¹²⁹

Should any removal of organized crime leaders take place, there may be a fracturing of groups as has happened in the past, following other initiatives, like the Kingpin Strategy in Mexico, which sought to kill or imprison crime bosses.

¹²⁵ Caribbean Council, "[CARICOM States Join Mexico's Anti-Gun Lawsuit in the US](#)," 31 March, 2023.

¹²⁶ Associated Press, "[Trump, Haley Look Beyond South Carolina as They Court Voters in Nevada](#)," 6 November, 2024.

¹²⁷ Forum Arms Trade, "[US Unsigns Arms Trade Treaty](#)," December 20, 2024.

¹²⁸ Greg Grandin, "[Republican War on Mexico](#)", The New York Times, November 1, 2023.

¹²⁹ Patrick J. McDonnell, "[Tariffs Cast Shadow on U.S.-Mexico Relations as Trump Return Looms](#)", The Los Angeles Times, 12 December, 2024.



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