



SMART NEWS & RESEARCH
FOR LATIN AMERICA'S CHANGEMAKERS



Report
The Crime Conundrum in the Caribbean

Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith

May 2023

This report represents the opinions and analysis of the author, but does not represent the institutional position of any of their respective organizations nor of Global Americans.



Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Growing Homicide Rates Across the Caribbean.....	2
The Crime-Guns Nexus	6
Guns, Guns, Guns.....	8
The Fierce Urgency of Now	13
Conclusion and Policy Considerations.....	14

Annex

Declaration by Heads of Government on Crime and Violence as a Public Health Issue..	17
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

Introduction

High crime—especially intentional homicide—has posed a clear and present danger for the Caribbean for some time. However, soaring homicide rates across the region and the fact that many are committed using weapons from the United States have caused the matter to attract more attention in recent months, with a recent symposium in Trinidad and Tobago on the subject shining the most recent spotlight. CARICOM leaders are concerned about the growing homicide rates and the number of arms entering the region—issues raised both at the February 2023 CARICOM Summit in the Bahamas as well as at a recent special meeting on April 18 and 19 on the subject convened by Prime Minister Keith Rowley of Trinidad and Tobago, who holds the portfolio for security within the CARICOM quasi cabinet.

The conference framed crime and violence as a public health crisis. Unlike at the Bahamas meeting—which featured government leaders—experts from within and outside the Caribbean were invited to the symposium to discuss options to address the issue. The Caribbean leaders declared a “war on guns to combat the illegal trade which provides the weapons that contribute significantly to crime and violence in our region causing death, disabilities and compromising the safety of our citizens” and implored the United States to support their efforts to halt illegal arms trafficking. They also lamented the disproportionate shares of their national budgets they are obligated to allocate to national security, especially to combat crime and violence while also grappling with mental and other health-related challenges spurred by the arms trafficking business.¹

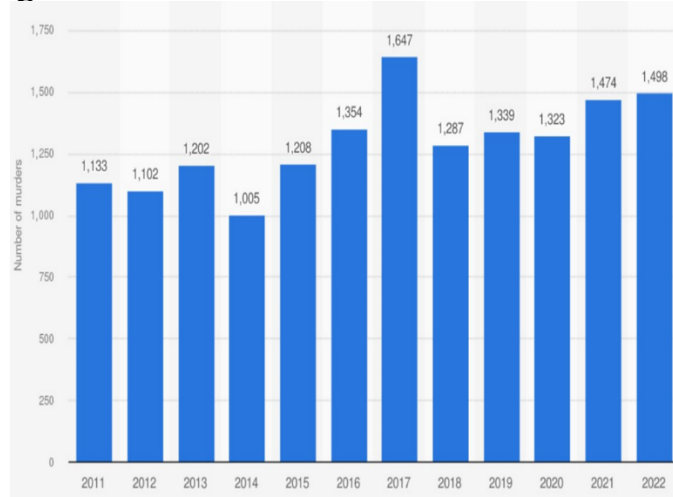
This report offers an analysis of the contemporary Caribbean crime landscape. Particular attention is paid to intentional homicides and murders. This is not because domestic violence, burglary, rape, larceny, money laundering, and other crimes are unimportant or have not increased in some places. Indeed, there have been troubling surges in domestic violence in Guyana, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and elsewhere. Murder, however, commands attention here because it constitutes the “ultimate crime”—taking a life as well as having powerful economic, public security, and other consequences. Yet, the region’s crime scene is troubling not just because of the volume of murders, but also because of the heinous nature of some of the criminal acts. Thus, we first provide a portrait of the murder scene and then offer examples of some of the horrible ways in which crimes have been prosecuted. Next, we discuss the significant use of weapons, the source of the weapons, and the actions being pursued by Caribbean and other leaders to stem the flow of arms into the region. In this respect, we focus on the crime symposium held this past April in Trinidad and Tobago. This report has taken into account a few policy considerations that might be considered as the region’s policymakers and practitioners address the perennial challenge of crime, violence, and arms trafficking.

¹ Ramdass, Ann. 2023. “War on illicit weapons.” *Trinidad Express*. https://trinidadexpress-tto.newsmemory.com/?publink=14b59ca41_134ab37.

Growing Homicide Rates Across the Caribbean

Statistics on reported crimes and the criminal justice, socio-economic, and other consequences are particularly alarming. While there are differences across the Caribbean region, the rise in violent crime remains startling. These growing numbers justify the crisis stance that leaders and citizens alike are adopting. In his 2020 New Year’s Message, Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness lamented that “it pains my heart that many of our brothers and sisters, and our children were deprived of seeing 2020 due to violence. This is a social epidemic and requires national consensus around the use of emergency powers to bring the disease under control.”² The many brothers, sisters, and children who were “deprived of seeing 2020 due to violence” actually numbered 1,339 (See Figure 1). This meant that in 2019, Jamaica had a homicide rate of 47.4 per 100,000 inhabitants—the second-highest rate in the entire Latin America and Caribbean region for that year. While the number dropped slightly in 2020, to 1,323 (46.5 per 100,000 inhabitants), it increased by nearly 10 percent to reach 1,474 in 2021—putting the homicide rate at nearly 50 per 100,000 people. Indeed, Jamaica’s crime rate was worse than Venezuela’s in both 2020 and 2021. The bloodbath continued in 2022. By the time the year ended, Jamaica had recorded 1,498 murders, giving it a homicide rate of 49.4 per 100,000, exceeding Venezuela, as Figure 2 shows.

Figure 1. Homicides in Jamaica 2011 to 2022



Source: Statista. *Homicides in Latin America and the Caribbean--Statistics and Facts*.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/312483/number-of-homicides-in-jamaica/>.

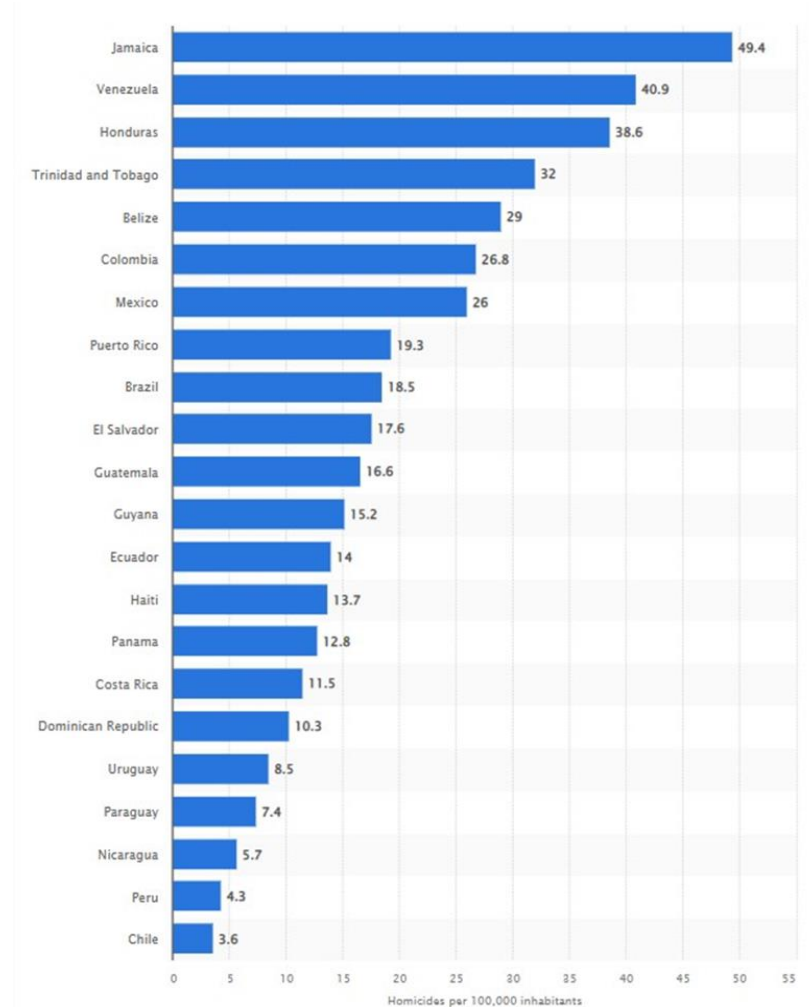
While these rates are stunning, Jamaica is not the only country experiencing such high rates. Trinidad and Tobago had 536 homicides in 2019, giving the country a homicide rate of 37.4 per 100,000 inhabitants. While the rate declined in 2020, it bounced back in 2021 before leaping to 601 in 2022—22 percent higher than in 2021. This made 2022 the deadliest in the nation’s history.³ Although Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and

² Holness, Andrew. 2020. “New Year Message 2020 Prime Minister, The Most Hon. Andrew Holness.”
<https://jis.gov.jm/speeches/new-year-message-2020-prime-minister-the-most-hon-andrew-holness/>.

³ Insight Crime. 2023. “InSight Crime 2022 Homicide Round-Up.”
<https://insightcrime.org/news/insight-crime-2022-homicide-round-up/>.

Puerto Rico tend to dominate the headlines in relation to crime and violence in the region, the pain to which the Jamaican Prime Minister referred is also evident in many smaller jurisdictions (See Figure 2). Indeed, 2022’s dramatic increase in murders in the Eastern Caribbean prompted *InSight Crime* to pay special attention to that subregion, with the editors expanding their “homicide round-up to include smaller Caribbean nations and territories” which, while having comparatively small populations and homicide numbers, “show how patterns of violence are affecting the entire region.”⁴

Figure 2. Homicide Rates in Select Latin America and Caribbean Countries in 2022



Source: Statista. *Homicides in Latin America and the Caribbean--Statistics and Facts*.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/947781/homicide-rates-latin-america-caribbean-country/>.

Still, it has not been just the high—and in some cases increasing—homicide numbers that have people worrying within and outside the Caribbean. The high use of weapons in murders and the audacity of some of the criminal acts have grabbed headlines and shocked the populace. Some examples include:

⁴ Insight Crime. 2023. “InSight Crime 2022 Homicide Round-Up.”
<https://insightcrime.org/news/insight-crime-2022-homicide-round-up/>.

- The region was shocked by the May 2014 assassination of a prominent Trinidadian prosecutor, Senior Counsel Dana Seetahal, as she was heading home from a social event. A station wagon sandwiched her Volkswagen SUV and opened fire, shooting her multiple times in the head and chest—killing her instantly. According to the police, Seetahal appeared to have been trying to reach for her licensed firearm, which was later recovered from her purse. A one-time independent senator, state prosecutor, assistant solicitor general, and magistrate, at the time of the murder she was lead prosecutor in a prominent murder trial. Eleven individuals were later charged with the murder—which local and international intelligence agencies deemed as a hit orchestrated by organized crime. The trial of ten of the accused began on July 23, 2020, and up to March 2023 it was still working its way through the judicial labyrinth.⁵
- On October 16, 2021, the Mawozo gang kidnapped a group of 16 U.S. citizens and one Canadian citizen—including five children— in Haiti. The gang demanded USD\$1 million ransom per person. The missionaries were from the Ohio-based Christian Aid Ministries. Authorities did not disclose whether any ransom was paid, but the hostages were released in batches through December 2021. This kidnapping highlighted Haiti’s long-standing kidnapping challenge—with some 628 reported abductions in 2021 alone.⁶
- The resort city of Montego Bay in Jamaica was the scene of a bizarre incident on October 17, 2021, when two members of Pathways International Kingdom Restoration Ministries were murdered in an alleged sacrificial murder and 42 members of the community, including the leader, were detained for questioning. Earlier that day, Kevin Smith, self-styled “Prophet to the Nations” summoned the church’s 144 men, women, and children with instructions for them to be robbed in white. Smith, an anti-vaxxer, had told congregants that only “pure blood”—that is, unvaccinated—members would be allowed to enter the “ark,” to survive a flood that was imminent. This allegedly prompted the slashing of the throats of two members who were reputedly vaccinated, allegedly “pure blood” church members. Another vaccinated congregant called the police. Smith later died in a mysterious car crash on October 25, 2021, while being transferred to the capital, Kingston, to be charged with the two murders.⁷
- Over the 2023 Easter weekend, gun violence took four lives in the village of Vieux Fort in southern St. Lucia in less than 24 hours. The first victim, 18-year-old Adan McFarlan, was fatally shot in a drive-by incident. The second and third victims—47-year-old Tara Joseph and two-year-old Kentrell Joseph—were killed by

⁵ Seelal, Nalinee. 2014. “Assassinated.” *Trinidad and Tobago News*.

<http://www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/blog/?p=8184t/>; Daily Express. 2023. “The murder of State attorney Dana Seetahal,” *Saturday Express*. https://trinidadexpress.com/newsextra/the-murder-of-state-attorney-dana-seetahal/article_1bf8d7f4-c4f7-11ed-88b1-4738cb11616e.html.

⁶ Treisman, Rachel. 2021. “All of the Kidnapped Missionaries in Haiti Have Now Been Released.” *NPR News*. <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/16/1064842364/haiti-kidnapped-missionaries-released-free>.

⁷ Pickering, Clinton. 2021. “Human Sacrifice Is the Gruesome End to This Cult’s Creepy History.” *Daily Beast*. <https://culteducation.com/group/1357-pathways-international-kingdom-restoration-ministries/36209-human-sacrifice-is-the-gruesome-end-to-this-cult-s-creepy-history.html/>.

assailants in their home and the fourth person to be killed was a 47-year-old woman, Nicole Charles.⁸ So far, no arrests have been made in any of the four cases.

- Shortly after Easter 2023, gangsters ambushed and murdered three policemen in the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. Indeed, between January and March of this year there were 389 abductions in the country, a 72 percent spike in kidnappings compared to the same period last year. Between March and April, a number of other violent crimes were committed in Haiti, including: a Haitian American couple was kidnapped and released after a ransom was paid; two lawyers were killed and a medical doctor badly injured in a botched kidnapping at his clinic; Robert Dénis, general director of the private television station Canal Bleu and twice vice-president of the National Association of Haitian Media, was abducted and released nine days later after a ransom was paid; and several individuals were snatched while waiting outside a school. All of this comes on the heels of a particularly violent March in which 195 people were slaughtered, including ten women, six girls, four boys, and a newborn. Overall, the murders that month more than tripled the figure for February.⁹
- Also in relation to Haiti, on April 24, 2023, a minibus heading through the Canapé-Vert neighborhood of the country's capital stopped at a police checkpoint. The police officers on duty, suspecting the young men aboard the minibus were gang members, had them deboard and lie on the ground. Residents then emerged from various sections of the neighborhood, wrestled the men from the police, and began to beat and stone them. With the police looking on, paralyzed, they placed gasoline-soaked tires on the men and set them alight. In all, 13 men were murdered by the mob.¹⁰
- According to the United Nations Human Rights Office, almost 850 people lost their lives to violence during the first three months of this year, more than 300 more than the last quarter of 2022, as Figure 3 shows. As long-time Haiti expert Georges Fauriol recently observed, gloomily, “Haiti is headed toward a catastrophic humanitarian and political crash. With an estimated 90 percent of the Port-au-Prince region under the chaotic control of gangs, kidnappings remain a lucrative trade (389 recorded incidents in the 1st quarter of 2023). Societal life—including the operation of schools—is essentially shut down. Haiti is halfway off the cliff.”¹¹

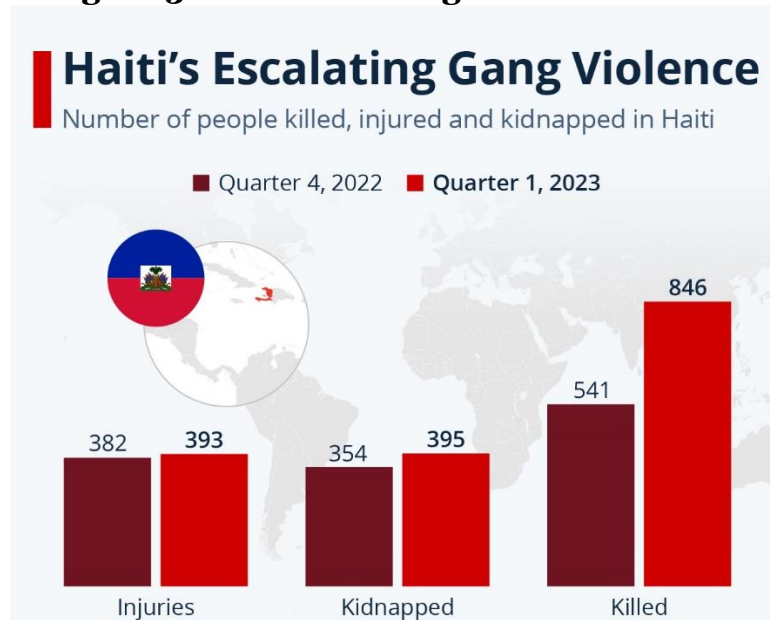
⁸ RSLFP. 2023. “Easter weekend homicide victims identified.” *St. Lucia News Now*. <https://stlucianewsnow.net/easter-weekend-homicide-victims-identified/>.

⁹ Wilentz, Amy. 2023. “Haiti, April 2023: Soon There Will Be No One Left to Kidnap.” *The Nation*. <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/haiti-gangs-ariel-henry-biden/>; Valdivia, Javier. 2023. “General Director of TV Channel Kidnapped in Haiti Freed.” *Inter American Press Association*. <https://en.sipiapa.org/notas/1215868-general-director-of-tv-channel-kidnapped-in-haiti-freed>; Grove, Rashad. 2023. “The Killings and Kidnappings in Haiti have grown exponentially this month.” *Ebony*. <https://www.ebony.com/haiti-killings-and-kidnappings-march-2023/>.

¹⁰ For example, see Charles, Jacqueline. 2023. “Residents of Haiti capital seize gang members from cops, shoot and burn some alive.” *Miami Herald*. <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/haiti/article274649086.html#storylink=cpy>.

¹¹ Fauriol, Georges. 2023. “Haiti’s Humanitarian and Political Crash.” *Global Americans*. <https://theglobalamericans.org/2023/05/haitis-humanitarian-and-political-crash/>.

Figure 3. Results of Gang Violence in Haiti



Source: Fleck, Ann. 2023. "Haiti's Escalating Gang Violence." *Statista*.
<https://www.statista.com/chart/29965/un-data-on-haiti-crisis/>.

The Crime-Guns Nexus

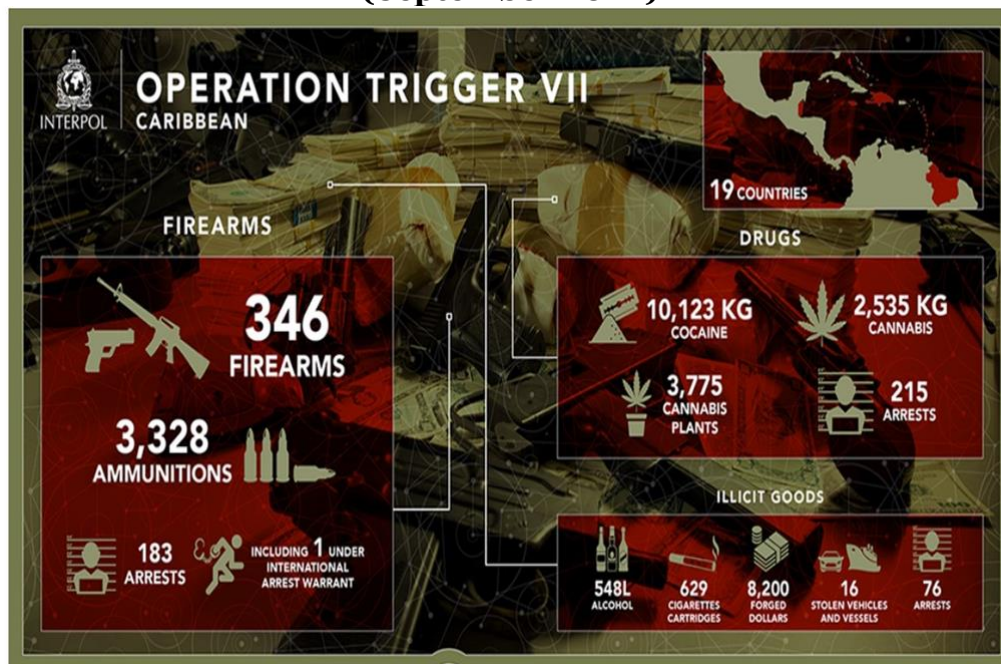
A crucial question regarding the nexus between guns and crime is: what is the source of the weapons available in the region? Although small arms have been smuggled to the Caribbean from Europe, Latin America, and Asia, most of the weapons originate from the United States. The chairman of CARICOM, Bahamian Prime Minister Phillip Davis, explained to participants at the April symposium that 98.6 percent of all recovered illegal firearms in the Bahamas can be directly traced back the United States. In Haiti, this figure stands at 87.7 percent while in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the numbers are 67 and 52 percent, respectively. As Davis noted, "We do not manufacture guns in the Caribbean. Every gun used to commit a crime in the Caribbean is smuggled into our countries."¹² *Miami Herald* award-winning journalist Jacqueline Charles cited the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security in saying that: "since 2020 about half of all firearms-export investigations have been concentrated in the Caribbean region—a top smuggling destination fueled by the demand of drug traffickers and huge black-market markups on U.S.-made guns. The other 50 percent are scattered throughout the world."¹³

¹² Munnings, Lynaire. 2023. "Davis decries 'epidemic' of violence in Caribbean." *The Tribune*.
<http://www.tribune242.com/news/2023/apr/18/davis-decries-epidemic-violence-caribbean/>.

¹³ Charles, Jacqueline. "Caribbean is a top smuggling destination for illegal arms. U.S. lawmakers want answers." *Miami Herald*. <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/caribbean-is-a-top-smuggling-destination-for-illegal-arms-us-lawmakers-want-answers/ar-AA1qtAtJ>.

Weapons and ammunition are smuggled in large and small quantities a variety of ways, including in food, toys, used clothing, preowned cars, and cargo containers, among other products. The guns, which often cost hundreds of dollars in the United States, are often resold for thousands of dollars apiece in the region. According to Charles, U.S. government officials report that products with name brand popularity, such as 9mm Glock pistols, that sell for as little as USD \$400 in South Florida gun shows can sell for as much as USD \$5,000 in St. Thomas, the U.S. Virgin Islands, or fetch as much as USD \$10,000 in Jamaica, Trinidad, or Haiti. Moreover, Douwe Den Held found that in 2020, almost three-quarters of all guns traced by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to the Dominican Republic originated in the United States.¹⁴

Figure 4. Results of Interpol Anti-smuggling Operation in the Caribbean (September 2022)



Source: INTERPOL. 2022. “Hundreds of firearms and 12.6 tonnes of drugs seized in Caribbean operation.” <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2022/Hundreds-of-firearms-and-12.6-tonnes-of-drugs-seized-in-Caribbean-operation>.

Nonetheless, security practitioners in the Caribbean, the United States, and elsewhere have not been resting on their laurels. For example, during the week September 24-30, 2022, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) conducted a joint operation that produced considerable results (See Figure 4). Known as Operation Trigger VII, it led to the seizure of 350 weapons, 3,300 rounds of ammunition, 10 tons of cocaine, and 2.5 tons of marijuana. A total of 510 arrests were also made.

¹⁴ Den Held, Douwe. 2022. “US Guns Fuel Arms Trafficking in the Dominican Republic.” *InSight Crime*. <https://insightcrime.org/news/us-guns-fuel-arms-trafficking-in-the-dominican-republic/>.

The operation involved officials from 19 countries who coordinated measures at airports, seaports, land borders, and inland locations. They acted on intelligence about organized criminal groups and individuals involved in trafficking, searched warehouses, inspected packages, and executed targeted checks at firearms dealerships, shooting ranges, and private security outfits.¹⁵ In a recent case—on May 7, 2023—police officers in the Dominican Republic arrested the intended recipient of 26 pistols, three rifles, and one revolver, which were concealed in two containers with basic necessities. The weapons originated in Brooklyn, New York, and were intended for delivery to José Manuel González Díaz (Jochy) at an address in Santiago province. This arrest and confiscation followed an earlier one, also originating in New York, that involved 16 pistols, a rifle, and a revolver.¹⁶

Guns, Guns, Guns

The results of a study on the matter conducted by Small Arms Survey and CARICOM IMPACS released on April 26, 2023, left no doubt that the unease is more than justified. Among other things, the main findings of the assessment are that:

- The rate of violent deaths in CARICOM member states is almost three times the global average. Firearms are used in more than half of all homicides in the entire Caribbean region, and in some countries this proportion reaches 90 percent.
- Case study research in the Bahamas, Barbados, and Jamaica reveals that firearm-related violence imposes significant public health and economic burdens on Caribbean communities and societies, where the average medical expenses for treating a single gunshot exceeds the annual health spending per capita by ratios ranging from 2:1 to 11:1.
- Legal civilian firearm ownership is tightly regulated in the region. Consequently, firearms licensing and registration data is relatively available, and suggests a low rate of legal civilian firearm ownership in the region compared with the global average.
- Based on seizure and trace data, the vast majority of illicit firearms circulating in the Caribbean are handguns. While illicit rifles and rifle ammunition are emerging concerns for law enforcement officials, their use by criminals in the region remains limited.
- The U.S. domestic market is a major source of illicit arms and ammunition in the Caribbean and is likely the largest source in some states and territories, although weapons are also sourced from other countries.
- Arms and ammunition are smuggled to the region via commercial airliners, postal and fast parcel services, and maritime shipping companies. Although the primary

¹⁵ INTERPOL. 2022. “Hundreds of firearms and 12.6 tonnes of drugs seized in Caribbean operation.” <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2022/Hundreds-of-firearms-and-12.6-tonnes-of-drugs-seized-in-Caribbean-operation>.

¹⁶ Dominican Today. 2023. “Man arrested in the Dominican Republic for receiving 26 firearms in basic necessities tanks from the United States.” *Dominican Today*. <https://dominantoday.com/dr/local/2023/05/09/man-arrested-in-the-dominican-republic-for-receiving-26-firearms-in-basic-necessities-tanks-from-the-united-states/>.

transport mode varies from country to country, trafficking by maritime cargo shipments is particularly common.¹⁷

Moreover, the study found that:

- According to seizure and trace data, the vast majority of illicit firearms circulating in the region are handguns, which account for as much as 88 percent of the firearms in the data sets of seized weapons, with little apparent geographic difference in the availability of the top brands of firearms, including pistols.
- Although illicit rifles and rifle ammunition are emerging concerns for law enforcement officials, their acquisition by criminals in the Caribbean generally remains marginal. This contrasts sharply with the situation in parts of Central and North America, where up to 47 percent of seized firearms are rifles.
- Most trafficking schemes are notable for their simplicity. The modus operandi of most U.S.-based traffickers is straightforward and requires minimal funding, infrastructure, or knowledge. The trafficker simply needs to camouflage arms and ammunition well enough to blend in with the thousands of shipments of other goods departing and arriving from international ports daily.
- Caribbean authorities often lack the personnel and equipment to adequately monitor their coasts, land borders, and air and seaports. In some of the smaller jurisdictions, officials need to patrol hundreds of beaches with only a small police force and little or no coast guard or customs support. In some places officials lack even basic scanning technology, making it difficult to identify and interdict illicit weapons and other contraband.
- The ready accessibility of arms and ammunition in some neighboring countries including the United States, combined with inadequate screening of outbound mail and cargo shipments, undermines the often-robust controls on firearms and ammunition required by many Caribbean states when they signed on to international treaties, some of which are shown in Figure 5.¹⁸

¹⁷ Fabre, Anne-S  verine, Nicolas Florquin, Aaron Karp, and Matt Schroeder. 2023. *Weapons Compass: The Caribbean Firearms Study*. Small Arms Survey: pg. 18.
<https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/CARICOM-IMPACS-SAS-Caribbean-Firearms-Study.pdf>.

¹⁸ Fabre, Florquin, Karp, and Schroeder, 66.

Figure 5. Arms Controls Instruments Adopted by CARICOM Countries

CARICOM member states ^a	Caribbean Firearms Roadmap (adopted) ^b	CIFTA (ratified) ^c	Arms Trade Treaty (ratified) ^d	UN Firearms Protocol (ratification or accession) ^e	UN Programme of Action (most recent national report submitted) ^f
Antigua and Barbuda	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (accession)	2020
Bahamas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (accession)	–
Barbados	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (ratification)	2003
Belize	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	2020
Dominica	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (accession)	–
Grenada	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (accession)	2022
Guyana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (accession)	2010
Haiti	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (accession)	2003
Jamaica	Yes	No	Yes	Yes (ratification)	2020
Montserrat	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
St Kitts and Nevis	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (accession)	–
St Lucia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	–
St Vincent and the Grenadines	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (accession)	2018
Suriname	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	2020
Trinidad and Tobago	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (accession)	2016

Source: Fabre, Anne-S  verine, Nicolas Florquin, Aaron Karp, and Matt Schroeder. 2023. *Weapons Compass: The Caribbean Firearms Study*. Small Arms Survey: pg. 27.

Note: CIFTA = Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials.

The Small Arms Survey assessment also found that handguns account for some 88 percent of the seizures, and as Figure 6 indicates, pistols make up most of the seized handguns. The five most commonly seized brands were Glock, Taurus, Beretta, Smith & Wesson, and Ruger. With the exception of Haiti and the British Virgin Islands, rifles comprise less than ten per cent of firearms seized, which is considerably lower than in places such as Mexico, with more than 29 percent of seized firearms submitted for tracing annually are rifles, and in Canada, where the number is 41 percent. Nevertheless, the proliferation of military-style rifles in some Caribbean countries is a significant concern for local and regional law enforcement officials.

In August 2022, for instance, U.S. officials warned of a notable increase in the trafficking of large-caliber rifles and other firearms to Haiti and elsewhere in the Caribbean. The alarm about ghost guns was sounded in the discussion about Privately Made Firearms (PMFs), with the report noting: “The growing popularity of ghost guns in the United States has potentially significant implications for the Caribbean given the role of US-sourced crime guns in the region. Since 2020, US customs and law enforcement officials have seized possible PMFs, components often used to assemble PMFs, and production

equipment bound for Caribbean states on multiple occasions.”¹⁹ It also was noted that U.S. Customs and Border Protection experienced a notable increase in seizures of receivers and frames bound for the Caribbean, possibly intended for use in the assembly of PMFs.

Figure 6. Types of firearms seized in (or intended for) the Caribbean, 2015–2021

Type	Trace requests submitted through INTERPOL (2015–21)		Trace requests received by US ATF (2016–20)		US customs seizures (2016–21)	
	Quantity	Per cent	Quantity	Per cent	Quantity	Per cent
Total handguns	2,111	88%	7,230	87%	431	83%
Pistols	1,593	67%	6,042	73%	417	80%
Revolvers	373	16%	1,188	14%	14	3%
Unspecified handguns	145	6%	–	–	–	–
Rifles	110	5%	325	4%	6	1%
Shotguns	62	3%	652	8%	14	3%
Sub-machine guns	22	<1%	–	–	0	0%
Machine guns	0	–	–	–	0	0%
Air or airsoft guns	10	<1%	–	–	–	–
Blank-firing guns	2	<1%	–	–	63	12%
Other and unspecified firearms	73	3%	68	3%	0	0%
Total	2,390		8,275		520	

Source: Fabre, Anne-S  verine, Nicolas Florquin, Aaron Karp, and Matt Schroeder. 2023. *Weapons Compass: The Caribbean Firearms Study*. Small Arms Survey: pg. 70.

The matter of 3D printing was also flagged as follows:

3D printing of firearms poses a significant threat to key elements of national and international small arms control regimes, including the CARICOM Firearms Roadmap. The development and refinement of user-friendly designs and production techniques for 3D-printed firearms, coupled with the increasing availability and decreasing costs of 3D printers, is making these weapons accessible to a growing pool of potential end-users, including criminals. The concurrent improvement in the quality and durability of 3D-printed firearms has also contributed to their increased popularity. ... The threat from 3D-printed firearms in the Caribbean is currently minimal, but that could change quickly and without

¹⁹ Fabre, Florquin, Karp, and Schroeder, 92.

warning. Authorities in the region would be well-advised to ensure that their laws and regulations allow for the seizure of unlicensed 3D-printed weapons and the prosecution of illicit producers before these weapons gain a foothold in criminal circles.”²⁰

Figure 7. Estimated total medical costs & productivity losses from gun violence in 2019 (USD)

Type of injury	Number of cases and type of cost	Bahamas	Barbados	Jamaica
Non-fatal	Number of cases**	66	33	1,154 (year 2018)
	Average medical costs	7,071	2,815	3,709
	Total medical costs	466,711	92,905	4,280,269
	Average productivity losses	4,850	2,719	664
	Total productivity losses	320,101	89,714	766,775
	Total non-fatal cost	786,812	182,619	5,047,044
Fatal (non-hospitalized costs)	Number of cases (national)	71	30	1,119
	Average productivity losses	675,824	409,060	116,042
	Total fatal costs	47,983,522	12,271,793	129,850,622
Total	Total medical costs and productivity losses	48,770,334	12,454,412	134,897,666

Source: Fabre, Anne-S  verine, Nicolas Florquin, Aaron Karp, and Matt Schroeder. 2023. *Weapons Compass: The Caribbean Firearms Study*. Small Arms Survey: pg. 143.

In relation to economic costs of the crime and violence in the region, the Small Arms Survey report reveals that direct medical costs and productivity losses due to firearm-related violence amount to at least USD \$49 million in the Bahamas, USD \$12 million in Barbados, and USD \$135 million in Jamaica for 2019. On average, medical expenditures for treating a single gunshot wound exceed health spending per capita, and firearm wounds tend to result in higher medical costs than wounds caused by sharp objects. Notable, too, is that firearm homicides account for the largest portion of the total

²⁰ Fabre, Florquin, Karp, and Schroeder, 97-98.

estimated productivity losses due to violence-related wounds, and that while significant, medical costs and productivity losses represent only a small portion of the total costs of firearm-related violence. Figure 7 provides a glimpse of the costs for gun violence for just three Caribbean countries for one year, another harsh reality.

The Fierce Urgency of Now

The Trinidad and Tobago symposium and the Small Arms Survey clearly show that statesmen and citizens within and outside the Caribbean view the crime and violence in the region as having developed into what the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once called a “fierce urgency of now.” To address this, participants at the symposium issued a 15-point action plan (See the Annex for the full Action Plan).²¹

Consonant with the broader than criminal justice approach to the matter that the symposium adopted, it is understandable that the various aspects of the plan are not all of the same ilk. Fourteen of the 15 action items could be placed into two buckets—a national security-criminal justice bucket, and a social dimensions-youth engagement bucket. The final item is an administrative one related to the implementation of the overall action plan. In my estimation, items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 fall within the first bucket, and items 7, 11, 12, 13, and 14 fall within the second one.

The symposium and the action plan highlight some of what I regard as the Harsh Realities (HR) of the phenomenon of crime and violence with its connection to arms trafficking.

- HR 1 is that the crime phenomenon is a complex one, and not simply a matter for the police and defense forces to handle. Even if only considering the criminal justice dimension, consideration has to be given to the courts—which are in crisis or near-crisis condition in many jurisdictions—as well as the prison systems, which in most countries are overcrowded with harsh and horrible conditions—for both prisoners and prison officers.
- HR 2 is that the phenomenon is transnational and multidimensional. Although most of the crime occurs within specific countries, much of it is driven by the drug phenomenon, which is both transnational and multidimensional—involving the production of illicit substances, the trafficking of substances produced locally and originating in South and Central America, the consumption and abuse of substances produced within and outside the region, and the laundering of the proceeds of the illegal operations. While these connections have been evident for decades, they continue today. Moreover, as was shown earlier, the illegal weapons and ammunition used in the region come from beyond the region.
- HR 3 is that—partly because of its complexity, transnationality, and multidimensionality—the phenomenon is not amenable to quick fixes. For instance, implementation of the action steps will require financial and professional

²¹ CARICOM. 2023. *Declaration by Heads of Government on Crime and Violence as a Public Health Issue*. <https://caricom.org/declaration-by-heads-of-government-on-crime-and-violence-as-a-public-health-issue/>. For a video recording of the symposium, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLuZyZJkJNY>.

resources which are scarce in the region. Fortunately, transnationality and multidimensionality also mean that state and non-state actors outside the region will have a vested interest in contributing to the successful execution of action plans. Keep in mind though, that potential contributors, even the rich and powerful United States, have budgetary—and political—constraints.

Thus, my cautionary note in relation to the 15-point action plan is for the relevant officials to guard against the “solution by platitudes syndrome,” especially since the region long has faced an implementation deficit challenge. Individual and corporate citizens of the region will be keen—and deservedly, so—to move beyond platitudes; to see action, results. The combined realities of the transnational and multidimensional nature of the crime and arms trafficking, and the capability limitations of Caribbean countries necessitate further pursuit of a collaboration imperative. Therefore, joint operations, both bilaterally with the United States and other countries, as well as multilaterally with INTERPOL, will need to become the rule rather than the exception.

The arms trafficking unease has led to unprecedented legal action in the region. This past March, Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, the Bahamas, Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago joined an *amicus curiae* brief filed by Mexico appealing a U.S. judicial decision to hold gun manufacturers responsible for enabling weapons trafficking used to prosecute crimes outside the United States. Mexico’s USD \$10 billion lawsuit named several defendants including major gun manufacturers Smith and Wesson Brands Inc, Sturm, Ruger and Co, Barrett Firearms Manufacturing Inc, Beretta USA Corp, Colt’s Manufacturing Co, Century International Arms Inc, Witmer Public Safety Group Inc and Glock Inc. Mexico was appealing a decision rendered in September 2022 in the federal District Court in Massachusetts that had dismissed its lawsuit, citing the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, which protects arms manufacturers from being held liable for crimes committed with their products.²² The symposium not only tacitly endorsed this legal action of the initial six member-states, but explicitly signaled its embrace by the entire 15-member CARICOM.

Conclusion and Policy Considerations

Undoubtedly, the Caribbean is facing some clear and present dangers with crime and violence. It is urgent that the entire region address this issue now. As the symposium’s host prime minister conveyed the nature and scope of the danger for the twin-island republic of Trinidad and Tobago: “Violence in the Caribbean is a public health emergency which threatens our lives, our economies, our national security and by extension every aspect of our well-being. In Trinidad and Tobago, in the years 2011 to 2022 we have lost and had to grieve for 5,439 lives to violent murder, largely through the use of imported

²² Caribbean Council. 2023. “CARICOM states join Mexico’s anti-gun lawsuit in the US.” <https://www.caribbean-council.org/caricom-states-join-mexicos-anti-gun-lawsuit-in-the-us/#:~:text=Antigua%20and%20Barbuda%2C%20Belize%2C%20The%20Bahamas%2C%20Jamaica%2C%20St,the%20trafficking%20of%20deadly%20weapons%20across%20the%20border.>

firearms and ammunition. In 2011 we lost 352 lives and by 2022 the annual count was over 600, a new record, already being challenged by the murder rate for 2023.”²³

Prime Minister Keith Rowley also explained:

For the thousands of wounded, victims and perpetrators alike, a surgical intervention to the head costs approximately TT\$170,000, a surgical intervention for a chest wound would cost about TT\$135,000. A shot to the leg requiring surgical intervention would cost just under TT\$100,000 and a leg shot without surgical intervention would cost about TT\$40,000 in medical care and attention. All of these frequent daily incurred costs are to be borne by the taxpayers at every level from scarce revenues diverted from other more deserving productive priorities.

Our current laws acknowledge a suite of afflictions, yellow fever, Smallpox, Plague, Cholera, Ebola, Novel Corona virus as notifiable, warranting emergency responses if even only a few cases are known to appear. Violent behavior, violent crime, violent crime involving the use of firearms, the associated individual and group mental health trauma accompanying violent behavior, so ever present amongst us now, pose a far greater destructive threat than these diseases and on that basis alone qualifies violence as a public health emergency. During the last 15 years, using the Trinidad and Tobago example, in the growing quest for safety and security we have seen a significant increase in the allocation in the national budget for National Security. In 2008 policing alone represented 32 per cent of the TT\$4 billion National Security budget. By 2017 this rose to 38 per cent. Even in the tighter budgetary environment of 2023 policing still accounted for 43 per cent of the National Security allocation...

*Our presence here is admission that Crime and Violence are now a major part of the Caribbean’s overall plethora of problems, ranging from petty theft to school violence, home invasions, domestic violence, sexual abuse, human trafficking, drive-by shootings, drug-gang warfare, mindless daily revenge murders, etc.*²⁴

With diagnosis of the problem undertaken and a plan of action outlined, implementation now becomes the focus of attention. In this respect, a few policy considerations are in order. First, some of the action areas require legislative steps. These include the action items calling for the “comprehensive overhaul of the criminal justice system,” mandates augmenting the strength and independence of the courts, jurisdiction of magistrates, consideration of judge-only trials, and the rotation of judges and magistrates, and

²³ “Opening Remarks by Dr. the Hon. Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the Regional Symposium: Violence as a Public Health Issue—the Crime Challenge, April 17, 2023.” <https://caricom.org/opening-remarks-by-dr-the-hon-keith-rowley-prime-minister-of-the-republic-of-trinidad-and-tobago-to-the-regional-symposium-violence-as-a-public-health-issue-the-caricom-challenge-april-1/>.

²⁴ Ibid.

banning assault weapons except for the security forces and sporting competitions. These subjects are all contentious and securing appropriate legislative approvals will be complicated—especially where the domestic political environment is fractious because of the tenuous balance of power in the legislature, the electoral calendar, and other factors.

Caribbean Community leaders are to be commended both for placing an urgency spotlight on the matter and for crafting an action plan. Yet, a cautionary note is warranted as a second policy consideration. In a study undertaken two decades ago for the North-South Center at the University of Miami, I first proposed the existence of a “solution by platitudes syndrome” in the region. While not limited to the Caribbean, this behavior occurs when political elites appear to believe that the delivery of a grand speech, proclamation, or the signing of a convention or treaty ipso facto solves the problem at hand. I posited that political and bureaucratic elites need to recognize that meaningful regional or other multilateral engagement requires rising above platitudes and going beyond speeches and signings. If Caribbean leaders are to address the twin challenges of arms trafficking and growing violent crime, they must either follow through, institutionalize, and implement appropriately themselves or delegate these tasks to individuals who can be held accountable.

Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith, a former Vice Chancellor of the University of Guyana, is a Fellow with Global Americans and the Caribbean Policy Consortium. The University of Illinois Press will publish his next book, Challenged Sovereignty: The Impact of Drugs, Crime, Terrorism, and Cyber Threats in the Caribbean. This article draws on Chapter 4 of the forthcoming book.

This report represents the opinions and analysis of the author, but does not represent the institutional position of any of their respective organizations nor of Global Americans.

Annex

Declaration by Heads of Government on Crime and Violence as a Public Health Issue

We the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) meeting in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago on April 17-18, 2023, on the occasion of the Regional Symposium to address Crime and Violence as a public health issue:

Alarmed by the epidemic of crime and violence in the Caribbean, fueled by illegal guns and organized criminal gangs, as a threat to our democracy and the stability of our societies;

Cognizant of its cost to our social, economic and health systems;

Determined to ensure that our people of the Caribbean can exist in an environment of peace and safety;

Seized of the urgent need to reverse the normalization of violence in social interaction and to restore the bonds of social solidarity;

Convinced that the multi-faceted nature of violent crime and its pervasive effects require a robust regional response that includes a public health approach, which is an all of society strategy including family, church, academia, cultural and sports personalities, minority political parties and wider civil society is urgently required;

Acknowledge the concerns of the people of the Region, that there is a tilting of the balance between the rights of the individual and the public safety interests of the whole of society, which is having a debilitating effect on the rights of the community to live in peaceful societies, particularly given the trend for persons on murder charges to be granted bail;

Deeply concerned at the high rate of illegal exportation of guns from the United States of America to the Caribbean Region; and,

Recalling the Region's strong and enduring investments to support the United States in its 'War on Drugs', and, given our observation that the gun has become the new drug, as articulated in our separate 18 April 2023 Declaration, we call on the United States of America to reciprocate and join the Caribbean in its 'War on Guns'.

Agree to strengthen the development of security as a fourth pillar of the Community so that collectively we can better address the extra-territorial threats to citizen security; including strengthening the capacity of the Community's Security and Justice agencies to adopt and implement a public health approach.

WE THE HEADS WILL

1. Undertake comprehensive overhaul of the criminal justice system to address criminal terrorists with a focus on proactive management of prosecutions, sentencing and the diversion of young people at risk;
2. Strengthen regional forensic capabilities and collaboration among national forensic agencies with a view to improving the quality of evidence and speed the conduct of trials;
3. Prepare regional model legislation to bring greater harmonization and efficiency to the development and revision of national laws;
4. Immediately and effectively implement the CARICOM Arrest Warrant Treaty;
5. Augment the jurisdiction of magistrates, the consideration of defendants' options to judge-only trials, and the intra-regional rotation of judges and magistrates to admit or foster their greater exposure;
6. Strengthen the capacity of the Regional Intelligence Fusion Centre (RIFC) to deliver its mandate through development of agreed protocols for data sharing amongst Member States;
7. Reform our education systems to empower our citizens and better enable their socio-emotional development, in recognition that the social and emotional learning of the child is as important as technical and academic achievements;
8. Agree to ban assault weapons in the region, except for security forces and sporting competitions;
9. Agree to stand with Mexico on its legal action against US gun manufacturers and retailers;
10. Establish an entity under IMPACS to assist in the containment of corruption and financial crimes, including money laundering and cybercrimes, through greater collaboration to harmonize related legislation and operational processes;
11. Empower and engage young people as positive content developers to offset the negative impact of social media and engage with the creative industries to re-engineer culturally acceptable norms;
12. Promote public awareness and education campaigns in our communities, that challenge harmful beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that contribute to crime and violence;
13. Work with all sectors and institutions to improve the equitable access to services and options for rehabilitation and reintegration into society, psychosocial support and parental education, addressing domestic violence, and integrating mental issues to treat with crime and violence;
14. Develop and implement targeted programmes and strategies to address young vulnerable youth at risk of becoming perpetrators and victims of crime;
15. Appoint an Eminent Person to lead and advise Heads and the Secretariat on further strategies and reforms and on effectively operationalizing the decisions of Heads.