



The Round Table

The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs and Policy Studies

ISSN: 0035-8533 (Print) 1474-029X (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ctr20

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To cite this article: Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith (22 Jun 2026): The crime and challenged sovereignty conundrum in the Caribbean, The Round Table, DOI: [10.1080/00358533.2026.2685722](https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2026.2685722)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2026.2685722>



Published online: 22 Jun 2026.



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The crime and challenged sovereignty conundrum in the Caribbean

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ABSTRACT

Sadly, the persistence and spread of crime and violence across the Caribbean region has become the harsh reality of the entire Caribbean. These factors have led the Caribbean area to experience significant trauma in relation to safety and security, as well as economic and social conditions. Crucially, too, the crime and violence have broader implications. This article examines some of the extant conditions and implications, by providing a contemporary portrait of the crime, examining the new policy and scholarly public health approach to it, and pondering some of the civilisational and sovereignty implications involved.

KEYWORDS

Caribbean; crime and violence; security; crime and economic conditions; crime and social conditions

It is no longer possible to think of crime as a simple or minor social problem. . . . Mounting crime and violence have been declared leading national problems, and the issue of law and order has assumed high priority in national planning and policymaking. Fear of crime is destroying freedom of movement, freedom from harm, and freedom from fear itself. – Dudley Allen

Introduction

When Dudley Allen, then Jamaica's Commissioner of Corrections, offered the proposition captured in the epigraph in relation to his nation in 1976,¹ he had no reason to believe it would later become the harsh reality of the entire Caribbean. Sadly, this has increasingly become the case over the years, corrupting the sea, sand and sun image and circumstance of the region. Understandably, especially as the crime and violence have persisted and spread across the region, they have led the area to experience some significant trauma in relation to safety and security, and economic and social conditions. Crucially, too, the crime and violence have broader implications. This article examines some of the extant conditions and implications, by providing a contemporary portrait of the crime, examining the new policy and scholarly public health approach to it, and pondering some of the civilisational and sovereignty implications involved.

Portrait of criminality

The focus here is on intentional homicides, not because domestic violence, burglary, rape, larceny, and money laundering and other financial 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. However, homicides command attention here because they represent the ‘ultimate crime’ and involve the finality of human life, with significant economic, public security and other consequences.

In his New Year’s Message for 2020, 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 (Holness, 2020).

The many brothers, sisters and children who were ‘deprived of seeing 2020 due to violence’ actually numbered 1,339. 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 of homicides dropped slightly in 2020, to 1,323 (46.5 per 100,000 inhabitants), it increased by nearly 10% 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. The number of homicides declined in 2023 to 1,393, and further in 2024, standing at 1,141.

Thankfully, since the dawn of 2025, Jamaica has witnessed a dramatic decline in homicides, with weekly murder counts remaining below 15 for 14 consecutive weeks since March 2025, the longest such stretch in 25 years. According to the Jamaica Information Service, Jamaica closed the year 2025 with a murder rate of approximately 24 per 100,000 population, which represents the lowest rate since 1991. The island’s deputy prime minister, Dr. Horace Chang, attributes the dramatic decline in homicides to the government’s deliberate policy decisions and strategic interventions aimed at transforming the country’s national security apparatus into a more modern, intelligence-driven, and community-focused system. These include strengthening the Jamaica Constabulary Force’s capacity through recruitment, modern training, infrastructure development and enhanced mobility; modernising the legislative framework for policing to equip law enforcement with the legal tools and authority needed to disrupt and dismantle criminal networks; and implementing targeted, intelligence-driven strategies that enhance public safety and uphold the rule of law, as well as a comprehensive, data-driven and community-based model of social investment targeting vulnerable communities and addressing the root causes of crime. According to Deputy Prime Minister Chang, the government had so far invested some J\$90 billion (US\$558,900,000) in strengthening the country’s national security architecture (Angus, 2025; Patterson, 2025).

It is worth noting that although there has been a remarkable turnaround in the portrait of crime and violence in Jamaica in terms of the number of homicides, the society has also faced a dramatic increase in the number of deaths caused by police shootings. For instance, according to the Independent Commission of Investigations

(INDECOM), Jamaica experienced a 120% increase in fatal police shootings between 2019 and 2024. In their 2024 Year in Review Fourth Quarter Report that was tabled in the Parliament on 2 April 2025, INDECOM reported that 189 people were killed by the country's security forces in 2024, a 22% increase over 2023, when 155 people were killed. That increase amounted to 34 more individuals being shot and killed. The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) alone reportedly was responsible for 180 fatalities in 2024, which was 38 more than the number killed in 2023, representing an increase of 27% over 2023 (Jamaica Observer, 2025).

Regrettably, Jamaica is not the only country that has been experiencing high murder rates. For instance, Trinidad and Tobago had 536 homicides in 2019, giving the country a homicide rate of 37.4 per 100,000 inhabitants. The rate declined in 2020, but it bounced back in 2021 before leaping to 601 in 2022—22% higher than in 2021. The situation worsened in 2023, with 623 murders that year, declining slightly in 2024 to 620. The dire situation prompted the declaration of a State of Emergency in December 2024, ending in April 2025, just before the elections held on 28 April, which resulted in a change of government, partly because of the crime situation. Unfortunately, electoral change did not lead to improvement in the country's crime profile. Indeed, the gravity of the situation prompted the government to reintroduce the State of Emergency (SoE) on 2 March 2026. Not only were 115 homicides reported by the end of April 2026, but shortly after the SoE was declared, the criminality developed a dangerous new dimension with the murder of a police officer – in the San Fernando Municipal Police Station – and the theft of 62 firearms and over 40,000 rounds of ammunition, estimated to value TT \$650,000 (See Baptiste, 2026; Collins, 2026).

Although Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and 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. 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'. Indeed, as Figures 1 and 2 show, the murder rates for 2024 and 2025 for some smaller jurisdictions surpassed those of some of the larger ones. Even Barbados, long considered perhaps the region's most safe and stable society, is not immune from the increasing crime and violence. They recorded 31 homicides in 2023 and 50 the following year. As the director of the Criminal Justice Research and Planning Unit in the Attorney General's office has observed, the country is on track for 2025 to become its deadliest year on record, with youth crime fuelling a surge in homicides. Director Cheryl Willoughby also noted: 'So far, for the month of June (2025), we have had ten murders. . . . We are almost at 30 murders for the year. If we continue on this trajectory, based on trend analysis, we may experience as many as 60 homicides for the year' (Braithwaite, 2025; also see Blunt, 2025).

However, it is not just the volume of crime that is troubling; so, too, is the viciousness of some acts and the significant use of weapons. A few instances will suffice.

- 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



Figure 1. 2024 Caribbean homicide rates. Source: Marina Cavalari, Juliana Manjarrés and Christopher Newton, 'InSight Crime's (2025) Homicide Round-Up', InSight Crime, 26 February 2025, <https://insightcrime.org/news/insight-crime-2024-homicide-round-up/>.

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 organised crime. The trial of 10 of the accused began on 23 July 2020. Incredibly, for a variety of reasons, up to April 2026, the case was still working its way through the judicial labyrinth (*Saturday Express*, 2023; Loutoo, 2025; Seelal, 2014).²

- Jamaica's resort city of Montego Bay was the scene of a bizarre incident on 17 October 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



Figure 2. 2025 Caribbean homicide rates. Source: Christopher Newton, Juliana Manjarrés, Marina Cavalari and Luis Felipe Villota Macías, InSight Crime's 2025 Homicide Round-Up, 11 March 2026, <https://insightcrime.org/news/insight-crime-2025-homicide-round-up/>.

who were reputedly vaccinated, by reputedly 'pure blood' church members. Another vaccinated congregant called the police. Smith later died in a mysterious car cash on 25 October 2021, while being transferred to the capital, Kingston, to be charged with the two murders (Pickering, 2021).

- In Haiti, on 24 April 2023, a minibus heading through the Canapé-Vert neighbourhood 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 exit the bus and lie on the ground. Residents then emerged from various sections of the neighbourhood, wrestled the men from the police, and began to beat and stone them. With the police looking on, paralysed, they placed gasoline-soaked tires on the men and set them alight. In all, 13 men were murdered by the mob (Charles, 2023a).
- St. Lucia, which gave birth to Nobel Laureates Arthur Lewis and Derek Walcott, has also been having similar experiences, with 77 homicides in 2024, up from 75 the previous year. In one weekend in June 2024, there were five gun homicides, in Vieux Fort, Marchand, and Rodney Bay. The following year, in one incident in July 2025, a shooting spree left a pregnant woman and her son dead in Castries, the island's capital (Campbell, 2025; Caribbean News Global, 2024; Jamaica Observer, 2025)
- In Trinidad and Tobago, special prosecutor Randall Hector was murdered on 31 December 2024, as he walked out of a service at a Seventh Day Adventist Church in Port of Spain with his wife and young children. The 43-year-old father of two had delivered the sermon at the church service earlier that evening. His

murder, the last to occur in 2024, pushed the country's murder toll to 624, the highest ever recorded in the country's history. The shocking homicide, which was described as an assassination in many quarters, was labelled as gang-related by the police and occurred the day after a State of Emergency was declared. Although someone was arrested for the murder, up to July 2025 no charges had been brought because of insufficient evidence (Bassant, 2025; Paul, 2025).³

As noted earlier, the nexus between homicides and weapons is a troubling aspect of the criminality portrait. Although small arms have been smuggled to the Caribbean from Europe, Latin America and Asia, most of the weapons originate from the United States. As then chairman of CARICOM, Bahamian Prime Minister Phillip Davis, once explained, 98.6% of all recovered illegal firearms in the Bahamas are directly traced back to the United States. In Haiti, this figure stands at 87.7% while in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the numbers are 67% and 52%, 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' (Munnings, 2023). Moreover, *Miami Herald* award-winning journalist Jacqueline Charles cited the US 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% are scattered throughout the world' (Charles, 2023b).

A major study conducted by Small Arms Survey and CARICOM IMPACS (Fabre et al., 2023) revealed the gravity of the arms aspect. Among other things, it revealed 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%. Moreover, 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. 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 US domestic market is a major source of illicit arms and ammunition in the Caribbean and likely is the largest source in some states and territories, although weapons are also sourced from other countries. In addition, arms and ammunition are smuggled to the region via commercial airliners, postal and fast parcel services, and maritime shipping companies. Although the primary transport mode varies from country to country, trafficking by maritime cargo shipments is particularly common.

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% 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% of seized firearms are rifles.

- Most trafficking schemes are notable for their simplicity. The modus operandi of most US-based traffickers is straightforward and requires minimal funding, infrastructure or knowledge. The trafficker simply needs to camouflage arms and ammunition sufficiently well 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 neighbouring 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.

Caribbean scholars and policymakers have long viewed crime and violence through public security lenses and struggled to meet the multiplicity of challenges involved. A strategic refocusing occurred in April 2023 at the symposium on the subject hosted by then-Prime Minister Keith Rowley of Trinidad and Tobago, who held the portfolio for security within the CARICOM quasi cabinet. The conference framed crime and violence as a public health crisis. It also 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 the efforts to halt illegal arms trafficking. The leaders 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 (Ramdass, 2023).

Caribbean leaders took the refocusing project further in November 2024 with the adoption of the George-Bridge Declaration at the second symposium on crime and violence held in Guyana. It was named George-Bridge to reflect the fact that it was hosted by Barbados, whose capital is Bridgetown, but held in Guyana, where Georgetown is the capital. According to the Declaration,

The public health approach to violence and crime is a systemic multidisciplinary evidence-based framework that seeks to understand, prevent, and mitigate violence and crime by addressing their societal, behavioral and environmental determinants. This approach applies public health principles – such as surveillance, risk, and protective factor identification, intervention, monitoring, and evaluation – to reduce the incidence impact, and recurrence of violence and crime. This approach involves multi sectors, including law

enforcement, health, education, academia, social services, and community stakeholders working collaboratively to design and implement intervention to reduce harm, enhance public safety and build cohesive communities. (CARICOM, 2024)

Civilisational and sovereignty implications

Earlier I mentioned crime and violence as having security, public health and economic implications. These are not the only ones, though; civilisational and sovereignty ones exist, too.

In the book *Challenged Sovereignty*, I recalled Fyodor Dostoevsky's contention that 'The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons' and argued that if one accepted that proposition and applied it to the Caribbean, the conclusion must be drawn that Caribbean civilisation is developing some degenerative features, partly because of the horrendous prison overcrowding and despicable incarceration conditions.

Figure 3, which captures the 2024 prison occupancy realities, reveals the terrible overcrowding in Haiti, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Lucia. As might be expected, the overcrowding and terrible conditions are due to several factors, including the high volume of crime and violence, and legislation about marijuana cultivation, possession and use that carry harsh sentences. Thankfully, the latter is changing since the decriminalisation of certain quantities of marijuana in several jurisdictions following adoption of recommendations of the CARICOM Regional Commission on Marijuana. Other factors exist, though. These include budget limitations, the backlog of cases in the courts, and inefficiencies in the judicial machinery of some countries. Needless to say, the civilisational implications do not derive merely from the occupancy realities, but also from the horrendous conditions that both prisoners and prison officers have to endure.

Moreover, overcrowding and terrible conditions exist both in some prisons and holding cells (jails) in police stations. In one case in Jamaica, detainees at the Spanish Town Police Station in St. Catherine had to be relocated because of rodent infestation and overcrowding. The chief health inspector of the parish reported that the facility had been beset with rat infestation, inadequate ventilation and sewage overflows. Prisoners were known to have been hospitalised after being bitten by rats at the police station, which was built for 45 detainees but was often packed with as many as 100 individuals. The jail was closed in January 2020 and detainees sent to the Linstead Lockup, the Horizon Remand Center and the Tamarind Farm Correctional Center (Turner, 2020). Even relatively wealthy Trinidad and Tobago faces this reality. For instance, according to the *Country Reports for Human Rights Practices* for 2018, most prisons there suffered from extreme overcrowding, although the maximum-security prison was below full capacity. The poor conditions and overcrowding were especially true of the Port of Spain Prison, the remand prison and the immigration detention centre (Griffith, 2022; US Department of State [US], 2019).

In an unprecedented move, on 18 July 2025, Christine Kangaloo, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, declared another SoE, just three months after the earlier one had been lifted. Prisons played a key role in this development. According to Commissioner of Police Allister Guevarro, the extreme action was prompted by 'grave concerns' about a coordinated threat from criminal gangs inside and outside the

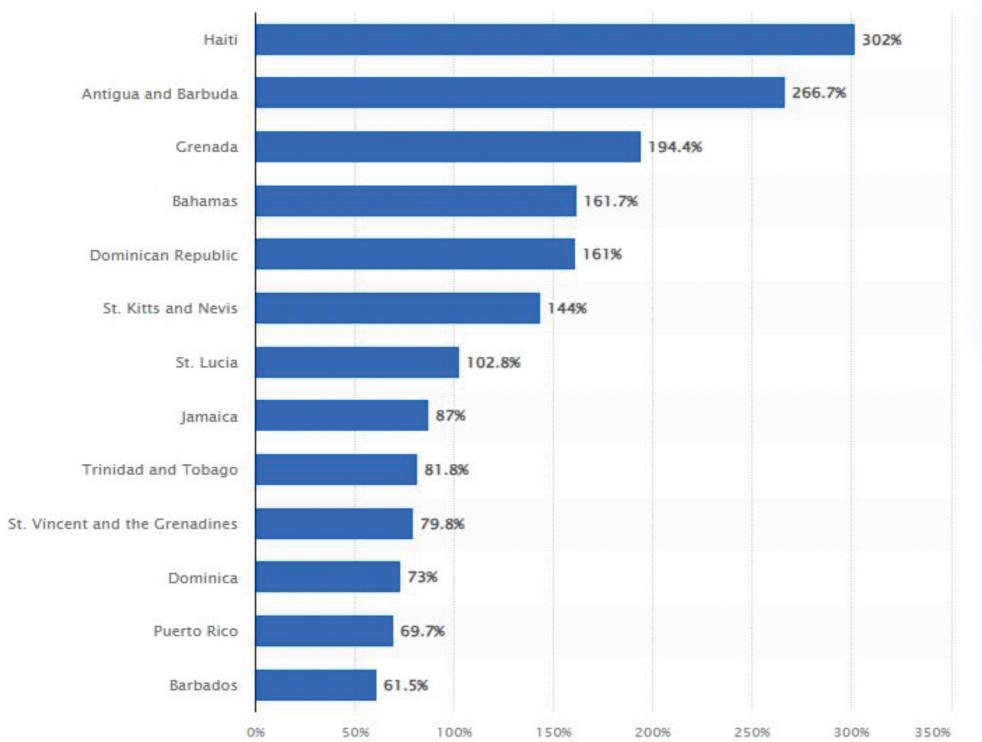


Figure 3. Caribbean prison occupancy 2024. Source: Statista, 'Prison occupancy rates in the Caribbean as of 2024, by country', 2025, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1297433/prison-occupancy-rates-caribbean-country/#:~:text=Haiti%20had%20a%20302%20%%20prison%20occupancy%20rate,Barbados%20had%20the%20lowest%20rate%2C%20at%2061.5%20%>.

country's prisons. In announcing the decision, the Commissioner of Police explained that they had received intelligence reports that several gangs had created an organised crime syndicate and were planning the assassination of political and law enforcement officials, robberies and kidnappings. He also confirmed the relocation of certain gang leaders from the prison system to another facility to manage the threat. Interestingly, Guevarro indicated there had been no recent surge in crime; the SoE was pre-emptive action and part of a broader strategy developed in consultation with the minister of homeland security. In responding to a question about the length of the SoE at a press conference, Attorney General John Jeremie noted that it would be for 'as long as the security forces tell us that they need the additional legislative support' (*Stabroek News*, 2025; Duncan & Haynes, 2025).

Finally, there is the implication related to sovereignty. Importantly, discussions about sovereignty once focused on its international dimension: freedom from outside interference; that no authority is legally above a state except that which a state's leaders voluntarily confer on international bodies. Progressively, though, many scholars and statesmen accepted that a key aspect of sovereignty relates to a nation's internal dynamics. This aspect, called 'positive sovereignty', pertains to state power holders not only being free from external interference but also having the ability to deliver 'political

goods' to citizens internally. Thus, positive sovereignty pertains to governance. As Robert Jackson argued in *Quasi States*, positive sovereignty enables states to take advantage of their independence. A government that is positively sovereign not only is able to enjoy the rights of non-intervention but has the ability to provide 'political goods' for society. Positive sovereignty includes having the economic, technical, military, psychological and other capabilities to declare, implement and enforce public policy, both domestic and foreign (Jackson, 1990, p. 29).

Because sovereignty is a contested concept, it is necessary to specify a working definition. In this respect, sovereignty is used here to mean the supreme authority of a state over itself, without any interference from foreign entities, unless expressly permitted by the state's authorised officials, that secures its territory and citizens, and possesses the economic, technical, military and other capabilities to promulgate and execute domestic and foreign policy. Mindful of this approach, as I outlined in an earlier work (Griffith, 2024, p. 31) 'Challenged Sovereignty' is defined as a condition where the state's vulnerability is exacerbated by internal or external developments that compromise the ability of the supreme authority of the state to promulgate and execute domestic and foreign policy in its own deliberate judgement and on its own terms. As Figure 4 shows, 'Challenged Sovereignty' is a function of three conditions.

All three conditions are required. Moreover, as was shown when the concept was elaborated, 'Challenged Sovereignty' is a circumstance that develops over time. Indeed, the stage-setting for 'Challenged Sovereignty' could take a decade or more to develop and cut across rule by a single political party, as was shown in relation to the Caribbean with regards to drugs, crime and other problems without passports, to use the notion introduced by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan.⁴ Thus, 'Challenged Sovereignty' is a structural condition and not just a functional one. As such, no single set of political and administrative elites by themselves is necessarily able to improve the situation (See Griffith, 2024).⁵

There is incontrovertible evidence that crime and violence in the Caribbean have contributed to the region's 'Challenged Sovereignty', which manifests itself in several ways, notably:

Manifestation 1: Contributing to increased crime and violence that challenge states' monopoly on the use of force in some places, creates climates of fear and insecurity, stresses and stretches military, police, criminal justice and cyber capabilities, and aids the development of unwholesome social values.

Manifestation 2: Enabling criminal entrepreneurs to violate sovereignty by penetrating territory without consent and with impunity and undermining normal internal governance by necessitating the introduction of extreme public security measures such as States of Emergency and other restrictions on civil and political rights.

Manifestation 3: Facilitating sporadic, systemic and institutionalised corruption, within public security agencies and other governmental entities, in businesses, and in the general society.

Manifestation 4: Fuelling the illegal traffic in weapons within and across states and the theft of weapons from private and public security agencies, both of which then contribute to the increased use of weapons in the prosecution of murders and other crimes.

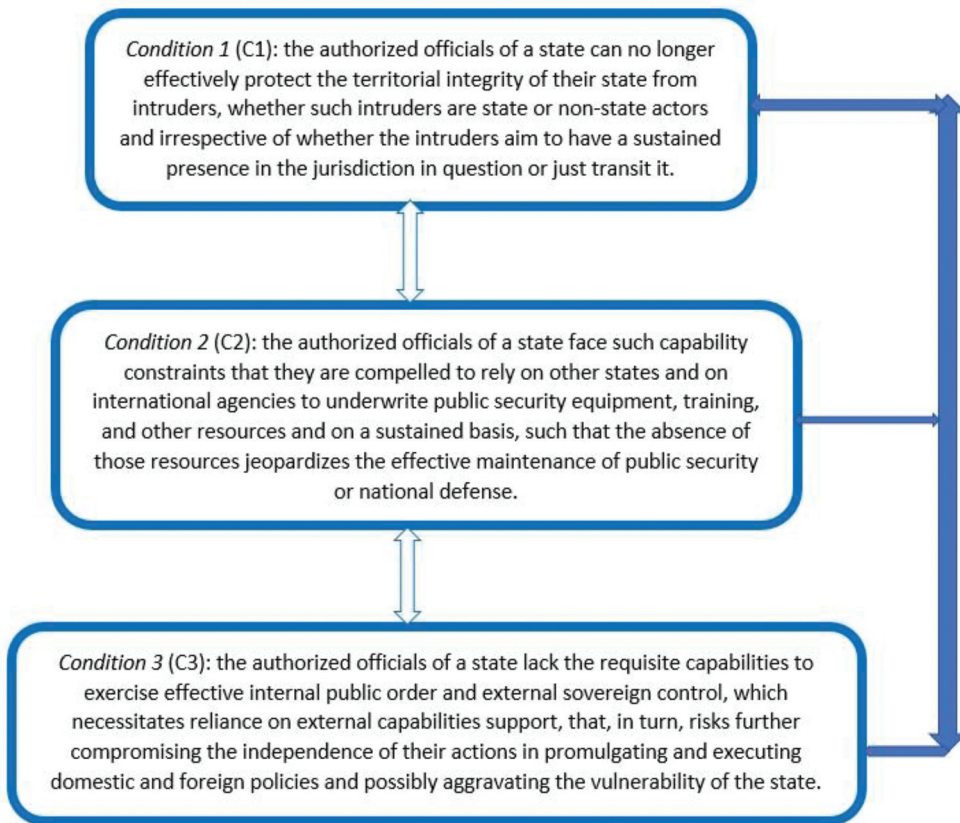


Figure 4. Conditions of challenged sovereignty. Source: author's design.

Manifestation 5: Causing skewed allocation of scarce national resources to fight crime and violence, often at the expense of health, education and other social programmes that themselves are needed to mitigate the susceptibility to the lure of drug money and criminality.

Manifestation 6: Impacting economic activity because of reduced tourism due to crime and because of fines imposed on private sector entities (notably airlines and shipping companies) because of trafficking or money laundering, or the confiscation of property because of trafficking or money laundering (Griffith, 2024, pp. 235–237).

Conclusion

There is little doubt that the crime and violence realities facing the Caribbean, with their implications for safety, public health, economics and sovereignty, have developed a circumstance fitting what the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once called a 'fierce urgency of now'. This is not merely an assessment by academics but a determination by policymakers. This is evident from the above-mentioned George-Bridge Declaration, which was the major outcome of the meeting of CARICOM leaders in Guyana in November 2024, where Caribbean leaders:

- Mandated the CARICOM Secretariat to develop a Contribution Formula for a US \$2.5 million fund to support initiatives to address crime and violence as a public health issue, established a Task Force to draft model legislation within four months, with drafting support by member countries and approval by the Legal Affairs Committee, and identified a dedicated focal point to monitor progress, liaise with stakeholders, and ensure timely implementation.
- Directed the CARICOM IMPACS (CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security) to advise on any further changes in the regional architecture, necessary for more effective collaboration on law enforcement and operational matters, and conduct an immediate review of systems, manpower and terms and conditions across law enforcement agencies, beginning with police services and extending to customs and immigration.
- Recognised the double jeopardy of high levels of violence and unsatisfactory regard by protective or law enforcement agencies endured by female citizens, and as such, require targeted inclusion in the regional approach on crime and violence as a public health issue.

Moreover, the meeting in Guyana also saw the necessity for other pursuits. One is implementation of targeted programmes for children affected by violence, including those of murder victims and incarcerated perpetrators, and development of the necessary measures to reverse the decline in civility and conflict resolution, including by engaging regional artistes to assist in reversing that decline. A second is promotion of mental health interventions and support systems to assist with reducing the link between mental health and crime and violence, facilitation of economic reintegration of convicts through entrepreneurial, agricultural and trade opportunities, and investment in initiatives aimed at at-risk youth. Moreover, the leaders saw the need for collaboration with Ministries of Education to foster positive disciplinary behaviour for those at risk of, or who have come into conflict with, delinquency, and between Heads of Government and Judiciary leaders to address crime, violence and law enforcement challenges in the region, and the strengthening of the Regional Security System (RSS). Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname were urged to join the System, which Guyana joined in 2022 (CARICOM, 2024).⁶

Clearly, the crime and violence circumstances of the Caribbean are multidimensional with transnational aspects. Thus, policymakers and practitioners addressing the situation must contend with several harsh realities, a few of which are presented below.

- Harsh Reality 1 is that the crime and violence circumstance is a complex one, and not simply a matter for the police and defence forces. 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.
- Harsh Reality 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. Moreover, as has been shown earlier, the illegal weapons and ammunition used in the Caribbean come from outside the region.

- Harsh Reality 3 is that – partly because of its complexity, transnationality and multidimensionality – the phenomenon is not amenable to quick fixes. For instance, implementation of the actions identified in the George-Bridge Declaration will require financial and professional 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. As a matter of fact, the United States has already begun to reduce its assistance to the Caribbean and other regions of the world.

Notes

1. See Dudley Allen, 'Urban Crime and Violence in Jamaica', in R. Brana-Shute and G. Brana-Shute, (eds). (1980), *Crime and Punishment in the Caribbean*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, p. 29.
2. One of the sad ironies of this whole saga is that one of the men awaiting trial won a lawsuit against the state after sustaining a severe beating following a riot at the Maximum Security Prison in Arouca during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic (See Achong, 2026).
3. In what could only be described as a macabre development in the twin-island republic, in April 2026 authorities discovered the discarded remains of 50 infants and six adults in the Cumuto Cemetery, 25 miles outside the country's capital, Port-of-Spain (See Collins, 2026).
4. In an earlier extensive study, I showed how the drugs phenomenon has been undermining the security and sovereignty of the Caribbean (See Griffith, 1997).
5. Although Griffith (2024) utilises the Caribbean as the unit of analysis, the author contemplates the application of the framework outside the Caribbean. Experiences within the global commons since the advent of the second Trump Administration, especially in relation to Venezuela, Canada and Europe, suggest that the 'Challenged Sovereignty' concept can have explanatory utility beyond small states.
6. In March 2022, President Irfaan Ali of Guyana signed the RSS protocol while in Belize for a meeting of CARICOM leaders and the following September Guyana formally became the eighth member when President Ali signed the instrument acceding to the RSS Treaty, joining Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, and St Vincent and the Grenadines in the alliance that dates to 1982. Incidentally, both the Guyana Defence Force and the Guyana Police Force participate in the RSS, as is the case with the other RSS members that have both defence and police forces. For more on the RSS, see (Griffith, 1992); and (Phillips, 2022).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

AI disclosure statement

No AI software programme was used in the writing and preparation of this article.

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