



USAID | **GUATEMALA**
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Project Brief

Democracy and Governance

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Situation Analysis

The political context in Guatemala fundamentally and irrevocably changed in Guatemala on April 16, 2015 when Guatemala's Attorney General ordered the arrest of a number of high ranking public officials for participation in a customs tax evasion scheme, *La Linea*. For seasoned observers of the Guatemalan political scene, the arrests, which targeted the inner circles of President Otto Perez Molina and Vice President Roxana Baldetti, were the start of a political earthquake. Over the next several months, a host of senior officials including ministers, congressmen and women, judges, candidates (including the leading candidate for Vice President), and the country's sitting President and Vice President would be arrested and charged. Nineteen weeks of massive civil society protests resulted in the President resigning four days before the general election, and a broad new coalition of civil society forces has demanded action on legal reform, including the elections law, anti-corruption laws and judicial reform. A new coalition for reform, combined with continued prosecutions of high-level corruption cases by the United Nation's Comision Internacional Contra Impunidad en Gutemala (CICIG) and the Attorney General has opened new windows of opportunity for serious engagement on governance and transparency initiatives.

Guatemala is a transit country for the trafficking of humans, drugs, arms and contraband. As other drug routes are disrupted, traffickers take advantage of the country's geographic proximity to Mexico and thus land routes to the United States. Additionally, transnational youth gangs including MS 13 and Barrio 18, have a strong presence in the country's urban centers, and are responsible for a major share of homicides and other violent crime.

Recent surveys have found that over 60% of Guatemalans believe insecurity is the most significant problem facing the country. However, unlike its Northern Triangle neighbors, Honduras and El Salvador, the homicide rate has been steadily dropping since 2009. Though Guatemala still has the world's fifth highest homicide rate, it has dropped from a peak of 46.5 in 2009 to 29.5 in 2015.

Achieving accountable and inclusive governance has been a challenge for Guatemala. With one of the lowest tax collection rates in the hemisphere (10.8%)¹, social spending levels are also abysmally low. Inclusion of marginalized communities has long been an issue, characterized by systemic exclusion of indigenous populations. Unresolved social conflict impedes economic and social development in communities that need it the most. Widespread corruption across all levels of government reduces legitimacy and impedes much-needed social spending. However, recent prosecutions of corrupt officials have chipped away at the high levels of impunity and have awakened a formerly apathetic middle class, prompting the formation of broader coalitions for reform.

USAID Response

Following a wave of migration to the United States by tens of thousands of unaccompanied children (UAC) in 2014, USAID/Guatemala, through its democracy and governance programs, is addressing the lack of social, educational and economic opportunity and insecurity, the main underlying causes of migration from Guatemala." USAID's Democracy and Governance Office supports Government of Guatemala (GOG) and civil society efforts

¹ World Development Indicators 2016. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/23969/9781464806834.pdf>

in two main areas: (1) greater security and justice for the country's citizens; and (2) improved accountable governance and social inclusion.

Citizen Security:

Specifically, USAID seeks to reduce levels of violence in target communities facing high crime rates and strengthen the prosecution and adjudication of crime.

- USAID has worked closely with Guatemala's Attorney General's Office (Public Ministry) to establish two new specialized prosecutors' offices over the past 18 months:
 - With USAID's support the Public Ministry established the Specialized Prosecutors Office Against Extortion in 2015. USAID has supported the office with a new case management model developed hand-in-hand with prosecutors, advanced investigative models for extortion cases, and improved interagency coordination. In May of 2016, the new Anti-Extortion Prosecutor's Office had its first operation, an incredibly successful take-down of a clique of the Barrio 18 gang for extortion and extortion-related homicide. The operation netted 62 arrests. In June, a similar operation targeted an extortion ring within a different click of Barrio 18 gang.
 - USAID also supported the establishment in 2015 of a new Specialized Prosecutor's Office Against Corruption, working with the institution to develop new models for case management and investigation. The new Prosecutor's Office has already opened several high-profile cases targeting mayors, municipal officials, officials within the tax authorities, and police. Strengthening this prosecutor's office complements CICIG's initiatives in Guatemala.
- In close cooperation with Guatemala's Security and Justice Sector institutions, USAID has established new types of courts to meet specific needs of Guatemalans within the judicial sector.
 - USAID established and continues to support a 24-hour court model under which judges are available 24 hours a day to comply with Guatemala's constitutional mandate to present a detainee to a judge within six hours of arrest. These courts also allow prosecutors to request court orders for wiretapping and search warrants around the clock. USAID launched and supports a specialized 24-hour court for cases of violence against women and sexual exploitation to ensure victims receive the assistance they need and strengthen criminal investigation by using scientific evidence. In total there are eight 24-hour courts.
 - USAID supported the GOG in establishing a High Impact Court model to provide greater security for Guatemala's justice sector personnel and enable the conclusion of the most risky cases involving gangs, narcotrafficking, transitional justice and high-level official corruption that in the past would not have made it through the justice system. USAID established these courts in 2009 and has supported their expansion based on caseloads. On June 23, the Supreme Court approved the fourth High Impact Court.
 - Most recently, USAID supported the Supreme Court in the establishment of a Pluripersonal Criminal Court where minor felonies with sentences of up to five years are tried. This new court relieves pressure from the over-burdened First Instance Criminal Courts.
- USAID is supporting efforts that promote accountability and good governance of institutions that work on security and justice issues.
 - USAID works to bring the financial and administrative management procedures in security and justice sector institutions up to international standards, thereby contributing to long term institutional efficiency and effectiveness. International standard certifications have been received in human resources, pay role, procurement among other administrative processes.
- Since 2006 USAID has supported the establishment and strengthening of an autonomous National Institute of Forensic Science (INACIF). INACIF has contributed to the reduction of impunity by replacing the dependence on witness testimony with scientific evidence. USAID is currently in the process of supporting international standard certification for the ballistics, toxicology and genetics laboratories.
- To complement security and justice sector reform efforts USAID has worked with the Ministry of Governance to propose a new Organic Law for the Police which includes processes and procedures from recruitment through retirement with a clearly define police career path. The law initiative has been presented to the minister who will then present it to the executive.
- USAID works to decrease the vulnerability of at-risk communities to gangs and organized crime, improve trust between police and communities and increase civic responsibility.
 - USAID's programs reduce the vulnerability of at-risk youth by providing educational and vocational training as well as recreational and cultural activities.
 - In coordination with the municipalities and police, USAID assists citizen groups to map neighborhood vulnerabilities and develop prevention plans to reduce crime.

- USAID also helped support the creation of a community-based policing degree program for the National Police Academy and provided assistance on a public policy on violence prevention.

Governance and Inclusion:

- USAID supports civil society efforts to promote accountable governance and combat corruption as well as to strengthen the institutional and technical capacities of target CSOs. Through a newly awarded \$25 million project, USAID can provide immediate technical and grant support to civil society organizations engaged in transparency, accountable governance, and legal reform issues. This support has been key for ensuring that civil society is able to engage effectively during the recent political crisis by holding the government accountable and coalescing around a reform agenda.
- The DG Office supports USAID's strategy for reducing poverty and chronic malnutrition in the Western Highlands with targeted assistance to local governments in the 30 Western Highland Integrated Project municipalities. USAID strengthens Western Highlands' municipalities to foster more responsive, inclusive, and effective socio-economic development; increase revenue; respond to citizen concerns related to violence and security, food insecurity and global climate change; and manage public resources in a participatory and financially sound manner.
- USAID/Guatemala is well-regarded within USAID for its leadership in integrated programming addressing issues faced by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community. In 2015, the DG Office included a pilot component addressing barriers to political participation by the LGBTI community. The pilot achieved numerous successes including advances in the process for transgender registration in the National Civil Registry inclusion of transgender voting issues in polling manuals issued by the Supreme Elections Tribunal (TSE), and an LGBTI voter registration day sponsored by the TSE.

Principal Results and Accomplishments

- **Reduced levels of violence** – An impact evaluation of USAID's violence prevention programming demonstrated that communities targeted by USAID reported an 18% decline in robberies, a 50% decline in illegal drug sales, and a 50% decline in extortion and blackmail.
- **Increased effectiveness of the Public Ministry** – Over the past year, USAID support has implemented new investigation and case management models in the Specialized Prosecutors' Offices for Extortion and Anti-Corruption resulting in 19 key arrests for corruption and more than 100 for extortion.
- **Increased efficiency of Guatemalan courts** – The 24-Hour Courts have reduced the number of cases dismissed for lack of merit from 77% to less than 15%. In 2013, the Pluripersonal Court resolved 4,342 cases, representing an increase of over 400%, dramatically improving system efficiency.
- **Support in combatting gender-based violence** – In 2013, USAID supported 18,451 women victims of violence, including domestic violence, through the implementation of key legislation and successful operation of the specialized 24-Hour Court for Violence against Women and Sexual Exploitation.

Current Implementing Partners

Project Name	Implementing Partner	Implementation Period	Total Amount
Acción Joven	Fundación Paiz para la Educación y la Cultura	October 31, 2013 – June 30, 2016	\$1,4 million
Civil Society for Accountable Governance and Citizen Security Project	Counterpart International	Sept. 30, 2015 – Sep. 29, 2020	\$25 million
Convivimos Project	Mercy Corps	June 12, 2015 – June 11, 2020	\$40 million
Elections – More Inclusion, Less Violence	Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS)	August 16, 2012 – January 31, 2017	\$7,9 million
Nexos Locales	Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI)	June 23, 2014 – June 19, 2019	\$16.3 million
Nominations Oversight Program	Familiares y Amigos contra el Secuestro y la Delicuencia (FADS)	Nov. 24, 2014 – Nov. 25, 2016	\$354,000

Nominations Oversight Program	Movimiento Nacional por la Integridad (MNI)	Jan. 28, 2015 – Jan. 29, 2017	\$278,000
Security and Justice Sector Reform Project (SJSRP)	Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc.	August 16, 2012 – August 16, 2017	\$36 million
Protection for Victims of TIP	El Refugio de Niñez	September 17, 2014 – Sept. 17, 2017	\$1.5 million
Youth and Gender Justice Project	Chemonics	May 20, 2016 – Feb. 7, 2021	\$37.4 million



Guatemala 2017 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Narco-Terrorism; Political Violence; Other Government Agencies; Natural Disasters; Maritime; Crime

Western Hemisphere > Guatemala; Western Hemisphere > Guatemala > Guatemala City

4/10/2017

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

U.S. Embassy Guatemala City does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The ACS Unit cannot recommend a particular individual or location and assumes no responsibility for the quality of service provided.

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASSESSED GUATEMALA CITY AS BEING A **CRITICAL**-THREAT LOCATION FOR CRIME DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERESTS.

Please review OSAC's Guatemala-specific webpage for proprietary analytic reports, Consular Messages, and contact information.

Crime Threats

Guatemala suffers from a severe impunity problem, which exacerbates a wide range of crimes. The issue of impunity, coupled with the easy availability of firearms, allows for an environment primed for violent crime. Public institutions are unable to target large-scale criminal enterprises or curb petty crime. Crime statistics are often called into question. The RSO has uses Guatemalan National Police (PNC)-provided crime data. While Americans and tourists are not specifically targeted, they can be easily victimized due to a perceived display of affluence or the appearance of being an easy target.

The PNC received over 14,000 reports of property crime, including approximately 1,500 reports of "theft and assault," in 2016.

A common trend in the commission of armed robberies is the use of motorcycles by assailants. Typically, two men on a motorcycle accost a driver or a pedestrian and demand valuables and cell phones. If assailants encounter resistance, they quickly escalate to

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extreme violence (stabbings, shootings). Motorcycles enable assailants to flee quickly; they are rarely apprehended.

Theft and armed robbery are the most common problems encountered by American citizens. Tourists should carry money in a front pocket or put it in a zippered/buttoned back pocket. Further, high traffic tourist areas are targeted frequently for petty crime; pickpockets and purse snatchers are active in all cities and tourist sites. Markets, national parks, crowded venues, and shopping areas are major areas of operation for criminals. In a common scenario, an accomplice distracts a victim while an assailant slashes or takes a bag/backpack.

In 2014 and 2015, U.S. citizens in Antigua increasingly reported to the Embassy armed robberies, mostly at night but some during the day, targeting pedestrians on less frequented roads.

In 2016, the PNC reported more than 4,500 homicides, 5,800 aggravated assaults, and 3,500 missing persons. Guatemala is consistently ranked by commercial security sources as one of the 25 most dangerous countries in the world. Violent crime is attributed to endemic poverty, an abundance of weapons, a legacy of societal violence, and the presence of organized criminal gangs (Mara Salvatrucha (MS13), Mara Barrio 18 (18th Street)). Long-term residents and dual nationals are more likely to become victims of serious crimes, as they tend to be integrated into society and may not reside in the safest areas.

Guatemala's murder rate appears to be driven by four key factors: narco-trafficking activity, gang-related violence, a heavily-armed population, and a police/judicial system that is unable to hold many criminals accountable. Well-armed criminals know there is little chance they will be caught/punished. Criminal gangs employ juveniles (12 year olds) to commit targeted assassinations. While the vast majority of murders do not involve foreigners, the high volume implies that officials, who are often inexperienced and underpaid, are unable to cope. The PNC does not count homicides if the victim left the crime scene alive but subsequently died from injuries. INACIF (Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Forenses de Guatemala), the government agency responsible for tracking deaths in country, shows homicide rates between 8-16% higher than PNC homicide rates between 2009 and 2013. In 2014, that difference increased to 21%, with INACIF reporting 6,072 deaths compared to PNC's 4,998, and in 2015, a 19% difference with PNC reporting 4,778 compared to INACIF's 5,718.

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The number of violent crimes reported by U.S. citizens and other foreigners has remained high, and incidents have included assault, theft, armed robbery, carjacking, rape, kidnapping, and murder. Even the most upscale residential and commercial areas (Zones 10, 14, 15, 16) have witnessed violent crimes in broad daylight.

Visitors should avoid using a laptop in public places that offer wi-fi services. Several individuals have been killed and their laptops taken upon departure from these establishments, after they were seen using their computers in public. Avoid carrying laptop cases or bags that resemble them, even if they do not contain laptops.

The number of reported missing persons has increased in recent years. While migration can account for some, it is unlikely that family and friends would undergo the cumbersome process of filing a complaint if they knew or suspected a person had disappeared voluntarily. The U.S. Embassy is aware of unsolved cases of disappearance of several U.S. citizens.

According to PNC records, the number of extortions, often by the two main gangs, has risen dramatically in recent years. Extortions are common and target all sectors of society. Bus lines, markets, and small businesses are common targets; however, these gangs also target school children, street vendors, and private citizens. A few years ago, ignoring extortionists and their calls could resolve the matter. However, in 2016, there was a spike in violence against non-compliant victims.

Vehicle thefts are a serious problem. Cargo and transportation theft is a major problem. Trucks carrying shipments of electronics or gasoline are particularly attractive targets. Theft of items from occupied vehicles is increasingly common.

Home invasions by armed groups occur in upscale neighborhoods. Thieves gain access by enticing a resident to open the door for a delivery or rushing in. Occasionally, household staff is believed to be complicit in home invasions. Residential crime rates decreased by 4% in 2013, 16% in 2014, and 8% in 2015.

According to government crime statistics, sexual assault numbers decreased from 614 in 2014, 613 in 2015, and 571 in 2016. In most known cases, women traveling/driving alone were at highest risk. The majority of assaults are inter-familial. The Embassy believes that the numbers of sexual assaults are higher, but cultural stigmas and sporadic police presence in rural areas causes significant underreporting. Arrest and prosecution of assailants in sexual assault cases is uncommon, at best, and can be more difficult without private legal assistance.

A particularly serious concern is incidents of vigilantism (stoning, lynching, immolation), especially in isolated, rural areas. The lack of police response to serious crimes can result in

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villages taking justice into their own hands, resulting in brutal attacks and deaths. Guatemala has many different and firmly-held local beliefs and customs. Particularly in small villages, residents are often suspicious of outsiders.

In January 2012, a group of National Geographic explorers, including U.S. citizens, were detained and assaulted in Quiché department by local residents when they jumped into a pond considered sacred in the Mayan tradition. The incident served as a warning to be mindful of local traditional practices when visiting indigenous Mayan communities.

In 2015, the PNC took approximately 30 reports of lynching per month.

In 2016, reports indicated that 23 people were killed and 43 people were seriously injured in lynching cases.

The Embassy advises U.S. citizens to keep their distance from (including photographing) local children and refrain from actions that could fuel suspicions of child abductions. Such contact can be viewed with deep suspicion and may provoke panic and violence.

Other Areas of Concern

Use a reputable tour organization. Stay in groups and on the main roads. It is preferable to stay in the main tourist destinations. Basic safety precautions for swimming, boating, and other outdoor activities may not be observed. Multiple boaters in the Rio Dulce area of Izabal have been victimized in violent armed attacks.

Widespread narcotics and alien-smuggling activities make remote areas especially dangerous. Due to uncontrolled drug and alien smuggling, the border with Mexico (and in particular the northwestern corner of Petén) is a high-risk area. The border areas (Sierra de Lacandon National Park, Laguna del Tigre National Park) are among the most dangerous areas in Guatemala due to drug trafficking activity. Violent attacks have occurred in the Mayan ruins in Petén, including in the Cerro Cahui Conservation Park, Yaxhá, the road to and inside Tikal Park, and in the Tikal ruins, particularly during sunrise tours. However, tourist police (DISETUR) patrols have significantly reduced the incidence of violent crime inside the park, and there have been no reports of armed assaults on tourists there in recent years. Travelers should remain in groups, stay on the principal trails leading to the Central Plaza and the Temple IV complex, and avoid remote areas of the park.

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Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Overall Road Safety Assessment: Fair

Urban road conditions/maintenance: Fair

Rural road conditions/maintenance: Fair to poor

Availability of roadside/ambulance assistance: Fair

U.S. citizens will encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the U.S. Many city streets are illuminated, but secondary and rural roads have little/no illumination. Passing blindly on winding and steep mountain roads, poorly designed surfaces, randomly placed speed bumps and unmarked hazards, including landslides and precarious temporary highway repairs, present risks to motorists.

Driving demands one's full attention, requiring that drivers be defensive. Speed limits, lane markings, and stop signs are frequently ignored. Many drivers do not use turn signals; instead, a common custom is for a driver or passenger to stick a hand out the window and wave it to indicate that they will be taking an unspecified action. Drivers often drive at the maximum speed their vehicle can handle. Drivers share the road with slow vehicles, some barely able to manage 20 miles per hour, creating a hazardous mix of velocities. Further, cars and trucks are often stalled or parked in the middle of the road. Tree branches are often placed in the road 100 meters or so before the stalled vehicle to warn approaching traffic of a hazard. Drivers are supposed to use the right side of the road, and speed limits are posted depending on the condition of the road. Turning right on red is not permitted unless otherwise posted, and drivers must yield when entering a traffic circle. Seat belts must be worn, but there are no laws requiring the use of child safety seats. It is against the law for drivers to operate cellular phones while driving, although this is not enforced. People found driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs are arrested and may serve jail time. For more information on self-driving, please review OSAC's Report "Driving Overseas: Best Practices." Lethal collisions are common. The Observatorio de Transito de Guatemala reported 4,707 traffic accidents (1,196 fatalities) between July 2015 and July 2016; a 25% increase (31% fatalities) over the previous 12 months. Driver error/negligence accounted for 80% of accidents.

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Pedestrians can create complications for drivers. Due to a lack of sidewalks and crosswalks, pedestrians often walk on the roadway or attempt to cross roads even in heavy traffic. Guatemala City has seen an explosive growth of vehicles in the city and commuting to the city during the work week. Traffic congestion has two significant security-related consequences:

Criminals on motorcycles use traffic as a means to rob motorists. These robberies occur in all sections of the city, to include major thoroughfares patrolled by police.

Road rage caused by heavy traffic and poor driving habits is common and has resulted in violent assaults and shootings.

Minor traffic incidents can escalate quickly to violence when one or both parties are carrying firearms. All drivers involved in accidents resulting in injury may be detained and held in protective custody pending investigation. In several instances, police officers have been posted outside hospital rooms of drivers who were injured, and they were not allowed to depart the country without judicial intervention. Such cases require the assistance of private local attorneys.

Driving outside of urban areas at night is dangerous and not recommended. Intercity travel after dark is extremely dangerous and should be avoided. It is highly recommended to caravan with at least two cars outside of Guatemala City. Emboldened armed robbers have attacked vehicles on main roads in broad daylight. Travel on rural roads increases the risk of being stopped by a criminal roadblock or ambush. The Inter-American Highway (CA-1) and the road from Guatemala City to the Caribbean coast (CA-9) are especially dangerous due to heavy traffic (large trucks, trailers) and poorly-maintained vehicles that often lack properly functioning lights. The main road to Lake Atitlán via CA-9 and Sololá is safer than the alternative secondary roads near the lake. Specifically, the main road is preferable to the alternative road through Las Trampas and Godinez to Panajachel (RN-11). Armed attacks have occurred on roads between Guatemala City and Petén and between Tikal and the Belize border.

Travelers should plan their routes and do their research prior leaving their destination. Although many commercial GPSs and GPS applications may function, they do not reflect road conditions. GPS applications trying to minimize travel times can also route drivers through gang infested neighborhoods.

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There are no roadside assistance clubs. However, a roadside assistance force (PROVIAL) patrols most of the major highways. PROVIAL can be contacted by calling 1520 from a local phone. Their vehicles are equipped with basic tools and first aid supplies, and their services are free. Police patrol the major roadways and may assist travelers, but the patrols are sporadic and may be suspended due to budget constraints or staffing issues. For roadside assistance, travelers may call the police by dialing 110 or 120 or the fire department by dialing 122 or 123. Cell service covers most areas frequented by tourists. Some reports of highway robberies include accusations that police, or assailants dressed as police, have been involved.

A May 2009 law mandates that the motorcycle license plate number must be printed on a sticker on the back of the motorcycle driver's helmet. However, criminals have adapted tactics to include two men on two or more motorcycles. In 2013, the government modified the law requiring motorcycle riders to wear orange vests and display the license plate numbers on those vests. The modified law also requires motorcycle riders to drive on the right-hand side of the road. However, there is little enforcement.

When stopped in traffic, drivers should leave at least half a car length of space after the car in front of them to maneuver. If a driver has to pull over on the highway, they should do it in a well-illuminated area with high visibility or a public place (preferably within view of a police officer). It is also highly recommended that if individuals are driving that they use a car with slightly tinted windows and not talk on their cell phones.

Robbers have been known to place a nail in a parked vehicle's tire. Robbers posing as Good Samaritans follow the vehicle until the tire becomes flat, and the victims pull over. While help is being rendered, the contents of the car are stolen, often without the victim's knowledge. In some cases, robbers have threatened tourists with weapons. Parking areas in/around the Guatemala City International Airport are particularly prone to this crime.

Travelers must also be aware of the high frequency of demonstrations/protests. A number of highly organized groups are capable of drawing thousands of people to support their cause. One of the most common demonstration tactics is the blocking of major routes. The most successful groups have blocked up to 30 major routes – bringing the country's road network to a standstill.

Public Transportation Conditions

Safety of public transportation: Poor

The most common resource for public transportation is the network of informal bus lines. These bus routes are serviced by brightly colored, recycled school buses. The buses are

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poorly maintained, and the drivers are barely qualified, creating an untenable security situation. Additionally, these bus lines are prime targets for extortions and robberies. Bus drivers are habitually assaulted or murdered while on their routes as a consequence of the growing extortion problem.

Modern inter-city buses offer some security from highway violence, but armed attacks are increasing, indicating that all buses are vulnerable. Several travelers have been attacked on first-class buses on CA-2 near the border with both Mexico and El Salvador; on CA-1 and CA-9 near the border with El Salvador; and in the highlands between Quetzaltenango and Sololá. Tourists' possessions are a favorite target of thieves.

Taxis are barely safer than buses. A number of gypsy cabs and unprofessional companies serve metropolitan areas. These cabs can be targeted by or be complicit in criminal activity. American citizens have reported moderate success with the use of Taxi Amarillo and Taxi Seguro. Taxi Amarillo Express is a radio-dispatch taxi service and can be reached by dialing 1766. Taxi Seguro can be reached at 2312-4243 but may not always be available, especially late at night. Hailing taxis on the street is discouraged.

The tourist assistance agency, PROATUR, may be able to provide additional information and can be reached by dialing 1500.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

La Aurora International Airport offers direct flights to/from the U.S. La Aurora has experienced a number of service issues in 2016. On a number of occasions, the airport has been temporarily shut down due to damages caused by severe weather. Flights on major commercial airlines have faced few issues other than delays and re-routing during the worst weather.

Small, privately-owned aircraft present a number of security concerns. Since 2015, the Civilian Aviation Authority investigated over 35 small aircraft accidents. The occurrence of accidents is evenly split between fixed wing and rotary wing aircraft. Maintenance for these aircraft does not meet reasonable standards. Operators of small aircraft are often poorly trained and inexperienced.

The area surrounding the airport is also heavily targeted for crime. Travelers are frequently robbed leaving the airport, commonly at night. Private vehicles, taxis, and shuttle buses have all been targeted. Typically, assailants steal money, passports, and luggage. In some cases, travelers who flagged a taxi outside of the airport have been robbed by the drivers. In other cases, assailants have worn full/partial police uniforms and have used vehicles that resemble police vehicles, indicating that some elements of the police might be involved. Armed

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robberies have occurred within minutes of a tourist's vehicle having been stopped by the police. It is advised that travel arrangements be made ahead of time. A pre-screened, vetted taxi service is available at the airport. You can hire them at the kiosk under the "SAFE" sign. Visitors to the Mayan ruins at Tikal are urged to fly to Flores and then travel by shuttle or tour van.

Terrorism Threat

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASSESSED GUATEMALA CITY AS BEING A **LOW**-THREAT LOCATION FOR TERRORIST ACTIVITY DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERESTS.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASSESSED GUATEMALA CITY AS BEING A **MEDIUM**-THREAT LOCATION FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERESTS.

Civil Unrest

Large demonstrations occur, often with little/no notice, and can cause serious traffic disruptions. Although most demonstrations are peaceful, they can turn violent. The use of roadblocks and/or blocking of public facilities (airport) may delay/prevent tourists from reaching their destination.

Travelers should avoid areas where demonstrations are taking place. It is wise to avoid any public gathering of agitated citizens, especially as persons attempting to intervene have been attacked by mobs. Keep informed of possible demonstrations by following the local news and consulting hotel personnel and tour guides. Confer with trusted local staff or associates, or check the mass media, before venturing out on trips.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Guatemala is a geologically and climatologically active and dynamic country. Visitors need to be aware of the diverse geological and climatological issues: Guatemala is prone to (but not limited to) seismic activity, volcanic eruptions, severe/unpredictable weather, and unstable terrain.

Guatemala lies on a major fault line known as the Motagua/Chixoy-Polochic fault complex. From June 2016 to January 2017, Guatemala registered 50 seismic movements at 3.5+. Guatemala has been affected by a number of significant earthquakes above 7.0 (Richter). In 1773, a 7.5 quake caused massive destruction to what is now known as Antigua Guatemala, resulting in the capital's move to what is now Guatemala City. Nearly 200 years

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later, in 1976, a 7.5 earthquake shook Guatemala City, leaving approximately 23,000 dead and 77,000 injured.

Guatemala has four very active volcanoes: Pacaya, Santiaguito, Fuego, and Tacana.

On January 7, 2017, a group of experienced climbers ascended the Acatenango volcano for an overnight excursion. Accompanied by qualified guides experienced in climbing and properly equipped, the group was overwhelmed by rapidly changing, severe weather. The temperature dropped below freezing, heavy wind and rain bore down on them. Hypothermia set in, killing six of the climbers.

In early February 2015, activity at Fuego caused avalanches and shock waves that rattled nearby structures. On February 7, 2015, a Strombolian eruption occurred, causing plumes with water vapor and ash to rise 1.3km in the sky. Ash fell in Guatemala City (about 35km from Fuego), and flights to the international airport had to be diverted to El Salvador.

In 2013, Fuego, Pacaya, and Santiaguito periodically displayed increased volcanic activity that included lava flow and ash dispersions.

Tourists planning to climb Pacaya and Agua volcanoes during the rainy season should plan their climb for the morning when thunderstorms are less likely to occur. Climbers should monitor the weather and return to the base as quickly and safely as possible if thunderstorms gather. INGUAT has organized an active community-based tourism program in San Vicente Pacaya to minimize the risk of armed robbery or mishap on Pacaya. Climbing volcanoes in groups and with a guide is still highly advisable to reduce the risk of assault and to mitigate the dangers of volcanic and weather conditions.

Guatemala has been called the "land of eternal spring." However, hurricanes and tropical storms threaten that moniker. During the rainy season, the country can feel the effects of severe rainfall. Flooding, mudslides, and landslides all pose a major risk to urban and rural areas. The poor road infrastructure can be easily overcome by mudslides. Landslides and flooding have destroyed entire communities.

On October 1, 2015, heavy rains triggered a massive landslide on the outskirts of Guatemala City. The make-shift community of El Cambray Dos was destroyed, leaving hundreds dead. Beware of strong currents, riptides, and undertow along the Pacific coast beaches. They pose a serious threat to even the strongest swimmers.

In 2012, two U.S. citizens drowned in the undertow, and one U.S. citizen drowned each year in the same area in 2013, 2014, and 2015. At least one of these U.S. citizens was an experienced surfer with strong swimming skills.

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Signs warning of treacherous surf are rare and confined mostly to private beaches. Lifeguards are rarely present.

For specific information regarding current conditions, visit Guatemala's national weather and geographical authority at: <http://www.insivumeh.gob.gt/>. General information about natural disaster preparedness is available locally from the National Disaster Reduction Coordination Office (CONRED) and from the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

FEMA Earthquake page: <http://www.fema.gov/earthquake>

Drop Cover Hold On: <http://www.dropcoverholdon.org/>

Terremotos: A California-specific site containing useful guidance in Spanish for earthquake preparedness: <http://www.terremotos.org/>

Red Cross – Earthquake Preparedness:

<http://www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/earthquake>

Red Cross – Earthquake Preparedness (Spanish):

<http://www.redcross.org/cruz-roja/preparate/terremotos>

Critical Infrastructure

Guatemala City is growing at a precipitous rate. Basic services, road infrastructure, emergency services, and medical services barely meet the needs of the current population. The capacity of the government to respond to chemical or industrial accidents is extremely limited, and small incidents typically go unreported. The government is also very limited in its technical ability to monitor watershed runoff or air pollution from industrial processes, the most controversial being mining.

Economic Concerns

The U.S.-Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement provides for improved standards for the protection and enforcement of a broad range of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) that are consistent with U.S. standards of protection and enforcement as well as emerging international standards. Enforcement of IPR laws, however, has been inconsistent. A number of raids, cases, and prosecutions have been pursued; however, resource constraints and lack of coordinated government action impede efficient enforcement efforts. Piracy of works protected by copyright and infringement of other forms of intellectual property,

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such as trademarks including those of some major U.S. food and pharmaceutical brands, remains problematic.

Personal Identity Concerns

Women should be especially careful when traveling alone and avoid staying out late alone. U.S. citizens are advised to be aware of and avoid activities that might unintentionally violate a cultural or religious belief.

Drug-related Crimes

Narcotics-related crimes factor into the precarious security environment, but the bulk of narco-crime occurs near the Mexican border. Smaller Guatemalan cartels usurp the territories of their more emboldened Mexican counterparts. Narco-traffickers are very well armed and operate with impunity within their areas of operation. Limited resources make it difficult to combat the narcotics trafficking problems. Safe storage of seized drug precursor chemicals is also a major challenge. The capacity to transport, treat, store, or dispose of precursors is severely limited, though the government has tried to develop expertise, albeit with slow progress.

The larger day-to-day security concern is the extortion rackets created by MS13, 18th Street, and a number of smaller gangs. Certain neighborhoods are controlled by the gangs. The PNC cannot enter many of these neighborhoods, as they are physically walled off and controlled by gangs. In spite of regional initiatives to combat drug trafficking and gang activity, gangs continue to operate freely, and extortions are on the rise.

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnappings are not as prevalent as they have been in the past. Given the complexity of kidnapping and the PNC's attention to them, kidnappings are not as viable a criminal enterprise as extortions. The kidnappings that do occur are often connected to drug traffickers. In these instances, narcos are often well-armed and will use massive amounts of force to extort, kidnap, and kill. There have been "express" kidnappings in recent years, primarily in Guatemala City, in which kidnapers demand a relatively small ransom that they believe can be gathered quickly. Some kidnapping gangs are known to kill their victims regardless of a paid ransom.

Police Response

The Policia Nacional Civil (PNC) lacks personnel and training to accomplish their mission. The PNC also suffers from a lack of supplies (vehicles, fuel, ammunition) with little improvement from year-to-year. More often than not, a police investigation fails to result in an arrest, much less a conviction. Apart from impunity, a principal reason that the government is unable to

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respond to the needs of crime victims or to prevent them from becoming victims in the first place, is that the PNC is significantly under-trained and under-funded. The average PNC officer should have at least a high school degree but often times has much less, is often equipped with as little as six months of police training before being sent out on the streets, and receives only U.S.\$535/month as salary. The PNC's annual budget is inadequate to support its personnel, vehicles, training, and other infrastructure needs.

Police in remote areas are often understaffed, ill-equipped, and typically will not interfere in deterring vigilantism.

Tourists should carry a photocopy of their passport while out.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

U.S. citizens detained by the police can contact the Embassy for assistance at (502) 2326-4000. The Embassy's Duty Officer is available after working hours at (502) 2331 2354.

Crime Victim Assistance

Crime victims are often asked to pay for gas so that the police, if they have a vehicle available to them, may visit the crime scene.

Police (911 equivalent): 110 or 120

Fire Department: 122 or 123

Tourist emergency assistance: 502 2421-2810

Tourist Assistance (PROATUR): 1500

PROATUR is a joint national police/INGUAT initiative and is present in all major tourist destinations.

Support for victims of sexual assault is lacking outside of major cities, and there are not enough trained personnel who can help victims either in the capital or outlying areas.

Police/Security Agencies

Security escorts for tourist groups and security information are available from the Tourist Assistance Office (PROATUR) of the Guatemalan Tourism Institute (INGUAT) at 7a Avenida 1-17, Zona 4, Centro Cívico, Guatemala City. INGUAT's PROATUR division has 24-7 direct telephone numbers for tourist assistance and emergencies (Tel: (502) 2421-2810, Fax: (502) 2421-2891, 1500 in Guatemala, or email: operacionesproatur@inguat.gob.gt). PROATUR also maintains regional offices in all major tourist destinations, and the regional delegates

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provide rapid and appropriate assistance to crime and accident victims. Travelers may also wish to visit INGUAT's website at: <http://www.inguat.gob.gt/> (Spanish only). Tourist groups are advised to request security escorts from INGUAT. There have been no incidents of armed robbery of groups escorted through the Tourist Protection Program. The request should be submitted by mail, fax, or e-mail (info@inguat.gob.gt) and should arrive at INGUAT at least three business days in advance of the proposed travel. Requests should be directed to the attention of the Coordinator of the National Tourist Assistance Program and should provide the itinerary, names of travelers, and model/color of vehicle. Travelers should be aware that INGUAT might not be able to accommodate all requests.

Medical Emergencies

A wide range of medical care is available in Guatemala City, but medical care outside the city is limited. Care in private hospitals is generally adequate for most common illnesses and injuries, and many of the medical specialists working in them are U.S.-trained and certified. Public hospitals frequently experience serious shortages of basic medicines and equipment. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for health services, although most private hospitals accept major U.S. credit cards. They do not typically enter into payment plan agreements. Travelers should be aware that they may have to pay in advance and seek reimbursement.

Ambulances include:

Alerta Medica

Direct: 502-2332-9422

Work: 502-2327-7171

After Hours: 502-2327-7100

<http://www.alertamedica.com.gt/>

Description: EMT and paramedic on board at all times. All ambulances are fully equipped to respond to cardiac, respiratory, and trauma events. Typical response time can vary from 5-15 minutes, and all vehicles can access any private or public hospital.

Asistencia Medica, S.A.

Direct: 502-5203-0525

Work: 502-2332-1506

Work: 502-2332-6485

asmesa@c.net.gt

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Description: EMT on board at all times. Paramedic on board if requested. All ambulances equipped to respond to cardiac, respiratory, and trauma emergencies. Typical response time has been reported to be a minimum of 15 minutes. All vehicles have access to all public and private hospitals.

Rescate 911

Direct: 502-2361-4041

Work: 502-2362-5157

Work: 502-2362-5167

<http://www.rescate911.com.gt/>

info@rescate911.com.gt

Description: EMT and paramedic on board at all times. All medical providers are trained in Guatemala. Ambulances can provide intensive care quality transportation with equipment including continuous cardiac monitor, oxygen, infusion pump, incubator, and other medical supplies. Typical response time varies from 7-10 minutes, and all vehicles can access all private and public hospitals.

Contact Information for Available Medical Services

Private Hospitals in Guatemala City:

Hospital de las Americas

10a. Calle 2-31, Zona 14

Phone: 2384-3535 Fax: 2384-3535 Ext. 1028

info@hospitalesdeguatemala.com

Hospital Herrera Llerandi

6a. Avenida 8-71, Zona 10

Phone: 2384-5959 Emergency: 2334-5955

<http://www.amedesgua.com/> (Spanish)

http://www.amedesgua.com/index_eng.asp (English)

Healthinfo@herreralerandi.com

Cedros del Libano

8a. Avenida 2-48, Zona 1

Phone: 2230-6274/6/8, 2220-1356/2230-6274

Fax: 2253-6879

www.hospitalesdeguatemala.com

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info@hospitalesdeguatemala.com
Centro Medico
6a. Avenida 3-47, Zona 10
Phone: 2279-4949 Fax: 2331-7533
www.centromedico.com.gt
info@centromedico.com.gt

Public Hospitals in Guatemala City:
Hospital Universitario Esperanza
6a. Avenida 7-49, Zona 10
Phone: 2362-8626 Fax: 2362-8657
<http://hospitalesperanza.com/>
cesazo@hospitalesperanza.com
Private foundation, affiliated with Francisco Marroquin University School of Medicine
Hospital General San Juan de Dios
1a. Avenida 10-50, Zona 1
Phone: 2321-9191 / 2253-0423
<http://www.hospitalsanjuandediosguatemala.com/>
Affiliated with University San Carlos School of Medicine IGSS
Instituto Guatemalteco de Seguridad Social
9a. Calle 7-55, Zona 9
Phone: 2332-1009, 2332-4031, 2332-1278, 2332-3252, 2332-1312, 2332-0063.
<http://www.igssgt.org/>
Use requires registration
Nuestra Senora del Pilar
3a. Calle 10-71, Zona 15
Colonia Tecún Umán
Phone: 2420-0000
www.sanatorioelpilar.com
Private, run by Asociacion Española de Beneficiencia by nuns of the Anunciata.
Roosevelt Hospital
Calzada Roosevelt, Zona 11
Phone: 2321-7400

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<http://www.hospitalroosevelt.gob.gt>

Hosproos@terra.com.gt

Affiliated with University San Carlos School of Medicine

Hospital General de Accidentes - IGSS

13 Avenida 1-51 Col. Monte Real, Zona 4, Mixco

Phone: 2437-9625-29

www.hgadirec@itelgua.com

Membership required to use services

Available Air Ambulance Services

American Aerovac Air Ambulance

Direct: 001-800-423-5993

Other: 001-954-252-2744

rskuf@bellsouth.net

<http://americanaerovac.com/info.htm>

P.O. Box 291033 Davie, FL 33329-1033

Air Ambulance Network

Direct: 001-800-880-9451

Other: 001-727-934-3999

<http://www.airambulancenetwork.com/>

3607 Alt 19 N., Suite A, Palm Harbor, FL 34683

Aerotaxis Air Ambulance Service

Direct: 502-5709-7922, 502-2331-3073 or 502-2360-4074

aerotaxis@hotmail.com

Avenida Hincapie y 18 Calle, Zona 13, Interior Aeropuerto, Hangar J-12

Aero Ruta Maya, S.A. Air Ambulance Service

Work: 502-2418-2727 or 502-2418-2700 or 502-2418-2710

armsa1@intelnett.com

Avenida Hincapie y 18 Calle Final, Hangar L-16, Interior Aeropuerto La Aurora, Zona 13.

Insurance Guidance

It is very important to confirm that medical insurance will provide coverage overseas prior to travel. There are some aerial medevac services. However, these services are extremely expensive and frequently require payment before the service is rendered. Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the U.S. can be costly.

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Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for Guatemala.

OSAC Country Council Information

The Guatemala City Country Council currently meets monthly and has approximately 60 members. Please contact OSAC's Western Hemisphere team with any questions or to join.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

Avenida Reforma 7-01, Zona 10, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Business hours: 0800-1700 Mon-Thu; 0800-1200 Fri

Embassy Contact Numbers

Tel: (502)2326-4000

Emergency after-hours tel: (502)2331-2354

Fax: (502)2331-3804

Website: <http://guatemala.usembassy.gov>

Embassy Guidance

Consult the ACS webpage to find the requirements for your type of service and bring all the filled forms, supporting documentation, photos when needed to speed up your process.

U.S. citizens living in or visiting Guatemala are encouraged to register with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive updates with important safety and security announcements, and help friends and family get in touch with you in an emergency. Also, bookmark the Bureau of Consular Affairs website, which contains the current Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and Worldwide Cautions. Follow us on Twitter and the Bureau of Consular Affairs page on Facebook. Call 1-888-407-4747 toll-free within the U.S. and Canada, or a regular toll line, 1-202-501-4444, from other countries.

Additional Resources

Guatemala Country Information Sheet

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