



Caribbean MOB Project
[The Space of Agnes Elisa](#)
Since 2014

2025: Overview of Organized Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean

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2025

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About the Caribbean MOB Project

For more than five decades, organized crime and drug trafficking, along with their collaborative networks, have been the subject of extensive research, academic debates, and strategic analysis. From my experience as a scholar in criminology, intelligence analysis, and law enforcement, I have delved into these singularities from multiple approaches to understand why they continue to represent a highly profitable business and, at the same time, a constant challenge for governments.

🌐 In this space, I share reflections, evidence-based data, experiences, and studies that reveal the complex structure of drug trafficking and organized crime, as well as their impact on our societies.

📖 I invite you to read, comment, and share this information and to follow me on my social networks to access specialized content in criminal analysis, strategic intelligence, and crime prevention.

✅ **Key Topics:** Caribbean Organized Crime 2026, Drug Trafficking in Puerto Rico, Drug Cartels in Latin America, Anti-Crime Strategies 2026, Caribbean Security Policies, Regional Criminal Intelligence, Transnational Organized Crime

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Summary:

The era of the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, has brought to the sphere of organized crime and drug trafficking a war based on terrorism as a strategy of potential for the United States as the sole leader, and minimize the impact of Latin America and the Caribbean, making these a persistent threat to its governance. Citizen security and economic stability are threatened by increasing tariffs and the destabilization of the economy around the world.

By 2026, these dynamics will be more complex due to the diversification of strategies, the inclusion of criminal networks within state agencies, and the permanent use of technologies in transnational operations. You are aware that Puerto Rico, because of its geographical position and its territorial political status vis-à-vis the United States, directly and indirectly represents an interesting position in the network of the drug trafficking route and constitutes a key position for regional security and for military practice aimed at combating it.

In this edition, I want to comment on this year's organized crime trends **and trends for 2026, focused on six areas:**

1. Police Intelligence: its digital integration and access to data.
2. Multilateral cooperation through institutional strengthening of native intelligence analysis skills.
3. Legalization of Corruption
4. Discrepancy in the Economy
5. Community Engagement to Violence
6. Technological Innovation vs. Cybercrime

The goal is to provide an approach and openness to conversations that governments, the private sector, federal agencies, and international partners can share and build on as part of a sustainable, evidence-based solution. In 2026, it must mark the start of strategic orientation, social resilience, and institutional innovation.

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1. An Approach to the Subject

It is common knowledge that drug trafficking continues to be a very lucrative illegal activity, due to the high demand of clientele around the world, with the United States being one of its main consumer markets.¹ Therefore, the ability of the United States to exercise control over the consumption of its citizens has failed, so it has established a "terrorist" operation against those transnational structures dedicated to business.

Cartels, gangs, whatever you want to call them, have undergone a process of sophistication in the operational, hierarchical, and management dynamics of their lines of business. The traditional use of drugs, such as cocaine, has diversified in its operation and consumption towards synthetic drugs such as fentanyl and methamphetamines, in addition to activities linked to human trafficking and cybercrime (Insight Crime, 2024). The erosion of democratic institutions, in the face of infiltration into political parties, electoral processes, and security forces, has generated enormous financial flows that have led to a superficial improvement in the economy (Transparency International, 2024).

It is the Caribbean, which I have been mentioning for some time; its geopolitical and geographical position plays an essential role as a strategic maritime corridor for not only the United States but also for countries in Europe and Africa. Caribbean countries face limitations and restrictions in the management of illicit transit, such as a lack of training.² Of their security resources, opportunistic security businesses have been favored, positively or negatively, in the use of their territories as logistical bridges for organized crime (CARICOM IMPACS, 2024).

The island of Puerto Rico is a particular case because of its colonial relationship with the United States, which serves as a gateway to the largest consumer of drugs, and with our structural vulnerabilities and those of the Caribbean countries, we share the weakness of not having autonomy or the opportunity to effectively combat entry into the drug market (USDEA, 2025).

¹ Reference: [dataUNODC](#) |

² Because they don't want to invest in their talents to fight it.

1.1 Relevance:

By 2026, the analysis of organized crime and drug trafficking is relevant because this thriving business has demonstrated an excellent capacity for adaptation and diversification, superior to that of state governments and the policies implemented to date. Naim (2005) and Shelley (2014) note the modernization of criminal networks, driven by the logic of the illegal, globalized economy, in which borders are mere obstacles to the flexibility and innovation of criminal groups. At the level of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean islands, they can no longer be seen as peripheries of the problem, but as essential spaces in the logistics of route planning, criminal alliances, and the need to establish coordinated, evidence-based responses with a practical and strategic regional approach.

1.2 Purpose:

In this article #8, I want to evaluate the strategies projected for 2026, which seek to neutralize organized crime and drug trafficking in Latin America, Puerto Rico, and the Caribbean, analyzing the following areas:

1. Analysis of Crime Trends Observed in 2025.
2. Identify the Strategic Pillars Implemented or Under Development by 2026.
3. To observe the criminological theoretical frameworks that allow the analysis of current dynamics.
4. Assess persistent and emerging challenges.
5. Formulate evidence-based recommendations for governments, society, and international partners.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

This article aims to establish an open conversation that integrates criminology, security expert studies, and political science. Criminological theories of criminal networks that include the functioning of nodes and connections between actors (Morsielli, 2009), the perception of the weakness of the state to explain corruption and the lack of institutional incapacity that favors the penetration of organized crime in the political sphere (Rotberg, 2004) and the integration of new perspectives of the global economy that analyze organized crime for this essential structure (Naim, 2005).

2. Regional Overview 2025

Latin America has maintained its status as a strategic point of global drug trafficking, although with essential variables if we compare it with decades ago. Cocaine is the main export product; synthetic drug production has reached unprecedented levels (Insight Crime, 2024). This consumption adjustment may reflect a transformation, while the cocaine market requires extensive crops, farmers, brokers, and an entire production chain; Synthetic drugs can be produced in a clandestine laboratory, without necessarily having a production line, which reduces costs and facilitates the adaptation of the criminal business to any part of the world.

In addition, the direct attack and fragmentation of the central cartels in a process of restructuring, the [Sinaloa Cartel](#), [Jalisco New Generation](#), expanded their networks, establishing alliances, as I mentioned before, the presence of Mexican Cartels in Puerto Rico; with other criminal organizations in Latin America, allowing not only to maintain control but also to diversify operationally (Maldonado & Sánchez, 2023). Although from the point of view of the United States government, "legalizing" corruption remains a critical factor in combating drug trafficking and organized crime, in countries such as [Honduras](#) and [Guatemala](#), several investigations have revealed links between criminal organizations and public officials, which shows their insertion into government structures through narco-political practices (Transparency International, 2024).

2.2 The Caribbean: structural vulnerabilities and expansion of shipping lanes

The Caribbean, with its fragmented geography and economic dependence on tourism, faces specific challenges posed by organized crime. In 2025, it was consolidated as a key space for the transshipment of drugs to the United States and Europe. The strategy of criminal groups is based on "**island hopping**", i.e., the use of multiple islands to transport shipments in small boats to connect them with long-range routes (CARICOM IMPACS, 2024).

The **maritime vulnerability** of the region is a determining factor. Most island states lack sufficient resources to patrol their territorial waters effectively, leading to opportunities for drug, arms, and human trafficking (Muggah & Griffiths, 2024). This capacity deficit also reflects a structural problem of regional security, as framed in the multidimensional security theory proposed by the OAS, which includes threats beyond interstate wars, such as transnational crimes that directly affect social and economic stability (OAS, 2022).

Money laundering through the tourism sector intensified in countries such as the Dominican Republic, Aruba, and Antigua, where hotel chains and real estate developments served as conduits. The Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF, 2025) identified that offshore structures and the use of shell companies have been used to hide illicit profits in the region.

On the social level, Haiti and Jamaica became epicenters of armed violence. In Haiti, the institutional collapse after years of political crisis allowed gangs to dominate entire neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince and operate as *de facto* authorities in the absence of the state (World Bank, 2025). In Jamaica, the circulation of illegal weapons from the United States fueled gang violence linked to drug trafficking (Europol, 2025).

2.3 Puerto Rico: Strategic Node in Hemispheric Security

Puerto Rico occupies a unique position in the criminal landscape of 2025. As a territory of the United States, it is supported by federal agencies such as the DEA, the FBI, and the Department of Homeland Security. However, its geographical location makes it a **natural bridge between South America, the Caribbean, and North America**, which places it at the center of drug trafficking routes to the U.S. market (USDEA, 2025). The criminal dynamics in Puerto Rico manifest themselves on two levels. First, the island functions as **a transshipment platform**: cargoes from Colombia, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic enter through its coasts and ports, from where they are redirected to the continental United States. Second, there is a strong presence of **local criminal organizations** that control territories in hamlets and urban areas, linking up with international cartels to manage distribution and micro-trafficking (Rodríguez, 2025).

Political corruption is another critical dimension. Recent investigations have revealed links between officials and drug trafficking networks, reflecting the insertion of organized crime into the state sphere. This phenomenon is part of what Shelley (2014) calls **"dirty entanglements"**, that is, the convergence between corruption, crime, and, in some cases, terrorism. The social impact of these dynamics is profound. Puerto Rico has homicide rates higher than the U.S. average, with patterns associated with settling scores between organizations and territorial control in marginalized communities (USDEA, 2025). On an economic level, money laundering through casinos, real estate, and public contracts represents an additional risk to governance.

2.4 Comparative Synthesis

The outlook for 2025 shows both **convergences and divergences** between Latin America, the Caribbean, and Puerto Rico:

Region	Main Trends	Structural Factors	Applicable Theory
Latin America	Production of synthetic drugs; cartelization; Electoral corruption	weak states; high inequality	weak state (Rotberg, 2004); global illicit economy (Naim, 2005)
Caribbean	"Island hopping"; car washing; Violence in Haiti and Jamaica	Deficit of security resources; Economic dependence	Multidimensional Security (OAS, 2022)
Puerto Rico	Transshipment point: gangs linked to cartels; Narcopolitics	Dual Condition (U.S. + Caribbean); Institutional corruption	Criminal Networks (Morselli, 2009); dirty entanglements (Shelley, 2014)

This comparison shows that, although each region has its own particularities, they all share the same challenge: organized crime operates as **a transnational network capable of adapting to different contexts and exploiting local vulnerabilities.**

3. Police intelligence and criminal networks

3.1 Introduction

Within the framework of the strategies to combat organized crime in 2026, police intelligence is a fundamental axis. Unlike traditional reactive approaches, criminal intelligence promotes a proactive, preventive approach, focused on the collection, analysis, and sharing of information. This model, known as **police intelligence or evidence-based intelligence**, seeks to anticipate criminal patterns and dismantle the structures of organizations before they consolidate their territorial control (Ratcliffe, 2016).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the implementation of police intelligence systems faces structural challenges: lack of interoperability, technological weaknesses, and institutional resilience. However, in 2025, progress was made in the creation of regional data-sharing platforms, particularly under the leadership of CARICOM IMPACS and U.S. federal agencies with a presence in Puerto Rico (CARICOM IMPACS, 2024).

3.2 Criminal Network Theory

The theory of criminal networks, developed by authors such as Morselli (2009), states that criminal organizations are not hierarchical in all cases, but operate as **flexible networks of interconnected nodes**. Each node serves a function: financing, transportation, distribution, and institutional corruption, and the resilience of the network depends on its ability to adapt and replace actors when they are arrested or eliminated. In the Latin American and Caribbean context, this theory explains why cartels and gangs manage to maintain operations despite the capture of their leaders. In Puerto Rico, for example, the capture of leaders of organizations in San Juan has not dismantled the network, as other actors quickly fill the void left by their arrests. This adaptability turns criminal networks into antifragile organizations, capable of strengthening themselves in the face of state pressure (Kenney, 2007). Therefore, **police intelligence should focus on identifying critical connections in the network, rather than neutralizing isolated individuals**. The analysis of financial, technological, and social linkages provides an understanding of how information and power flow in illicit organizations.

3.3 Regional Exchange Platforms

In 2025, efforts were consolidated to improve the interoperability of police databases across the Caribbean and Latin America. An example is the [Advanced Passenger Information System \(APIS\)](#), managed by CARICOM IMPACS, which allows monitoring suspicious passenger movements at airports in the region

(CARICOM IMPACS, 2024). Puerto Rico participates indirectly through coordination with U.S. agencies, making it a hub between regional and federal systems. Likewise, the implementation of fusion centers *in* Puerto Rico is a relevant model. These spaces integrate local police, federal agencies (DEA, FBI, Homeland Security), and, in some cases, international partners. Its primary function is to centralize intelligence, reduce information fragmentation, and promote faster response to emerging threats (USDEA, 2025).

3.4 Limitations and Challenges

Despite the advances, police intelligence in the region faces critical limitations:

- **Institutional fragmentation:** Lack of trust between agencies limits the flow of information.
- **Corruption:** the same officials who should feed intelligence systems are, in some cases, co-opted by criminal networks (Transparency International, 2024).
- **Technology gaps:** While Puerto Rico has access to advanced federal systems, many Caribbean countries lack basic digital infrastructure.
- **Human rights:** The use of biometric databases and mass surveillance creates tensions with legal privacy frameworks (Muggah & Griffiths, 2024).

These challenges force us to rethink the implementation of police intelligence in terms of balance: effectiveness against crime and respect for fundamental rights.

3.5 Applications in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean

In Puerto Rico, public housing complexes constitute a testing ground for police intelligence. The use of geospatial monitoring and data analysis has enabled the detection of patterns of violence linked to micro-trafficking. In turn, federal investigations have revealed links between local gangs and cartels, confirming the importance of integrating international information (Rodríguez, 2025). In the Caribbean, maritime cooperation is based on intelligence-sharing systems. For example, the Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S), based in Key West, coordinates interdiction operations with countries in the Eastern Caribbean and Puerto Rico, focused on identifying fast boat routes used for cocaine and arms trafficking (OAS, 2022).

3.6 Preliminary Recommendations

1. **Develop interconnected intelligence nodes** that integrate Puerto Rico as a bridge between the United States and the Caribbean.
2. **Invest in big data analytics and cyber intelligence** to map the financial and technological links of criminal networks.

3. **Strengthen anti-corruption mechanisms** in security agencies to ensure data reliability.
4. **Promote regional training in social network analysis** for police forces in Latin America and the Caribbean.

4. Multilateral cooperation and multidimensional security

4.1 Introduction

Organized crime in Latin America, Puerto Rico, and the Caribbean transcends political borders and jurisdictions. No state, no matter how much capacity it possesses, can confront transnational networks of drug trafficking, money laundering, and arms trafficking on its own. Therefore, the need for multilateral cooperation is an essential component of security strategies for 2026. This approach is based on the concept of multidimensional security, adopted by the Organization of American States (OAS) in 2003, which recognizes that security threats include both military risks and unconventional phenomena, such as terrorism, organized crime, cyberattacks, natural disasters, and pandemics (OAS, 2022). Under this paradigm, drug trafficking and associated violence are treated as regional problems that require coordination between governments, international organizations, and civil society.

4.2 Multidimensional Security Theory

The theory of multidimensional security challenges the traditional view of national security, which focuses exclusively on military defense. According to authors such as Muggah (2018), contemporary security must be analyzed at multiple levels: human, social, environmental, economic, and political. In this sense, organized crime is understood as a hybrid threat that not only affects the security of the State but also the well-being of communities. Applicable to the Caribbean and Latin America, this framework explains why multilateral cooperation must include not only the armed forces and police, but also financial, customs, educational, and health institutions. The fight against drug trafficking implies both drug interdiction and social prevention and institutional strengthening.

4.3 Regional Cooperation Mechanisms

In the Caribbean, the most relevant body is the [Caribbean Community Implementation Agency for Crime and Security \(CARICOM IMPACS\)](#), created in 2006. In 2025, CARICOM IMPACS coordinated intelligence operations, the standardization of legal frameworks, and joint maritime patrols. Among its most prominent initiatives are the Advance Passenger Information System (APIS) and the [Caribbean Arrest Warrant Treaty](#), which facilitate data sharing and judicial cooperation between CARICOM Member States (CARICOM IMPACS, 2024).

Puerto Rico, although not a member of CARICOM, participates through U.S. federal agencies. The DEA and Homeland Security Investigations have strengthened coordination with islands such as the Dominican

Republic, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago, recognizing the importance of the Eastern Caribbean corridor for the transit of cocaine to North America (USDEA, 2025). In Latin America, cooperation is articulated through initiatives such as Plan Colombia (now called *Peace Colombia*) and the [U.S.-funded Central American Regional Security Initiative \(CARSI\)](#). These policies have sought to contain the expansion of cartels in Colombia, Honduras, and Guatemala, although with mixed results in terms of violence and corruption (Isacson, 2023).

4.4 Puerto Rico's Role as a Hemispheric Hinge

Puerto Rico plays a strategic role as a link node between the Caribbean and the United States. Through its ports and airports, the island is used for both illicit operations and security programs. The Port of San Juan, for example, participates in the [Container Security Initiative \(CSI\)](#), a U.S. program that inspects high-risk containers before they arrive at continental ports (CBP, 2024). The island is also a key point for the Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S), which coordinates interdiction operations in the Caribbean with countries such as the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. Puerto Rico's participation in these initiatives reinforces its role as an operational bridge in multilateral efforts to combat drug trafficking (OAS, 2022).

4.5 Limitations of multilateral cooperation

Despite progress, cooperation faces significant obstacles:

- **Capacity asymmetries:** Countries with limited resources, such as Haiti and Dominica, are unable to sustain intelligence operations at the level of regional powers (Muggah & Griffiths, 2024).
- **Political fragmentation:** diplomatic tensions between states can slow down agreements, as happened with the lack of coordination between Venezuela and Colombia at certain times (Isacson, 2023).
- **Unequal access to information:** U.S. agencies control much of the intelligence and don't always share the data equitably with their Caribbean partners.
- **National sovereignty:** Some governments perceive cooperation as meddling in internal affairs, limiting the willingness to integrate forces more deeply.

4.6 Preliminary recommendations

1. **Strengthen shared data platforms between the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, and Latin America, ensuring interoperability** and data protection.
2. **Expand judicial cooperation** through effective extradition treaties and a regional court specializing in organized crime.

3. **Ensure sustainable financing** for joint operations, avoiding exclusive dependence on external resources (US or EU).
4. **Integrate social and community dimensions** into cooperation, recognizing that multidimensional security goes beyond the military.

5. Institutional strengthening and the fight against corruption

5.1 Introduction

Organized crime thrives where institutions are fragile, corrupt, or lack social legitimacy. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the infiltration of drug trafficking into police forces, customs, ports, and political processes has become a recurring pattern. This reality has led to **institutional strengthening and the fight against corruption** being essential pillars of the security strategies projected for 2026 (Transparency International, 2024). Puerto Rico, despite being a territory of the United States with access to federal resources, is not immune to this phenomenon. Recent corruption scandals linked to public contracts and links with criminal organizations show that local institutions can also become vehicles for organized crime (Rodríguez, 2025).

5.2 Weak State Theory

The analysis of the link between organized crime and corruption can be approached from the theory of the weak or failed state, proposed by Rotberg (2004). According to this framework, **when the state fails to guarantee fundamental public goods**, such as security, justice, and basic services, it becomes fertile ground for non-state actors, including criminal networks, to occupy that space. In the Caribbean and Latin America, weak institutions facilitate co-optation: criminals do not necessarily seek to destroy the state, but to infiltrate and manipulate it to ensure impunity. This is reflected in phenomena such as the purchase of police protection, the manipulation of electoral processes, and the capture of judicial institutions (Shelley, 2014).

Puerto Rico represents an intermediate case: it is not a failed state, but the perception of corruption in local agencies and the weakness of control mechanisms have, according to some authors, generated a **"vulnerable state"** (Muggah, 2018).

5.3 Corruption in police and customs forces

In Latin America, customs and police forces are institutions highly susceptible to corruption. Cases in Guatemala and Honduras have shown that state agents participate in the transit of illicit shipments in exchange for bribes (UNODC, 2023). In the Caribbean, ports are hotspots. The lack of modern monitoring systems allows containers with drugs and weapons to enter without adequate controls, as happened in the Dominican Republic, where more than 3 tons of cocaine were seized in 2024 (Europol, 2025). Puerto Rico also faces vulnerabilities. Despite federal controls, investigations have documented collusion between port employees and criminal organizations to facilitate the transit of illicit shipments (USDEA, 2025).

5.4 Narcopolitics and state capture

The concept of **narcopolitics** describes the infiltration of criminal networks into political processes, whether through campaign financing, vote buying, or control of elected officials. In countries such as Honduras, the trial of former President [Juan Orlando Hernández](#) in U.S. courts for links to drug traffickers evidenced the magnitude of this phenomenon (Isacson, 2023). In Puerto Rico, multiple cases of mayors and municipal officials prosecuted for corruption and links to drug trafficking in recent years show that the problem is not exclusive to failed states but can manifest itself even in contexts with federal supervision (Rodríguez, 2025).

5.5 Institutional strengthening strategies

Institutional strengthening requires a combination of structural reforms and accountability mechanisms:

- **Internal control reforms:** creation of independent internal affairs offices in the police and customs forces (Transparency International, 2024).
- **External oversight:** strengthening of external audits and courts of auditors to monitor the use of public resources.
- **Whistleblower protection:** Establish legal frameworks that protect the "[whistleblowers](#)" who reveal corruption linked to organized crime.
- **Electoral transparency:** international monitoring of elections and public financing to reduce dependence on illicit private capital (OAS, 2022).

Puerto Rico has taken steps in this direction by creating joint task forces against public corruption **composed** of local and federal agencies. However, challenges related to citizen trust in institutions persist (USDEA, 2025).

5.6 Challenges and Limitations

- **Judicial impunity:** In many countries in the region, corruption investigations do not result in effective convictions due to a lack of judicial independence.
- **Internal resistance:** sectors within institutions oppose reforms that threaten their privileges.
- **Dependence on external support:** Some Caribbean countries rely on international funding to sustain their anti-corruption units, raising questions about their sustainability (Muggah & Griffiths, 2024).

5.7 Preliminary Recommendations

1. **Create courts specialized in organized crime and corruption**, with trained judges protected from threats.

2. **Implement digital traceability systems in customs and ports** to reduce bribery opportunities.
3. **Promote the culture of integrity** through ethical training programs in public institutions.
4. **Ensure international supervision in contexts of high vulnerability**, especially in electoral processes in Caribbean and Latin American countries.

6. Economic disruption of criminal networks

6.1 Introduction

Organized crime is sustained not only by territorial control or violence, but also by its ability to generate, move, and conceal financial resources. For this reason, one of the strategic pillars for 2026 is the economic disruption of criminal networks, which seek to attack the heart of their power: illicit finance. The central premise is that, without access to financial resources, organizations lose the ability to corrupt officials, acquire weapons, recruit young people, and sustain their transnational operations (Shelley, 2014). In the Caribbean and Puerto Rico, this approach is particularly relevant due to the use of casinos, hotels, real estate, and offshore companies for money laundering (CFATF, 2025).

6.2 Global Illicit Economy Theory

Authors such as Naim (2005) and Castells (2010) argue that organized crime should be understood as part of the **illicit global economy**, a parallel system that takes advantage of the same globalization processes as legal economies: financial flows, logistics chains, and digital technologies. According to Castells, criminal networks are "global companies" that operate under logics similar to those of transnational corporations, with strategies of diversification, decentralization, and flexible alliances. This explains how drug trafficking can be linked to smuggling, illegal mining, and arms trafficking, creating illicit conglomerates with revenues equivalent to the GDP of small countries. The theory of the illegal economy allows us to understand that fighting organized crime is not only a police issue, but also a **financial and economic one**.

6.3 Forms of Money Laundering

In Latin America and the Caribbean, criminal networks employ multiple mechanisms to legitimize their profits:

- **Casinos and betting:** In the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, casinos have been labeled as centers for money laundering through simulated bets and international transfers.
- **Real Estate:** Buying luxury properties in San Juan, Santo Domingo, and Panama City is a recurring avenue for converting illicit money into legal assets (USDEA, 2025).
- **Tourism and hotels:** The Caribbean has seen an increase in investments in resorts partially financed with illicit capital, taking advantage of the steady flow of foreign exchange (CFATF, 2025).
- **Shell and offshore companies:** corporate structures in low-tax jurisdictions, such as the Cayman Islands or Panama, serve to hide the actual beneficiaries of the funds.

- **Cryptoassets:** 2025 saw a growth in the use of cryptocurrencies to move resources out of regulated banking systems, primarily through mixers and dark web transactions (Europol, 2025).

6.4 The Case of Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico faces a unique situation due to its dual condition: a U.S. territory with access to global markets and, at the same time, a vulnerable space given its location in the Caribbean. DEA investigations (2025) have identified laundering operations through public contracts and municipal tenders, in which front companies obtain projects financed with illicit money. In addition, the use of real estate and savings cooperatives to channel resources from drug trafficking has been documented (Rodríguez, 2025). Puerto Rico's appeal for these operations lies in:

1. **Connection to the U.S. financial system**, which provides international legitimacy.
2. **Local tax incentives** that can be taken advantage of by criminal structures disguised as legal investment.
3. **Weakness in local** controls, particularly in the monitoring of government and cooperative purchases.

6.5 Regional and Global Initiatives

In the Caribbean, the key body is the [Caribbean Financial Action Task Force \(CFATF\)](#), which oversees compliance with international anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing standards. In 2025, the CFATF promoted audits in the tourism sectors of Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico to detect irregularities in foreign investments (CFATF, 2025). Globally, the [Financial Action Task Force \(FATF\)](#) remains the benchmark for anti-money laundering standards. However, many Latin American countries lack the technical capacity to implement these recommendations (Transparency International, 2024) fully. Cooperation with the European Union and the United States has allowed the development of financial intelligence units (FIUs) in several countries. However, their effectiveness depends on the political independence and will of governments.

6.6 Challenges of Economic Disruption

- **Technical complexity:** Tracing illicit transactions requires expertise in finance, forensic accounting, and blockchain analysis.
- **Political Collusion:** When government actors engage in money laundering operations, investigations face internal blockages.
- **Balloon effect:** criminal networks move operations from one country to another with fewer controls, taking advantage of regulatory asymmetries.

- **Risks of over-regulation:** excessive controls can choke legal economies, especially in tourism-dependent countries.

6.7 Preliminary Recommendations

1. **Strengthen the financial intelligence units (FIUs)** in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, with guaranteed independence in the face of political pressures.
2. **Implement registries of beneficial owners** of companies to avoid the use of shell companies.
3. **Monitor foreign investments in tourism and real estate through periodic audits and** international cooperation.
4. **Train specialized crypto finance teams** to track illicit operations on blockchain.
5. **Create regional sanction mechanisms** that punish banks and financial institutions complicit in laundering operations.

7. Community Violence Prevention and Rehabilitation

7.1 Introduction

The confrontation with organized crime through police and military repression has shown limitations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Evidence shows that community-based violence prevention and social rehabilitation programs are a key focus of sustainable security strategies by 2026 (World Bank, 2025). This pillar seeks to reduce the supply of criminal labor, build social resilience, and rebuild the community fabric in contexts marked by poverty and exclusion.

7.2 Applied Criminological Theories

- **Situational crime prevention:** proposed by Clarke (1995), who argues that crime can be reduced by modifying the environment and increasing the costs of committing crimes. Applied to hamlets in Puerto Rico, it involves public lighting, surveillance cameras, and access control.
- **Critical criminology:** maintains that crime is the product of structural inequalities and social exclusion. From this perspective, education, youth employment, and community development programs are as important as police operations (Young, 2011).
- **Community resilience theory:** emphasizes the ability of communities to resist criminal pressures through social cohesion, local leadership, and citizen participation (Ungar, 2012).

These theories complement state responses and emphasize that organized crime cannot be fought only in the coercive dimension.

7.3 Puerto Rico: Hamlets as a space for intervention

The public housing in San Juan and other towns has been a recurrent scene of violence linked to drug trafficking. Prevention programs have sought to offer alternatives to vulnerable young people through sports, art, and job training. The "Al Rescate de Nuestros Jovenes" project, promoted in 2024 with the support of the University of Puerto Rico, has shown reductions in youth recidivism by integrating community education and mentoring (Rodríguez, 2025). However, challenges remain: the lack of continuity in public policies and the pressure of gangs, which offer immediate income, limit the impact of these programs.

7.4 The Caribbean: Community-Based Initiatives

In Jamaica, the [Violence Interruption](#) program, based on Chicago's Cure Violence model, has worked with community mediators to defuse conflicts before they escalate into homicides. Preliminary assessments indicate a decrease in shootings in Kingston neighborhoods (Muggah & Griffiths, 2024). In Haiti, local organizations have sought to integrate young people displaced by gang violence into urban agriculture programs. However, the impact has been limited due to the fragility of the state.

7.5 Latin America: rehabilitation and prevention programs

- **Colombia:** Initiatives to reintegrate former FARC combatants have served as a model for social inclusion in rural areas.
- **Brazil:** "Proximity Police" programs in Rio de Janeiro favelas combined police presence with social investment, although they were criticized for their lack of sustainability.
- **Mexico:** Prevention projects in Monterrey and Ciudad Juárez have reduced youth violence by combining technical education with business cooperation (Isacson, 2023).

7.6 Challenges

- **Lack of political continuity:** Many programs depend on electoral cycles and are interrupted by changes of government.
- **Insufficient resources:** Community initiatives often lack sustained funding.
- **Stigmatization:** marginalized communities face social stigmas that limit their labor and social reintegration.
- **Criminal threats:** community leaders are targets of intimidation and violence.

7.7 Preliminary Recommendations

1. **Invest in sustained social prevention programs** with stable funding across political cycles.
2. **Strengthen technical education and youth employment** in vulnerable communities.
3. **Promote partnerships between the State, the private sector, and NGOs to expand the impact of rehabilitation programmes.**
4. **Protect community leaders** through legal frameworks and state accompaniment.
5. **Integrate evaluation mechanisms** to measure the impact on reducing violence and recidivism.

8. Technological Innovation and Cybercrime Control

8.1 Introduction

Technological advancement has transformed the way criminal organizations operate in Latin America, Puerto Rico, and the Caribbean. Drug trafficking, money laundering, and smuggling no longer depend exclusively on physical corridors, but use digital tools to coordinate operations, move money, and hide identities. Faced with this scenario, technological innovation applied to security and cybercrime control has become an essential pillar of the 2026 strategies (Europol, 2025).

8.2 Theory of the Modernization of Crime

The theory of crime modernization holds that technology not only facilitates legitimate social and economic life but also expands opportunities for illicit activities (Wall, 2007). According to this approach, criminal organizations are early users of technological innovations, able to adapt them to their ends quickly. Examples of this include cryptocurrencies, initially designed as decentralized means of exchange that are now used to finance illicit operations and to move large amounts of money without going through traditional banking systems (UNODC, 2023). From this perspective, the fight against crime must include technological capabilities for surveillance, detection, and analysis, in balance with respect for fundamental rights.

8.3 Security Technologies

In 2025, several technological innovations began to consolidate in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean as part of the fight against organized crime:

- **Biometric controls at borders and airports:** the use of facial recognition and fingerprints allows high-risk travelers to be identified and document forgery to be prevented (CBP, 2024).
- **Customs inspections with artificial intelligence:** X-ray and AI systems analyze patterns in containers and baggage to detect suspicious cargo.
- **Blockchain transaction monitoring:** Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) have begun using blockchain analytics tools to track suspicious cryptocurrency transfers.
- **Predictive analytics platforms:** big data models applied to police records, emergency calls, and socioeconomic data make it possible to anticipate "hotspots" of violence in urban communities (Ratcliffe, 2016).

8.4 Puerto Rico as a Technological Laboratory

Puerto Rico, thanks to its connection with U.S. federal agencies, has become a laboratory for the implementation of security technologies in the Caribbean. Pilot facial recognition programs at airports and ports have enabled the detection of individuals linked to international criminal networks. In addition, in 2025, a specialized cybercrime and digital financial crime unit was created **to track cryptocurrency transactions used to finance** drug trafficking operations. These efforts are carried out in coordination with Europol and the US Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) (USDEA, 2025).

8.5 Ethical and Technical Challenges

Technological innovation poses benefits, but also multiple challenges:

- **Privacy and human rights:** Mass surveillance using biometrics can lead to abuses if there are no clear legal frameworks (Muggah & Griffiths, 2024).
- **Technological gap:** While Puerto Rico has access to cutting-edge technology, many Caribbean countries lack the resources to implement it.
- **Insufficient training:** The shortage of cybersecurity specialists limits the effectiveness of these tools.
- **Cyberattacks on critical infrastructure:** criminal organizations can use technology not only to traffic, but also to attack state and financial systems.

8.6 Preliminary Recommendations

1. **Invest in regional cybersecurity capabilities** so that Caribbean countries are not left behind.
2. **Establish legal frameworks for data protection and privacy** to prevent abuses in the use of biometric and surveillance technologies.
3. **Promote international cooperation against cybercrime** through joint teams between Puerto Rico, Latin America, and global agencies.
4. **Train local specialists** in blockchain analytics, artificial intelligence, and big data applied to security.
5. **Guarantee the financial sustainability** of technological projects, avoiding exclusive dependence on external funds.

9. Persistent and Emerging Challenges

9.1 Introduction

Despite advances in regional cooperation, technological innovation, and prevention programs, organized crime in Latin America, Puerto Rico, and the Caribbean continues to adapt and expand. The year 2026 is presented as a turning point. Still, persistent challenges, those already identified but not yet resolved, and emerging challenges, new criminal dynamics or structural risks, test the effectiveness of the strategies adopted. Understanding these challenges is critical to ensure that public policies are not limited to short-term responses but evolve in line with the flexible, transnational nature of criminal networks (Kenney, 2007).

9.2 Persistent challenges

9.2.1 Limitations on maritime surveillance

The Caribbean has thousands of nautical miles of territorial waters and limited interdiction capabilities. The lack of naval resources, coastal radars, and trained personnel reduces the ability of island states to detect fast boats used in the trafficking of drugs, arms, and people (Muggah & Griffiths, 2024). Puerto Rico, although supported by the U.S. Coast Guard, faces the same challenge on its western and eastern coasts, where numerous vessels loaded with cocaine and firearms have been detected.

9.2.2 Structural corruption

Corruption continues to be the primary facilitator of organized crime. At the regional level, customs agents, police, and political officials continue to be co-opted through bribes or threats. In Puerto Rico, the phenomenon has generated scandals involving mayors and local legislators (Rodríguez, 2025). This is connected to the weak state theory (Rotberg, 2004), according to which institutions are unable to contain the infiltration of crime due to their fragility or lack of legitimacy.

9.2.3 Judicial impunity

The judicial systems of several Latin American countries are backlogged, lack of independence, and are vulnerable to corruption. In the Caribbean, the absence of clear extradition frameworks makes it difficult to prosecute criminals who move between islands to evade justice (Transparency International, 2024).

9.3 Emerging Challenges

9.3.1 Expansion of synthetic drug laboratories

While cocaine continues to be relevant, clandestine laboratories for synthetic drugs, particularly fentanyl and methamphetamines, are expanding in Mexico, Central America, and some Caribbean islands. These substances require less agricultural infrastructure and generate higher profits, posing a growing threat (Insight Crime, 2024).

9.3.2 Cybercrime and Crypto Markets

The use of cryptocurrencies and dark web platforms for illicit transactions is booming. In addition to the financing of drug trafficking, activities such as arms trafficking and online sexual exploitation have been detected (Europol, 2025). Puerto Rico, due to its access to the U.S. financial system, is vulnerable to becoming a node for these operations.

9.3.3 Migration Crises and Organized Crime

Forced migration in Central America and the Caribbean is fertile ground for organized crime. Criminal groups take advantage of migrants' vulnerability to recruit or exploit them in illicit activities, from drug trafficking to human trafficking (UNODC, 2023).

9.3.4 Militarization and human rights

In some countries, the militarization of security has led to complaints of human rights violations. In Mexico and Brazil, urban military operations have temporarily reduced violence, but at the cost of abuses and loss of public trust (Isacson, 2023). This reflects the tension between security and human rights, a central policy dilemma in 2026.

9.4 Comparative Synthesis of Challenges

Challenge Type	Latin America	Caribbean	Puerto Rico
Persistent	Corruption; judicial impunity; Endemic violence	Limited maritime surveillance; Corruption in ports	Drug trafficking; Local Corruption
Emerging	Expansion of synthetic drugs; militarization	Crypto markets; Trafficking in Persons Linked to Migration	Financial vulnerability in cryptocurrencies

9.5 Preliminary Recommendations

1. **Improve regional maritime surveillance** through multinational cooperation and external financing.
2. **Create a regional extradition framework** to avoid legal refuge in small islands.
3. **Strengthen judicial independence** through the training and protection of anti-corruption judges.
4. **Cryptocurrencies and digital platforms with homogeneous legal frameworks in the Caribbean** and Latin America.
5. **Prioritize a balanced approach to security** that respects human rights and prevents abuses in militarized contexts.

10. Evidence-based Recommendations

10.1 Introduction

The strategies implemented in Latin America, Puerto Rico, and the Caribbean until 2025 have shown progress but also limitations. Organized crime continues to diversify, adapting to new technologies and taking advantage of institutional vulnerabilities. For 2026 to be a turning point, public policies must be oriented towards empirical evidence, integrate successful experiences, and correct the failures detected in the region (UNODC, 2023). The following recommendations are organized into three levels: national governments, civil society and non-governmental organizations, and international partners. Each level links to previously analyzed theoretical frameworks and responds to the persistent and emerging challenges identified in Chapter 4.

10.2 Recommendations for Governments

1. Joint Network Intelligence and Analysis Centers

- Establish shared intelligence units that integrate national, Caribbean, and Latin American databases, applying the criminal network approach (Morselli, 2009).
- Puerto Rico could act as a technological bridge between the U.S. and the Caribbean, sharing *fusion center* models adapted to island contexts.

2. Strengthening judicial independence

- Create specialized courts in organized crime and corruption, with trained judges protected from threats (Rotberg, 2004).
- Promote cooperation between regional prosecutors' offices to expedite extraditions and transnational processes.

3. Border and port modernization

- Invest in scanning and predictive analysis technologies in strategic ports (San Juan, Santo Domingo, Cartagena).
- Combine physical inspections with artificial intelligence algorithms to detect smuggling patterns (Europol, 2025).

4. Ongoing Community Prevention Programs

- Ensure stable funding for education, sports, and youth employment programmes in high-risk areas.
- Link situational prevention (Clarke, 1995) with critical criminology to address both environmental conditions and social inequalities.

10.3 Recommendations for Civil Society and NGOs

1. Social prevention education campaigns

- Design campaigns that inform communities about the risks of recruitment by criminal groups, synthetic drug use, and armed violence.
- Incorporate digital media and social networks to reach young people in urban and rural contexts.

2. Strengthening community reporting systems

- Create safe and anonymous mechanisms to report corruption and crimes, avoiding reprisals.
- Develop alliances with the media to make the complaints visible and generate public pressure.

3. Rehabilitation and social reintegration

- Expand reintegration programs for former gang members and ex-inmates, with the support of private companies.
- Implement community mediation models to reduce violent conflict, based on Jamaica's experience with *violence interrupters* (Muggah & Griffiths, 2024).

4. Participation in public policies

- Include NGOs and communities in the formulation of national security plans, ensuring a multidimensional and democratic approach (OAS, 2022).

10.4 Recommendations for International Partners

1. Financing digital and security infrastructure

- The United States, the European Union, and Canada must fund maritime radars, biometric technologies, and digital platforms in the Caribbean.
- Establish regional cybersecurity projects to train countries with limited resources.

2. Support for anti-corruption forces

- Support the task forces against public corruption in Puerto Rico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, through technical accompaniment and international supervision.
- Fund independent audits in vulnerable sectors such as customs, ports, and tourism.

3. Standardization of financial regulatory frameworks

- Support the implementation of beneficial ownership registries in offshore companies and companies, to close money laundering routes.

- Coordinate international sanctions against banks and financial institutions complicit in laundering (CFATF, 2025).

4. Focus on human rights

- Ensure that international cooperation does not encourage indiscriminate militarization.
- Promote citizen security programs that integrate social justice, in line with the multidimensional security paradigm (Muggah, 2018).

10.5 Summary of Recommendations

Actor	Key measures	Expected impact
Governments	Joint intelligence centres, specialised courts, port modernisation, and community programmes	Reduction of impunity, greater territorial and financial control
Civil society / NGOs	Educational campaigns, reporting systems, rehabilitation, and policy participation	Social resilience and decreased criminal recruitment
International Partners	Technological financing, anti-corruption support, homogeneous regulatory frameworks, respect for human rights	Increased regional capacity and program sustainability

11. Conclusions

11.1 Introduction

The analysis of organized crime and drug trafficking in Latin America, Puerto Rico, and the Caribbean reveals a complex, dynamic, and deeply rooted reality in the social, political, and economic structures of the region. The review of the trends of 2025 and the strategies projected for 2026 shows that, although significant progress has been made in multilateral cooperation, technological innovation, and community prevention, criminal networks maintain an extraordinary capacity to adapt. The conclusions of this study seek to synthesize the central findings, highlight the strategic role of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, and offer a vision of the future oriented towards regional resilience and hemispheric security.

11.2 Key Findings

1. Organized crime as a transnational network

- Far from rigid hierarchical structures, criminal organizations function as **flexible and resilient networks**, which explains their ability to survive after captures or coups by the state (Morselli, 2009; Kenney, 2007).

2. Corruption and narco-politics as structural threats

- Corruption in police forces, customs, and local governments continues to be the factor that most favors the expansion of drug trafficking (Transparency International, 2024).
- The case of Puerto Rico shows that narcopolitics is not limited to weak states, but also affects territories with federal oversight (Rodríguez, 2025).

3. The Caribbean as a logistics epicenter

- The sea and air routes consolidate the Caribbean as a **strategic hub** for drug and arms trafficking. The limited maritime surveillance capacity of island states remains a critical vulnerability (Muggah & Griffiths, 2024).

4. Puerto Rico as a hemispheric hinge

- The island occupies a unique position as it is simultaneously part of the U.S. and the Caribbean. This dual status makes it a bridge of cooperation and, at the same time, a vulnerable point for drug trafficking.

5. Technological innovation: opportunity and risk

- The use of biometrics, AI, and blockchain analytics bolsters state capacity, but criminal organizations are also quick to adopt technologies, especially cryptocurrencies and the dark web (Wall, 2007; Europol, 2025).

6. Community prevention as a sustainable key

- Evidence shows that social and rehabilitation programs reduce youth recruitment and recidivism, although they require continuity and stable financing (World Bank, 2025; Ungar, 2012).

11.3 Strategic role of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean

The study confirms that **Puerto Rico and the Caribbean are no longer peripheries**, but central scenarios in the fight against hemispheric organized crime. Puerto Rico, as a U.S. territory, provides technological and intelligence capabilities, but faces internal challenges of violence, corruption, and narcopolitics. The Caribbean, for its part, is both a victim and a facilitator of criminal networks. Regional cooperation through CARICOM IMPACS and the CFATF represents progress, but capacity asymmetries persist that can only be overcome with increased international support.

11.4 Outlook for 2026

- **Regional unity:** States must overcome political differences and strengthen joint intelligence, extradition, and judicial cooperation platforms.
- **Smart disruption:** More than militarization, an evidence-based, financial, and technology-based approach is required.
- **Social resilience:** Investing in vulnerable communities is just as crucial as patrolling seas or prosecuting criminals.
- **Security-rights balance:** any strategy must guarantee respect for human rights to avoid the reproduction of conditions of violence and exclusion.

11.5 Conclusion

Organized crime in Latin America, Puerto Rico, and the Caribbean constitutes a hemispheric challenge that requires **coordinated, multidimensional, and sustainable responses**. 2026 must be consolidated as a year of inflection: a moment to transform the fight against drug trafficking into a regional security and development strategy. Puerto Rico and the Caribbean occupy the center of this chessboard, not only as victims of criminal dynamics but also as key actors in the construction of innovative solutions. The region has an opportunity to

move from a weak link to an example of international cooperation, community resilience, and institutional strengthening.

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