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# The confluence of crime: mapping the nexus between arms and drug trafficking in the Caribbean

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**ABSTRACT**

The Caribbean region has emerged as an epicentre of transnational organised crime, where firearms are not only tools of protection but also increasingly function as both currency and commodities within the drug trade. Despite limited network analyses on the interrelationship between arms and drug trafficking in the region, existing literature suggests their interconnection remains to be empirically tested. As a step in this direction, this research undertakes a quantitative analysis of regional seizures of drugs and firearms based on an open-source dataset, complemented by anecdotal evidence from available regional jurisprudence to assess whether the two commodities are frequently seized jointly, thus indicating an interconnectivity of the markets and various trends observed. The analysis of 1,098 seizure instances from press articles and 107 court cases reveals a moderate correlation, pointing to a possible link between firearm and drug seizures, with some countries acting as 'hotspots' while others exhibiting only weak associations.

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## Introduction

The Caribbean region, situated between major drug production zones in South America and high-demand markets in North America and Europe, has become an epicentre of transnational organised crime. The late 1990s saw the Southern Caribbean emerge as a pivotal hub for transhipping drugs across the hemisphere, with the notable surge in deadly violence in Trinidad frequently linked to this development (Baird et al., 2023). The region suffers from some of the world's highest rates of violent deaths, with firearms used in the majority of homicides (Fabre et al., 2023). In late 2022, INTERPOL and CARICOM-IMPACS' Operation Trigger VII led to the seizure of more than 350 weapons, 3,300 rounds of ammunition and 12.6 tons of drugs (INTERPOL, 2022). Firearms are not just a tool but have become both a form of currency and commodity in the drug trade, turning it into a significant independent criminal activity (Nicholson & Mitchell, 2022). This evolution is facilitated through three primary channels: firearms accompanying narcotics transactions, arms trafficked from

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South America (especially Venezuela), and those purchased – often quasi-legally – from U.S. merchants and trafficked south through the region (Baird et al., 2023). The situation in Haiti illustrates the severe implications of these intertwining criminal markets. As of early 2024, Haitian gangs had gained control over vast territories, including crucial trading routes and maritime ports, enabling them to move illicit firearms, drugs, and other contraband with impunity (UNSC, 2024). Such developments underline the importance of understanding the nexus between these two different forms of trafficking. The urgency to address these challenges has also reached the highest policy levels. In April 2023, the CARICOM heads of government declared crime and violence as a public health issue, specifically emphasising the roles played by gangs and illicit firearms (CARICOM IMPACS (Caribbean Community Implementation Agency for Crime and Security) [CARICOM], 2022). This declaration underscores a growing recognition among policymakers that the interplay between different types of trafficking exacerbates violence and impedes societal development.

The nexus between the drug trade and arms trafficking in the Caribbean involves multiple layers of interaction between gangs, organised crime groups, and the illicit markets that sustain them. In 2016, a survey conducted by the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force reported that 10 out of 12 country respondents stated that criminals primarily obtain and use small arms and ammunition for drug trafficking purposes, while 4 out of 10 stated that the secondary use of small arms and ammunition is identified as gang violence (CFATF (Caribbean Financial Action Task Force) Risk, Trends and Methods Group [CFATF], 2016). As analysed by Baird et al. (2023), the relationship between gangs, drugs, and firearms is complex, and the association between them is often assumed rather than explained. While scientific research has more extensively studied drug trafficking networks, little quantitative or qualitative network analysis has been employed to study arms trafficking, and even less the interconnections between both types of trafficking. In spite of the recent progress in the field of illicit network dynamics (Bright et al., 2018), several hypotheses on the nexus between arms and drug trafficking remain yet to be tested.

Given the critical background of violence fuelled by the interplay between arms and drug trafficking in the Caribbean, the proactive policy environment in addressing these phenomena, and the absence of existing analysis on the connection between both types of trafficking, this research seeks to establish a first step in understanding the interlink between arms and drug trafficking in the Caribbean and how both trafficking activities interact. The research will then delve into several central subquestions: How often are the items seized together? In which countries? Do drug and arms trafficking activities influence the likelihood of joint seizures? The study aims to answer these questions by analysing the instances of joint seizures of both commodities, through a quantitative analysis of a 1,098 seizure instances dataset designed by the authors, and a qualitative analysis of 107 court cases related to drug and firearms trafficking, providing anecdotal evidence on their linkages and modus operandi. Additionally, the research looks into the pathways of drug and arms trafficking in the Caribbean through a literature review. Together, these materials allow the authors to assess the hypotheses of whether drug and firearm seizures tend to co-occur, whether trafficking intent increases the probability of joint seizures, and whether the strength of these relationships varies across national contexts.

Preliminary findings reveal marked disparities in the prevalence of joint seizures across the Caribbean. Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas stand out as prominent hotspots, whereas Jamaica and Guyana record comparatively few cases of co-occurrence. The results indicate that trafficking intent is a significant factor in increasing the likelihood of firearms being seized alongside narcotics. In such cases, firearms appear to play a functional role in drug trafficking – serving as tools for protection, intimidation, or as commodities traded in parallel. While these patterns point to the presence of a regional nexus between arms and drug trafficking, the strength, form, and operational dynamics of this relationship vary substantially between national contexts and require further research.

The following section outlines previous research on the arms and drug trafficking security context and legal framework within CARICOM IMPACS' Member States, to provide an overview of drug and arms trafficking dynamics.

## *The interlink between arms and drug trafficking in the Caribbean region*

Griffith characterised the Caribbean region as being impacted by four primary drug-related activities: production, consumption and abuse, trafficking, and money laundering from drug revenues. These activities contribute to a series of adverse consequences, including the proliferation of arms trafficking, corruption, crime, and negative effects on tourism. Access to firearms and ammunition is considered crucial for the success of some drug operations, particularly in production and trafficking. Firearms serve to safeguard drugs and personnel, enforce the agendas of drug producers, dealers, and traffickers, intimidate clients and other operators, and deter internal disloyalty or defection (Griffith, 1997).

When looking at drug trafficking, starting around the mid-1980s, drugs that were once trafficked directly from South America to the United States increasingly began passing through the Caribbean and Central America (Seepersad, 2017). Large quantities of narcotics transit through key Caribbean states such as the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and the Dutch Caribbean islands. Traffickers employ a range of tactics, including transporting drugs in shipping containers, boats, aircraft, and via human couriers. Moving beyond channels to the use of arms for drug modus operandi, Caribbean-based drug trafficking organisations, such as those in the Dominican Republic, pay local groups with both drugs and firearms, spurring a local micro-trafficking market and igniting conflicts among rival groups fighting to control the trade (Fabre et al., 2023; Insight Crime, 2023). Jamaica illustrates, for instance, a particularly strong link between arms and drug trafficking. Cannabis-loaded boats depart from Jamaica's coastline, bound for Haiti – specifically Old Harbour Bay – where the drugs are exchanged for firearms, including handguns and high-powered assault rifles. The boats return to Jamaica loaded with firearms, which are then resold individually or in bulk. This 'guns-for-drugs' trade is enabled by traffickers and gangs, with local fishermen often serving as couriers and middlemen (The Gleaner, 2020). Saint Lucia, as well, receives firearms smuggled with cocaine from Venezuelan drug networks, which are then used by criminal groups to secure their drug stockpiles. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has seen a shift in trafficking dynamics since COVID-19, where cannabis is exchanged for firearms

coming from Trinidad and Tobago. In Suriname, firearms from Venezuela arrive through intermediaries involved in cocaine trafficking (Global Initiative on Transnational Organized Crime [GI], 2023).

Previous research undertaken on the types of arms trafficking in the region highlighted that handguns are the predominant type of illicit firearm in circulation across the Caribbean. Although law enforcement is increasingly wary of illicit rifles and rifle ammunition, their use remains relatively uncommon. Nevertheless, U.S. authorities in August 2022 flagged a significant uptick in the trafficking of large-calibre rifles and other firearms into Haiti and neighbouring Caribbean territories (Fabre et al., 2023). The Caribbean also face mounting challenges related to privately manufactured firearms and conversion devices, which are categorised in this analysis as firearms (Yarina & Florquin, 2024). When looking at the channels of arms trafficking, most legally obtained firearms in the Caribbean are imported from the United States under specific permits (Caribbean, 2016). Between 2015 and 2020, approximately 87.7% of firearms seized in Haiti were manufactured or legally sourced from the U.S., with similar figures for the Bahamas (98.6%) and Jamaica (66.9%). Key methods by which legally owned firearms are diverted into illicit markets in the U.S. – and subsequently trafficked into Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean – include third-party purchases, gun show sales, and theft from licenced dealers (Vázquez Del Mercado, 2022). This flow of firearms is part of a broader problem known as the 'iron river', a term used in Latin America and the Caribbean to describe the trafficking of guns from U.S. states with permissive gun laws to criminal organisations throughout the region (CNN, 2024).

### *Regional arms and drug trafficking routes*

To start understanding the intersection between arms and drug trafficking, one must look at the trafficking flows internal and external to the region: where the drugs and arms come from, what are the transiting countries, and where these commodities head to. This allows to identify the broader overlapping trafficking flows between both types of commodities before turning to the analysis of seizures. According to the 2023 Organized Crime Index (GI, 2023) the majority of arms enter the Caribbean from the U.S., more seldom Central and South American regions. Arms are usually exported to the Caribbean islands to remain there, rather than for transit. Drugs mostly originate in South or Central America and are sent via the Caribbean states to Europe, North America, or other islands. We see several Caribbean states emerge as major transit hubs such as Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Antigua and Barbuda. Trafficking routes within the Caribbean mainly include arms from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as drugs from St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Guyana to the other islands. However, the data of the OCI should be taken with caution as it does not encompass data on all countries, nor shares the methodology used for data collection on drug and arms trafficking. For example, there is no such data on the Dominican Republic, which through the author's media monitoring emerged as a major transit hub for drugs to Europe.

### *Relevant legal frameworks on firearms and drugs*

Since the given research methodology uses legal charges to determine trafficking activities and intent of perpetrators, the authors would like to provide a condensed snapshot of the relevant legal framework. A comprehensive overview over the legislation in each of the CARICOM Member states on both arms and drug possession, trafficking and penalties shows that in most Caribbean countries, civilian firearm possession is allowed but requires a licence, registration, and is often decided at the discretion of the authorities. Public carrying of firearms is generally prohibited, though Belize allows open carry in restricted zones (Belize, 2011). Other countries like Saint Vincent (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, 1995) and Saint Lucia (Lucia, 2022) permit carrying under certain conditions. Unlawful possession of firearms is penalised in all countries, with penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment. Thereby, some countries, such as Belize (Belize, 2011), Jamaica (Jamaica, 2022), Guyana (Guyana, 2021a) and Montserrat (Montserrat, 2008) maintain a registry. When looking at drug legislation, cannabis is generally decriminalised in many Caribbean countries, often up to specified limits (e.g. 15–56 grams), with medical, therapeutic, religious, or research allowances in countries like Jamaica (2015; Jamaica, 1948), Belize (Belize, 2020, 2022), Guyana (Guyana, 1999, 2021b), and Saint Kitts and Nevis (Kitts & Nevis, 2002; Kitts et al., 2020, 2020b). Exceptions are Grenada (Grenada, 2011), Suriname (Suriname, 1998), and Montserrat (Montserrat, 2008), where, as far as mid-2024, cannabis remains illegal except for medical use. Cocaine and heroin are illegal, with limited medical, scientific, or veterinary use allowed in the Bahamas (Bahamas, 2000), Montserrat (Montserrat, 2008), and Saint Kitts and Nevis (Kitts & Nevis, 2020).

Recent judicial developments are also important and stress the country's recognition of the growing national threat from firearms trafficking. Saint Kit and Nevis, for instance, took a stronger stance against illegal firearm ownership and use to address gun violence, notably by extending the longer maximum sentences for firearm-related offences and increasing the fine for profiting from their sale (SKNIS, 2024). In 2023, Guyana also expressed its intention to update its current Firearms Act, to address the issue of illicit trafficking and comply with its obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty, ratified in 2013 (CIJN, 2023). In 2024, the Bahamas also announced its intention to update its current firearms legislation, notably to strengthen restrictions to obtain a licenced firearm, integrate gun kits and 3D-printed firearms (Loop News, 2024). However, looking at drugs, one can see a certain trend towards the legalisation of cannabis. In 2021, Saint Lucia decriminalised cannabis up to 30 grams (Saint Lucia, 2023). Grenada, where possession remains illegal as far as mid-2024, is considering a medical cannabis industry (Jamaica Observer, 2022). Whether this is done for political or economic reasons, or to 'legalise' a part of the drug market, goes beyond the scope of this paper.

### *Previous analysis on trafficking flows*

Over the past decade, different methods have been tested to understand the interlink between distinct trafficking activities, such as dyadic logistic regression, latent-space models, and exponential random graph models (ERGMs). Outside the Caribbean, a small but insightful body of research shows how seizure data and court records can be turned into testable trafficking networks. In Europe, for instance, Giommoni, Aziani, and

Berlusconi (2017), and Berlusconi et al. (2017) used UNODC drug seizure data to model heroin flows. They applied latent-space models to show how distance, governance quality, and colonial ties influence trafficking routes. In Asia, Baradel and Breuer (2024) used Japanese trial records to build a picture of drug importation networks. Their ERGM models showed how organisational efficiency shapes long-distance drug imports. Similar approaches have been applied to firearm trafficking. Leuprecht and Aulthouse (2014) analysed cross-border gun-running cases between Canada and the U.S., while Langlois et al. (2022) mapped actor networks from U.S. federal indictments. Together, these examples show two important points. First, seizure data and court records offer different but complementary views of trafficking – physical shipments versus actor relationships. Second, network-based models like ERGMs are well-suited to uncover the structure of these markets. However, previous studies also note key limits: seizure data often mirrors enforcement bias (Giommoni et al., 2017), while court records reflect only prosecuted cases and can miss broader network activity (Langlois et al., 2022).

Our study builds on this foundation by applying logistic regression analysis to the Caribbean for the first time. We combine both data sources – seizures and court cases – for drugs and firearms in a single regional network. This allows us to explore whether the two markets intersect and to assess the strengths and limitations of each type of data.

## Material and methods

### *Data collection*

This research is based on multiple data sources using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data sources include:

(a) Literature review of relevant academic articles, UN Agencies reports (such as UNRILEC, UNODC, UNIDIR), and civil society organisation reports (such as the Small Arms Survey, GI-TOC), national legal repositories;
(b) Open-Source Dataset

An open-source dataset developed by the authors of media articles on firearm and drug seizures in 19 Caribbean countries[1]: To create this dataset, the authors reviewed CARICOM IMPACS daily media monitoring newsletters, to identify and compile open source media reports of drug seizures and firearm seirures reported between 26 October 2023 and 28 October 2024. Each newsletter listed the title of the news articles and a short abstract for each. While the newsletter itself is not publicly accessible, all underlying media articles referenced therein are fully open-source and publicly available; the newsletter merely replaced the compilation work that would otherwise have been undertaken by the authors, and therefore does not hinder the reproducibility of the results. The authors systematically screened these newsletters using predefined keyword searches (‘gun’, ‘arm’, ‘firearm’, ‘ammunition’, ‘drug’, ‘narcotics’, ‘weed’, ‘marijuana’, ‘ganja’, ‘cannabis’, and ‘cocaine’). All articles matching these terms were reviewed in full. For each relevant report, the authors recorded whether the seizure involved drugs, firearms, or both, thereby generating the quantitative data used in the statistical analyses (i.e. the number and type of seizure instances). In

parallel, qualitative information was extracted from the articles, including the type and quantity of commodities seized, location and circumstances of the seizure, indications of trafficking or intent to sell, number and gender of individuals involved, their reported occupation where available, and the mode of transportation used. The media articles were not independently verified by the authors, as they were sourced through an official governmental media monitoring mechanism and originated from established regional news outlets (including, inter alia, Loop Caribbean, Antigua News Room, CNC3, and Guyana Times). All articles identified through the keyword search were included; no additional selection criteria based on media type or outlet were applied.

In total, 1098 of fitting news entries have been identified by the authors. Following, the authors noted down the country, date, item seized (drugs or firearms), whether a 'joint seizure' (drugs seized with firearms) was present, circumstances of the seizure, as well as the 'intent' of the perpetrator vis- à -vis the seized commodity. In criminology and criminal law, *intent* generally refers to the mental state (*mens rea*) of a person at the time of committing an offence, encompassing the conscious decision to engage in conduct that is unlawful (Ashworth & Horder, 2022). It is typically distinguished from accidental or reckless behaviour and forms a core element in establishing criminal liability. In this study, however, *intent* is operationalised in an evidentiary and procedural sense, to distinguish trafficking activities from simple 'possession', based on observable indicators reported in official or journalistic accounts, rather than on a subjective assessment of the perpetrator's mental state or the normative debates surrounding it in critical criminology.

The authors noted down when perpetrators had an 'intent to sell' the commodities at hand, to establish possible trafficking cases, as well as the intent of perpetrators to keep the items 'for personal use'. In order to establish the intent, the authors first looked at the judicial charge mentioned in the article such as 'possession of dangerous drugs with intent to supply', 'possession of firearms/ammunition with intent to supply', 'exportation of dangerous drugs'. If no judicial charge was mentioned, the authors looked at the description in the article and such formulations used as 'drug/arms trafficking', 'the trafficker', 'drug dealer'. Finally, the authors presumed an intent to supply when the quantity of the drugs seized exceeded by far (at least 5 times) the legal limit (for marijuana), or exceeded 1 kg (for cocaine). Where the intent of the perpetrator was unknown, the authors remained on the side of caution and coded it as 'for personal use'. The 'intent to sell' was clearly indicated (by judicial charge or textual information) in 87.4% of drug cases and in 93.3% for firearm cases. In 50 drug cases and 2 firearms cases, the authors relied on quantity. Additionally, the authors noted anecdotal circumstances of cases, such as what mode of transportation was used for the commodities, the perpetrator profile, whether commodities were seized in prisons, or whether they were seized in connection with any other crimes.

Importantly, the authors counted only the instances of seizures, not the quantity seized per se, as the purpose of the analysis is to quantify and analyse the occurrence of joint seizures. For instance, while only a few seizures have been made in the Dominican Republic, they were of high volume ranging up to 1.6 tonnes of cocaine (2024). This is not reflected quantitatively in the analysis, to avoid skewing the data, as the exact quantity of the seized commodity was not indicated for all cases. Ammunition seizures have been coded as firearm seizures for simplification purposes. The complete dataset,

along with the original media sources, can be made available by the authors upon reasonable request.

c) Jurisprudence overview and anecdotal evidence

A compilation of available court records of convicted arms and drug traffickers (2004–2024) from the Eastern Caribbean Court (gathering cases from Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, Saint Kit and Nevis, and the Virgin Islands) the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Court of Appeal, the High Court of Justice of the British Virgin Islands, the High Court of Justice and the Court of Appeal of Trinidad and Tobago, the Supreme Court of Jamaica, and the Court of Appeal of the Bahamas, collecting 107 relevant cases. Cases were selected based on charges of drug or firearm possession with 'intent to supply'. Due to the limited availability of cases showing both drug and firearm trafficking, only seven such cases were identified. Given these data limitations of the jurisprudence, the authors rounded up the analysis by providing a general overview over the jurisprudence available, highlighting their observations vis a vis perpetrator composition, modes of trafficking and more, as well as provided anecdotal evidence from selected jurisprudence underlying the interconnectivity between drugs and arms trafficking in the region. The authors compared these trends with the literature available, the observations made during the media monitoring process as well as the quantitative analysis of the authors' dataset.

## *Data analysis*

Data analysis included a quantitative analysis of seizure instances of firearms and drugs separately as well as together, followed by a proportion test and a statistical analysis. The statistical analysis employed a correlation calculation and a logistic regression model to quantify relationships between different types of seizures. The proportion test, as well as the correlation analysis and logistic regression, was conducted with the statistical program R 4.4.1. A quantitative and qualitative analysis was also undertaken to understand trafficking modus operandi and actors in the compiled 107 court cases dataset designed by the authors.

### *Hypotheses tested*

Based on the reviewed literature and observed trafficking dynamics in the Caribbean, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested through the quantitative analyses:

***H1 – Drug and firearm seizures are positively associated.*** The frequency of firearm seizures is positively correlated with the frequency of drug seizures across countries, suggesting possible overlap or co-dependence between the two illicit markets.

***H2 – Trafficking intent increases the probability of a joint seizures.*** When either drugs or firearms are seized with intent to sell (as opposed to for personal use), the probability of a joint seizure (drugs and firearms) is significantly higher. This reflects the operational co-occurrence of the two commodities in trafficking activities, either as mutually traded goods or with firearms used to facilitate drug trafficking.

***H3 – The strength of this relationship varies across countries.*** The effect of trafficking intent (drugs or firearms) on the probability of a joint seizure differs across national contexts, reflecting variation in the interconnection between trafficking markets, enforcement priorities, or the structure of illicit networks.

### *Proportion tests*

A proportion test was employed to assess whether the proportion of joint seizures in each country was significantly different from the regional average proportion of joint seizures. This test was crucial in identifying countries with unusually high or low occurrences of joint seizures compared to the norm, which could reflect specific national trafficking dynamics, structures of criminal markets or unique enforcement practices. This analysis tests Hypothesis 1 (H1) regarding whether certain countries deviate significantly from the regional average in their proportion of joint seizures.

To conduct the proportion testing, the following steps were undertaken:

(1) **Calculation of the overall regional proportion**: the authors first calculated the average proportion of joint seizures across the sampled Caribbean countries.
(2) **Country-by-country proportion calculation**: For each country, the authors calculated the proportion of joint seizures relative to total seizures.
(3) **Proportion test**: A proportion test for each country compared their joint seizure proportion against the regional average. This test generated a *p*-value indicating whether the proportion of joint seizures in each country was significantly higher or lower than the overall Caribbean average.
(4) **Interpretation**: Countries with a *p*-value below 0.05 were interpreted as having joint seizure proportions that were significantly different from the regional average. This enables to identify locations with either heightened or reduced levels of joint trafficking activity as well as statistically relevant results.

Having conducted a first per-country analysis, the authors realised that the value of the U.S. Virgin Islands showed a 100% proportion, since only two seizure instances were reported in the country during the whole year, and both of them were joint seizures. The authors decided to treat the U.S. Virgin Islands as an outlier and to exclude it from the overall proportion test as well as the per- country analysis.

### *Correlation analysis*

The purpose of the correlation analysis was to explore the general association between drug seizures, firearm seizures, and joint seizures across the Caribbean region. By examining correlations, the objective was to identify whether a statistical relationship exists between the frequencies of these different types of seizures within each country and across the entire region.

To conduct the correlation analysis, the authors calculated the correlation coefficients between the variables: 'Drug_Seizures', 'Firearm_Seizures', and 'Joint_Seizures'. This step contributes to the understanding whether high frequencies of one type of seizure were generally associated with high frequencies of another. This analysis addresses Hypothesis 1 (H1), testing whether higher frequencies of drug seizures are associated with increased firearm seizures.

### *Logistic regression*

Logistic regression is a statistical method used to model the relationship between a binary dependent variable and one or more independent variables. The authors tested Hypothesis 2 (H2) by examining how the intent to sell drugs or firearms influenced the likelihood of joint seizures. By treating 'Presence_of_Co_Seizures' (a binary variable: 1 for joint seizures, 0 otherwise) as the outcome variable, the objective was to determine whether trafficking intent significantly impacted the probability of a joint seizure.

To proceed with the logistic regression analysis, the following steps were undertaken:

(1) **Variable selection**: The authors initially considered two binary predictors: *Intent_Sell_Drug* and *Intent_Sell_Firearm*, indicating whether the seized drugs or firearms were intended for sale. As the research question concerns the overall nexus between drug and firearm trafficking, these were aggregated into a single binary variable (*Intent_Sell*) coded 1 if either commodity was intended for sale and 0 otherwise. This aggregation ensured that firearm-led seizures involving drugs were not excluded, avoided underestimating co-trafficking, and mitigated statistical power limitations in country-level models.[2]
(2) **Model construction**: The logistic regression model was constructed with *Presence_of_Co_Seizures* as the dependent variable and the aggregated *Intent_Sell* variable as the independent variable.
(3) **Model estimation and interpretation**: The model output provides estimates of the influence of trafficking intent on the odds of a joint seizure occurring. Odds ratios were calculated to interpret the magnitude of this effect, with higher values indicating a greater likelihood of joint seizures when trafficking intent was present.

The following country-by-country analysis allowed the authors to test Hypothesis 4 (H4) regarding country-level variation in this relationship.

### *Data limitations*

The study's limitations include the reliance on media-reported seizure data, which may be subject to reporting biases. Although the dataset consisting of 1098 seizures over an observation period of 1 year is significant, data was not equally available for all countries under review. Two main forms of bias are relevant: first, whether the dataset includes all available media reports (which was maximised through comprehensive data collection), and second, whether the media report themselves accurately reflect actual seizure activity. The latter is difficult to assess, as underreporting may result from limited press freedom, strategic omissions, or resource constraints. To increase the robustness of the research results, more data on several countries should be collected and/or the time span extended.

Several limitations pertaining to statistical analysis are also acknowledged in this study. First, the correlation analysis does not establish causation; rather, it identifies associations between types of seizures. Additionally, sample size limitations in certain countries affected the robustness of the proportion test and logistic regression analysis. Specifically, disparities in the sample size for 'intent to sell firearms' versus 'intent to sell drugs' likely led to an overestimated influence of firearm trafficking intent, though adjustments were made where feasible to mitigate this effect. Finally, country-specific

variations suggest that aggregated results may not fully capture distinct local trafficking networks, highlighting the need for more network analysis in future research. Additionally, the jurisprudence sample is constrained, with only a few cases reflecting dual trafficking activities, limiting its generalisability. Jurisprudence was publicly available only for a limited set of countries and in most cases limited to the higher court or court of appeals. Hence, the court cases often contained limited information on the trafficking circumstances.Due to time constraints and lack of dedicated funding, the authors have used a Generative AI tools (Chat GPT 4.0) in the copy-editing stage of the manuscript for language improvement. The final manuscript was reviewed and approved by the authors to ensure accuracy and integrity.

## Results

### *Media monitoring dataset*

The occurrence of joint seizures of arms and drugs may be a good first indicator for the interlinkages between the two illicit markets and trafficking activities. In order to analyse the occurrence of such joint seizures, the authors compiled a dataset[3] based on openly available media entries. While the dataset was primarily used for statistical purposes, a complementary overview of the media reports covered provided valuable insights to contextualise the statistical findings and further analysis.

The vast majority of drug seizures, where the drug was identified involved marijuana (over 30% of all cases) and cocaine (accounting together for roughly half of all seizures), with fewer instances of other substances, primarily ecstasy (e.g. INews Guyana, 2023), heroin (The Tribune, 2024) and others (Sambrano, 2023). Most seized firearms were pistols and handguns. However, a significant number of high-powered weapons (in at least 6% of the cases), mostly rifles and some submachine guns, have also been confiscated. The perpetrator network composition of the media instances analysed showed that most drugs and arms were seized on single people, or a group of two. Cases involving more elaborated networks involving more than three people were less common and mostly involved shipping of large amounts of drugs (Jamaica Customs Agency [JCA], 2023). By far most perpetrators were male. The occupation of perpetrators varied. However, a number of taxi drivers and other transport operators have been arrested (Guyana Times, 2023). The methods of transporting drugs and firearms included roads, vehicles, speedboats, and airways. Thirty seizures have taken place in or near harbours or at sea. Numerous foreign nationals have been involved in trafficking, with both origins and destinations mainly in the U.S. and Europe (Cayman News Services, 2024; StKN Observer, 2024). Bigger drug shipments destined for Europe, Canada, Australia and others seem to have been more often seized in the Dominican Republic (Loop News, 2024) and some smaller ones in Suriname (Waterkant, 2023a). Some intra-Caribbean trafficking, of both arms (Waterkant, 2023b) and drugs (Nationwide Radio, Jamaica [NRJ], 2024; Waterkant, 2024), has also been observed. Eighteen drug seizures have occurred in prisons (Antigua News Room [ANR], 2023). In some cases, arms trafficking has been linked to migration from Venezuela (such as 2023; 2024) and Haiti (NewslineTCI, 2024). A considerable portion of seized firearms has been associated with robberies, violent crimes, or incidents of domestic violence.

**Table 1.** Seizure instances per location.

| Location | Drug seizures alone | Firearm seizures alone | Joint seizures | Total seizures |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Antigua and Barbuda | 17 | 24 | 4 | 44 |
| Bahamas | 44 | 40 | 22 | 106 |
| Barbados | 12 | 8 | 2 | 22 |
| Belize | 44 | 12 | 5 | 61 |
| Bermuda | 10 | 7 | 3 | 20 |
| British Virgin Islands | 4 | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Cayman Islands | 10 | 9 | 3 | 22 |
| Dominica | 5 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| Dominican Republic | 15 | 0 | 1 | 16 |
| Grenada | 5 | 5 | 3 | 13 |
| Guyana | 121 | 70 | 16 | 206 |
| Haiti | 2 | 4 | 1 | 7 |
| Jamaica | 52 | 154 | 5 | 211 |
| St. Kitts and Nevis | 7 | 7 | 4 | 18 |
| St. Lucia | 1 | 27 | 8 | 36 |
| St. Vincent and the Grenadines | 18 | 20 | 3 | 41 |
| Suriname | 35 | 13 | 7 | 55 |
| U.S. Virgin Islands | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 50 | 89 | 50 | 188 |
| Turks and Caicos | 5 | 7 | 4 | 16 |

*Note*. Total count: 1098[4].

### *Instances of firearm seizures, drug seizures and joint seizures*

The authors arrived at the following data on seizure instances per country:

Plotting this data on maps, the authors arrived at the following geographical distributions:

As illustrated in Figure 1, Jamaica is the country where firearms have been seized the most often, followed by Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and the Bahamas. As illustrated in Figure 2, the country with by far the highest count in drug seizures has been Guyana, followed by Trinidad and Tobago, Belize, Bahamas and Jamaica. Finally, as illustrated in Figure 3, the countries with the highest number of joint seizures are Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, closely followed by the Bahamas, Suriname, and Belize. However, while the number of instances of joint seizures may provide valuable insights into where the two illicit markets might be connected, raw count numbers may be misleading. This is especially true in a dataset with limited datapoints available for different countries. To address this, the authors further conducted a proportionality test.

### *Proportion of joint seizures*

A proportionality test for the whole region yielded the result of 0.131 (or 13.10%). Meaning that 13.10% of all seizures in the dataset are cases of joint seizures. While it does not constitute a very high percentage, it might be influenced by the small sample size for certain countries.

In order to get a more detailed result and to compare with the results of the simple quantitative analysis of joint seizures per country, the authors further examined the proportion of joint seizures for each country separately. For each location, the authors used a one-sample proportion test (specifically, prop.test() in R). This test compares the proportion of joint seizures in each country against the overall proportion calculated


**Figure 1.** Instances of firearms seizures. *Note. Source*: created by authors with mapchart.net.

(13.10%) to see if a location's proportion of joint seizures is significantly different from the overall rate.

Table 2 provides the country-by-country analysis, while Graph 2 provides a visualisation of the proportionality test's results. As mentioned earlier, the U.S. Virgin Islands were identified as an outlier and excluded from the analysis.

Based on Table 2 and Figure 4, the authors can make statistically relevant observations ($p < 0.05$) only for four countries. With a proportion of 20.75% and $p$-value of 0.028, the joint seizure proportion in the Bahamas is significantly higher than the overall average, which might point towards a possible connection between the two illicit markets in the country. Similarly, Trinidad and Tobago has an even higher proportion of 26.46% and a very low $p$-value (9.70e-08). This may again indicate particularly intertwined illicit markets. On the other hand, Guyana, which was a leader in drug seizures by number, shows a significantly lower proportion of joint seizures of only 7.73%. The $p$-value for Guyana is 0.028, indicating a statistically significantly lower proportion of joint seizures than the regional average. Jamaica has an even lower proportion of 2.37% with an even lower $p$-value of 6.23e-06.

For most other countries, including Antigua and Barbuda (8.89%), Barbados (9.09%), Belize (8.20%), Bermuda (15.00%), Cayman Islands (13.64%), Dominica (12.50%), Dominican Republic (6.25%), Haiti (14.29%), St. Vincent and the Grenadines (7.32%),


**Figure 2.** Instances of drug seizures. *Note. Source*: created by authors with mapchart.net.

Suriname (12.73%), the proportion of joint seizures did not differ significantly from the regional average of 13.10%.

Finally, although some countries showed a significantly higher proportion, they also had a significantly high p-value, indicating that these results are not reliable, and might be influenced by a small sample size. Such countries include the British Virgin Islands, Grenada, Turks and Caicos, St. Kitts and Nevis and St. Lucia.

As illustrated in Figure 5, the map plotting the different seizure proportions shows significant differences, with the map depicting the number of joint seizure instances alone. We see the biggest differences in ranking with regard to Jamaica and Guyana. In both countries, the proportion of joint seizures has been below average, although the number of joint seizures as such was high. This pattern relates to Hypothesis 3 (H3), which anticipates variation in the strength of a possible nexus across national contexts. Another significant difference can be observed with regard to countries which had a proportion of joint seizures way above average, while a small number of joint seizures as such and following also a high p-value indicating statistical uncertainty. Such countries include St. Lucia, British Virgin Islands and Grenada. More datapoints are needed for these particular countries. High numbers of instances for joint seizures as well as a high statistically significant proportionality can only be observed in the cases of Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas. These results also support Hypothesis 1 – that firearms and drug seizures are positively associated – and Hypothesis 2, which posits that trafficking intent increases the likelihood of joint seizures. To complement these findings and dive


**Figure 3.** Instances of joint firearms and drug seizures. *Note. Source*: created by authors with mapchart.net.

**Table 2.** Country-by-country analysis of proportionality5.

| Location | Proportion of joint seizures | p-value |
|---|---|---|
| Antigua and Barbuda | 8,89% | 0,537335416 |
| Bahamas | 20,75% | 0,028465761 |
| Barbados | 9,09% | 0,808971621 |
| Belize | 8,20% | 0,34422378 |
| Bermuda | 15,00% | 1 |
| British Virgin Islands | 33,33% | 0,387783889 |
| Cayman Islands | 13,64% | 1 |
| Dominica | 12,50% | 1 |
| Dominican Republic | 6,25% | 0,658557321 |
| Grenada | 23,08% | 0,512603451 |
| Guyana | 7,73% | 0,028661211 |
| Haiti | 14,29% | 1 |
| Jamaica | 2,37% | 6,23001E-06 |
| St. Kitts and Nevis | 22,22% | 0,425245143 |
| St. Lucia | 22,22% | 0,169257489 |
| St. Vincent and the Grenadines | 7,32% | 0,386219945 |
| Suriname | 12,73% | 1 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 26,46% | 9,70229E-08 |
| Turks and Caicos | 25,00% | 0,298396741 |

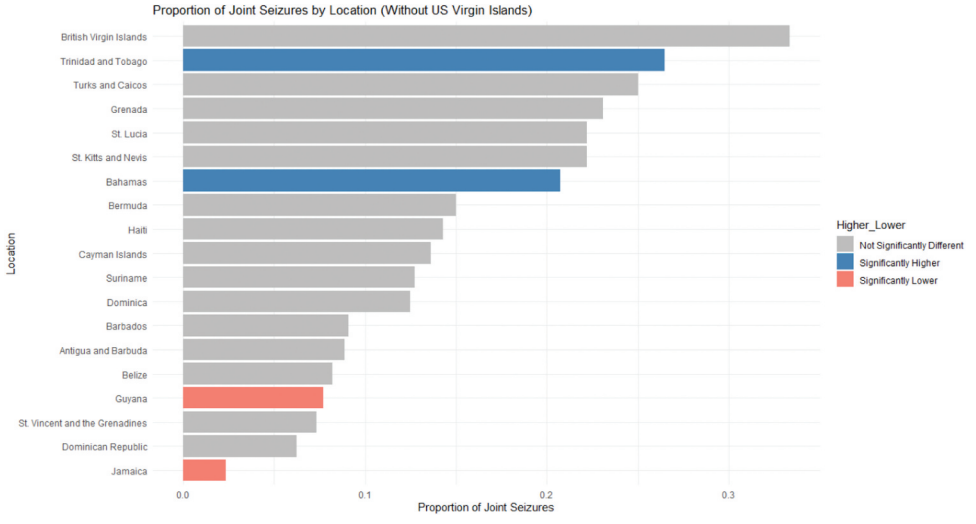


**Figure 4.** Proportion of joint seizures by location. *Note. Source*: Authors with R.4.4.1.

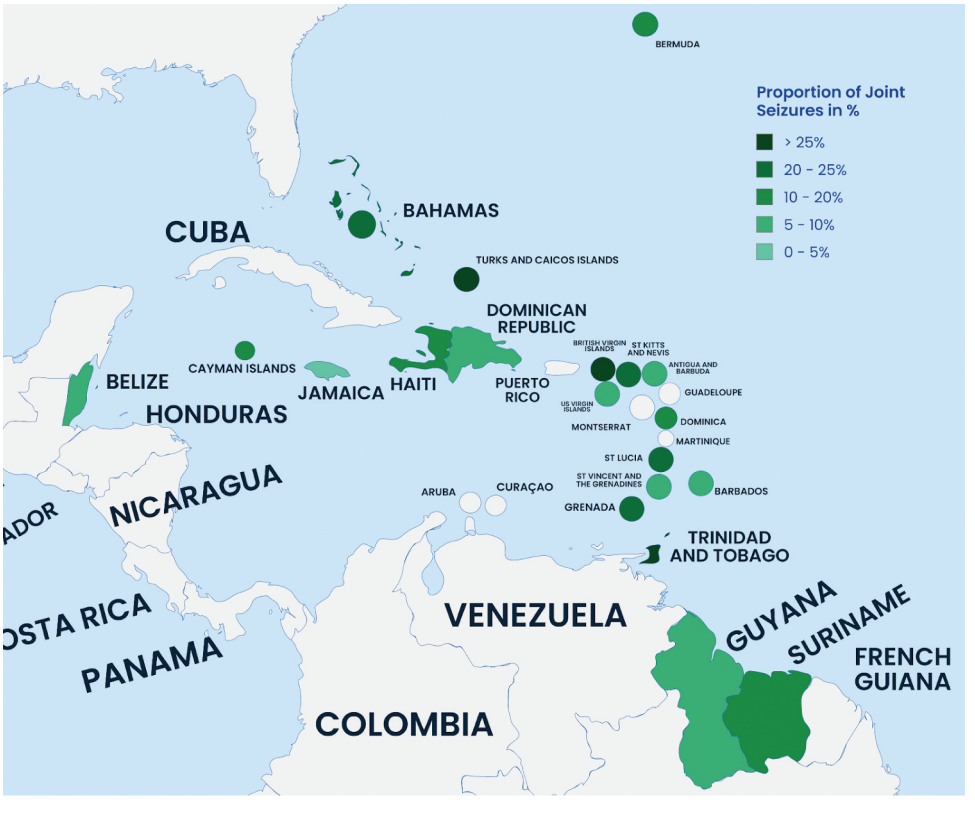


**Figure 5.** Proportion of joint seizures by location. *Note. Source*: created by authors with mapchart.net.

slightly deeper into the matter, the authors proceeded with an attempt at looking at possible causal links between the seizures of firearms and drugs.

## *Causal relationship between joint seizures of firearms and drugs*

The authors conducted a regional correlation analysis to explore potential relationships between the different types of seizures. Among the three pairwise comparisons, the strongest association was found between drug and firearm seizures, with a moderate positive correlation coefficient of 0.64. This moderate correlation weakly supports Hypothesis 1 on the positive association between firearms and drug seizures but indicates that joint seizures may be influenced by other factors, such as the intent to sell the commodity, hence trafficking activity, or specific trafficking patterns in certain areas.

### *The influence of 'intent to sell'*

For the purpose of this paper, the authors focused on trafficking intent – whether for drugs or firearms – to explore its potential influence on the likelihood of joint seizures as an indicator of interconnectivity between the two illicit markets. In the dataset of 1,098 seizures, *intent to sell drugs* was coded in 397 cases and *intent to sell firearms* in 30 cases. Given the literature findings that arms often accompany drug trafficking as a means of protection or extortion (FPI and UNODC, 2024), the authors anticipated that trafficking intent would increase the probability of a joint seizure.

To capture this effect without excluding firearm-led seizures that also involved drugs, the two variables were aggregated into a single binary measure (*Intent_Sell*), coded as 1 if either drugs or firearms were intended for sale and 0 otherwise. This aggregation also mitigated issues of overestimation arising from the small number of firearm-intent cases while retaining the full dataset for analysis.

A logistic regression model was then estimated with *Presence_of_Co_Seizures* as the dependent variable and the aggregated *Intent_Sell* variable as the predictor. The results for the whole region are shown in Table 3.

The intercept estimate of −2.023 represents the log-odds of a joint seizure occurring when there is no trafficking intent. The corresponding odds ratio of 0.132 indicates a low base likelihood of joint seizures in the absence of trafficking intent.

The coefficient for *Intent_Sell* (0.593) is positive and statistically significant ($p = 0.001$), indicating that trafficking intent substantially increases the likelihood of joint seizures. The odds ratio of 1.81 means that the odds of a joint seizure are 81% higher when trafficking intent is present. In probability terms, this corresponds to an increase from roughly 11.6% to 19.5%, a relative increase of about 68%. The 95% confidence interval for the odds ratio (1.27 to 2.57) does not cross 1, further confirming the robustness of the association.

**Table 3.** Logistic regression matrix for the region.6

| Variable | Estimate | Std_Error | z_value | p_value | Odds_Ratio | Lower_CI | Upper_CI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | −2.023 | 0.118 | −17.13 | <0.001 | 0.132 | 0.105 | 0.166 |
| Intent_Sell | 0.593 | 0.180 | 3.29 | 0.001 | 1.81 | 1.27 | 2.57 |

**Table 4.** Per-country logistic regression matrix [7]

| Country | Variable | Estimate | p_value | Odds_Ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Antigua and Barbuda | (Intercept) | −32581 | 0001388 | 0038461538 |
| | Intent_Sell | 1.2432 | 0.326465 | 3.466667 |
| Bahamas | (Intercept) | −1.2528 | 0.000036 | 0.285714 |
| | Intent_Sell | −0.2231 | 0.652391 | 0.800000 |
| Barbados | (Intercept) | −138629 | 007951 | 025 |
| | Intent_Sell | −50.5722 | 1.000000 | ~0 |
| Belize | (Intercept) | −211021 | 0.000067 | 0121212121 |
| | Intent_Sell | −1.0253 | 0.372866 | 0.358696 |
| Bermuda | (Intercept) | −2.3979 | 0.021687 | 0.090909 |
| | Intent_Sellg | 1.2993 | 0.327063 | 3.666667 |
| Guyana | (Intercept) | −2.5745 | 0 | 0.076190 |
| | Intent_Sell | 0.2113 | 0.684965 | 1.235294 |
| Jamaica | (Intercept) | −3.9640 | 0 | 0.018987 |
| | Intent_Sell | 0.7859 | 0.396859 | 2.194444 |
| St. Lucia | (Intercept) | −2.6027 | 0.000383 | 0.074074 |
| | Intent_Sell | 4.3944 | 0.000761 | 81 |
| Suriname | (Intercept) | −2.4849 | 0.000735 | 0.083333 |
| | Intent_Sell | 0.9163 | 0.300536 | 2.500000 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | (Intercept) | −1.3122 | 0 | 0.269231 |
| | Intent_Sell | 0.8769 | 0.011431 | 2.403361 |

### *Country-by-country analysis*

To understand which countries are especially affected by this pattern, the authors broke down the dataset into a country-by-country analysis.

## Discussion

Analysing the Table 4, the authors made the following observations:

Statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$) were observed in two countries: St. Lucia ($p = 0.000761$, OR = 81.0), where trafficking intent strongly increased the likelihood of joint seizures; and Trinidad and Tobago ($p = 0.0114$, OR = 2.40), where the effect was also positive and notable. These results provide partial support for H2,

Several countries, including Bermuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Antigua and Barbuda, display high odds ratios (>3), but these are not statistically significant, largely due to small sample sizes.

A smaller number of countries, such as the Bahamas, Belize, and Barbados, have odds ratios below 1, suggesting a potential inverse relationship between trafficking intent and joint seizures, though these findings lack statistical significance.

Overall, the results suggest that while the aggregated regional model supports Hypothesis 2, the country-level breakdown shows that the relationship's magnitude and direction are far from uniform, reinforcing Hypothesis 3.

While Trinidad and Tobago and St. Lucia show a notable relationship, additional data is needed to confirm a broader regional link between drug trafficking and firearm seizures.

### *Statistical interpretation of the open-source dataset*

The conducted statistical analysis based on the open-source dataset has illustrated that there is at least some interconnectivity between firearms and drug seizures in the region,

indicating that the two trafficked commodities and markets relate to each other. The collected data and its analysis showed, at least anecdotally, which commodities get seized the most in which countries:

For drugs those were Guyana, Jamaica, the Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Belize. For firearms, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and the Bahamas. Joint seizures occurred most often in Trinidad and Tobago, Bahamas, and Guyana.

The quantitative analysis and proportion test underscored notable regional variances: Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas stood out with a statistically significant higher proportion of joint seizures. This might indicate a significant interconnectivity between the two illicit markets in these locations, potentially due to their geographical positioning, trafficking routes, and law enforcement practices which need to be further researched or local criminal market structures that need to be further explained. In contrast, countries like Jamaica and Guyana showed lower proportions of joint seizures, suggesting a possible operational separation between drug and arms trafficking activities, the involvement of specialised actors handling each separately, or differences in enforcement practices. Thereby, the case of Jamaica is especially interesting, since the country was the leader in instances in firearm seizures as shown above. Furthermore, the literature has singled out Jamaica as a prominent player in the 'guns for drugs trade' in the region (Robbins, 2020). Further research would be needed to address this discrepancy.

The correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive association between drug and firearm seizures, with higher frequencies of one often aligning with an increase in the other, suggesting a tendency towards co-occurrence, although not an absolute dependence. This finding together with the mapping of joint seizure occurrences and their proportionality supports Hypothesis 1 and points to overlapping market structures or operational synergies between the two forms of trafficking.

The logistic regression analysis further revealed that trafficking intent (drugs or firearms) is a statistically significant predictor of joint seizures in the region as a whole, increasing the likelihood of co-seizures by approximately 68% when present. This outcome supports Hypothesis 2 (H2) and aligns with the qualitative insights gathered, suggesting a regional pattern in which firearms serve as key tools within trafficking networks – not only to safeguard illicit shipments but also to assert control and deter challenges from rivals or law enforcement (as described in FPI, 2024). At the country level, statistically significant relationships were found for St. Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago, confirming that in certain national contexts, trafficking intent significantly affects the probability of a joint seizure. Such variation likely reflects differences in national context, enforcement priorities, and the operational structure of trafficking networks. However, only Trinidad and Tobago demonstrated consistent results across both statistical methods, showing both a higher-than-average proportion of joint seizures and a significant positive influence of trafficking intent on the likelihood of drug–firearm co-seizures.

Several countries presented mixed signals over the different statistical calculations. For instance, St. Lucia demonstrated a strong relationship between intent to sell and joint seizures in the regression model, but its joint seizure proportion was not statistically significant. The Bahamas, by contrast, showed both a statistically significant high proportion of joint seizures in the proportionality test and a positive association in the logistic regression, though the latter was not statistically significant. Conversely, Grenada and

St. Vincent and the Grenadines exhibited high proportions of joint seizures and elevated odds ratios, yet no statistically significant findings in either test.

Therefore, while the quantitative analysis provided partial support for Hypotheses 1 and 2, due to data limitations, and only partial statistically significant results the only hypothesis that can be confidently supported by the quantitative part of the study is Hypothesis 3, which posits notable differences in the relationship between drug and firearm trafficking across individual countries in the Caribbean. The observed cross-national variation – ranging from strong, statistically significant associations in some jurisdictions to weak or inconclusive patterns in others – underscores the importance of context-specific factors in shaping the nexus between these two forms of trafficking. This finding not only highlights the need for more granular, country-level studies, but also calls for further research into how enforcement capacity, local criminal market dynamics, and transnational supply chain linkages influence the observed patterns.

### *Analysis of contextual data from jurisprudence and open-source data set*

Out of 107 court cases analysed between 2004 and 2024, only 7 involved both firearms and drug trafficking, while 88 concerned solely drug trafficking and 6 solely firearms trafficking. In the remaining cases, drugs and firearms were seized together, but no charges of firearms trafficking were brought. Geographically, most cases originated in Trinidad and Tobago (19), the Bahamas (35), and Saint Lucia (10), with others reported in Antigua and Barbuda (7, including 2 cross-border cases from Montserrat and Jamaica), Jamaica (9, one cross-border to the U.S.), Grenada (7), St. Vincent and the Grenadines (3), St. Kitts and Nevis (3), Dominica (1), Montserrat (2), the U.S. Virgin Islands (4), the British Virgin Islands (2), and the U.S. (3 cases involving Caribbean trafficking). Several cross-border cases involved routes from Jamaica, Haiti, or Venezuela to the Bahamas, and one case used Trinidad and Tobago as a transit route from Guyana to Britain. All cross-border instances involved drug trafficking only.

The majority of seized drugs were cannabis and cocaine. Less frequently, amphetamines (e.g. CoA Bahamas, 2015), ecstasy (INews Guyana, 2023), heroin (The Tribune, 2024), and other substances (Sambrano, 2023) were intercepted. Seizure volumes varied widely – from small quantities like 50 g of cocaine (CoA Bahamas, 2023b) or 80 g of marijuana (CoA T&T, 2017) to massive hauls of over 1,200 kg of cocaine (CoA Bahamas, 2022) or marijuana (CoA Bahamas, 2023c). These findings were reinforced by media monitoring, which noted that larger shipments, especially those destined for Europe, Canada, and Australia, were often intercepted in the Dominican Republic (Loop News, 2024) and Suriname (Waterkant, 2023a). Firearms seized were predominantly pistols and handguns – consistent across court records, the Fabre et al. (2023), and open-source data. However, a significant number of high-powered weapons, including rifles and submachine guns, and in rare instances, grenades have also been seized. A considerable portion of seized firearms has been associated with robberies, violent crimes, or incidents of domestic violence.

Two main trafficking profiles emerged from the jurisprudence: small-scale operations and larger, organised networks. On one end, individuals or pairs trafficked limited quantities of drugs, sometimes driven by economic hardship (Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court [ECSC], 2017). These cases were often intercepted in private apartments (19 cases), on roads (at least 18), or at airports. On the other end, sophisticated networks,

with clearly defined roles and logistics, were often intercepted at sea, harbours, or private island properties, after loading or unloading large shipments (CoA T&T, 2014). Of the 107 cases, 25 occurred in maritime contexts, and 19 in or near airports. In 21 cases, the seizure location was not specified. The media analysis also revealed similar patterns. Most seizures involved individuals or small groups – usually two people. Larger networks involving more than three individuals were less common and usually tied to large-scale shipments (JCA, 2023). Traffickers used roads, vehicles, speedboats, and air transport, with many seizures near harbours. Notably, some seizures occurred in prisons (ANR, 2023), and intra-Caribbean trafficking, including arms transfers (Waterkant, 2023b) and drug shipments (NRJ, 2024; Waterkant, 2024), was observed. Migration flows from Venezuela (2023, 2024) and Haiti (NewslineTCI, 2024) were also linked to arms trafficking in a limited number of cases.

Evidence from court cases reinforced key insights about how firearms often accompany drug shipments, serving as tools for protection and deterrence within trafficking operations (FPI, 2024; Annex II). It further underscores the significant role of maritime and, to a lesser extent, air routes in facilitating the transportation of large quantities of drugs and firearms across the region. Many operations have been intercepted at sea or ports, illustrating the challenge law enforcement faces in monitoring vast open waters, islands and remote entry points. Key source countries external to the region include Venezuela and the United States, underscoring the broader nature of these illicit trades, in which traffickers exploit Caribbean transit hubs as strategic intermediary points, going hand in hand with findings from the OCI and media monitoring.

Perpetrators were overwhelmingly male (93 out of 107 court cases and the majority in media reports), with diverse occupational backgrounds. These included unemployed individuals (CoA Bahamas, 2020), bus and taxi drivers (ECSC, 2024a; Guyana Times, 2023), mechanics (CoA Bahamas, 2023c), boat captains (Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court [ECSC], 2024b), and business owners (CoA Bahamas, 2019). Foreign nationals were often involved in cross-border operations, with major trafficking routes identified from the U.S., Colombia, Venezuela, and within the Caribbean itself (CoA Bahamas, 2023a; Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court [ECSC], 2018a, 2018b).

## Conclusion

The study provides an overview of drug and firearm trafficking interlinks in the Caribbean, pointing to a possible nexus between the two. Based on the open-source dataset, it maps seizure patterns over one year, identifies regional hotspots, and examines the role of trafficking intent in joint seizures. While results suggest a moderate positive association between drug and firearm seizures at the regional level, this relationship varies widely across countries. Across the region, seizures of both commodities have been recorded together, but the frequency and circumstances of these co-occurrences differ considerably.

In places such as Trinidad and Tobago, the available evidence points towards possible operational linkages. In contrast, in countries like Jamaica and Guyana, the observed patterns could indicate a more segmented structure in which drug and firearm trafficking occur largely along separate channels, contradicting past assumptions about Jamaica. Trinidad and Tobago stands out as the only jurisdiction where findings are consistent

across different statistical methods, indicating a strong and significant link between the two markets. In other countries, patterns are mixed or inconclusive, reflecting limitations in data availability as well as possibly the influence of local enforcement practices, trafficking routes, and criminal market structures. These variations underscore the importance of more granular, country-specific research to better understand the factors driving – or limiting – the connectivity between drug and firearm trafficking. This is particularly relevant for countries showing contradictory patterns. For example, St. Lucia exhibited a strong association between trafficking intent and joint seizures, yet its overall proportion of joint seizures was not statistically significant. The Bahamas, conversely, showed a proportion of joint seizures well above the regional average, but its positive association with trafficking intent in the regression analysis did not reach statistical significance.

The jurisprudence overview and anecdotal case studies reinforce and contextualise these findings, offering insights into the potential role of firearms within drug trafficking networks, and which would benefit from further research applying social networks analysis methods. In cases from Trinidad and Tobago, firearms were frequently seized alongside large drug shipments, serving as tools for intimidation, protection, and enforcement, and, less commonly, as co-trafficked commodities. Isolated cases from other countries, such as Saint Lucia and the Bahamas, suggest similar dynamics, but available evidence is, again, too limited to draw firm conclusions. Transportation by sea, air, and road corresponds with patterns identified in the open-source dataset and literature, underscoring how the region's geography shapes trafficking operations. The tracing of drug origins to countries such as Venezuela and firearm sources to the United States, along with destinations for trafficked drugs in North America and Europe, confirms the transnational dimension of these markets, where Caribbean transit routes intersect with both local and global supply chains.

Despite these insights, this study acknowledges several limitations due to data constraints. The limited availability of cases involving both drugs and firearms and discrepancies in numbers of seizures reported across Caribbean nations impacted the depth of the analysis. Consequently, certain countries exhibited unreliable results or outliers that skewed overall patterns. While open-source data is to be taken with caution, it at least allows researchers to have an entry point.

As such, to enhance the robustness of future studies, these should involve further data collection, multi-year datasets, and cross-country standardisation of data on seizures and trafficking incidents. Incorporating additional variables such as gang presence, law enforcement capacity, and border control measures could provide greater analysis and help control for potential confounding effects. Moreover, country-specific models or hierarchical (multilevel) regression frameworks may offer more nuanced insights into how national contexts mediate the relationship between drug and firearm trafficking. On a broader level, future research on the dynamics of arms and drug trafficking in the Caribbean should explore the interaction between formal and informal economies, the role of diaspora networks, and the influence of geopolitical shifts. Special attention should also be paid to the adaptability of trafficking groups in response to enforcement patterns and technological innovation (e.g. encrypted communication, maritime smuggling techniques). By moving beyond seizure data alone and incorporating social, political, and

logistical dimensions, future studies can more fully capture the complexity and evolution of these interconnected illicit economies.

Finally, and critically, this research challenges the frequent grouping of the Caribbean with Central America in discussions of transnational crime. The distinct trafficking patterns observed here warrant independent policy attention. Treating the Caribbean as a mere extension of Central American dynamics risks obscuring critical nuances and leading to ineffective or misaligned policy interventions. Future studies and policy frameworks must recognise the heterogeneity within the region and adapt accordingly.

Therefore, while the analysis of the dataset and available jurisprudence indicates that there might be a possible relationship between firearms seizures and drug seizures, and hence a possible nexus between the two illicit markets in the region as a whole, and in certain countries specifically, these findings should be generalised only with extreme caution. Ultimately, the results of this study point to possible avenues for further exploration rather than offering definitive conclusions.

## Notes

1. Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos, U.S. Virgin Islands.
2. Because of the difference in numbers of cases with intent to sell firearms (30 cases) and intent to sell drugs (397), including both variables separately in the same model risked skewing the results and inflating the odds ratio for intent to sell firearms. This imbalance arises because with fewer firearm-intent cases, the model interprets each occurrence as having disproportionately high explanatory weight. To address this and avoid underrepresenting firearm-led seizures where drugs were also present, the authors aggregated the two variables into a single binary Intent_Sell measure, coded as 1 if either drugs or firearms were intended for sale. This approach retains the full dataset, prevents overestimation from small counts, and better reflects the intertwined nature of arms and drug markets observed in both the literature (FPI, 2024; Griffith, 1997) and the jurisprudence analysis described below.
3. The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, MB, upon reasonable request.
4. The reviewed media entries included one case of seizures in the US but destined for the Dominican Republic. This case was excluded from this table.
5. Note: Cells highlighted in green indicate statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$). Cells highlighted in red indicate $p$-values above 0.05 for countries with a proportion of joint seizures exceeding the regional average; these are included for descriptive purposes but are not statistically significant.
6. Note: Cells highlighted in green indicate statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$). Cells highlighted in red indicate $p$-values above 0.05 for countries with a proportion of joint seizures exceeding the regional average; these are included for descriptive purposes but are not statistically significant.
7. For reasons of clarity countries with an overall seizure number of $n < 20$ according to Table 1 have been excluded. Please find the full table in Annex I. Estimates for certain countries (e.g. Cayman Islands, St. Vincent and the Grenadines) could not be reliably produced due to quasi-complete separation in the data. In these cases, the very small number of joint seizures, combined with highly unbalanced distributions of trafficking intent, prevented the logistic regression model from converging to stable estimates. Note: Green highlighting indicates positive and statistically significant associations ($p < 0.05$). Red highlighting indicates non-significant results or values approaching zero.

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## Author contributions

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## Disclosure statement

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

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## Annex I

**Table 1A.** Full per-country logistic regression matrix

| Country | Variable | Estimate | p_value | Odds_Ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Antigua and Barbuda | (Intercept) | −3,2581 | 0,001388 | 0,038461538 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 1,648659 | 0,16925 | 5,2 |
| Bahamas | (Intercept) | −1,29277 | 1,83E-05 | 0,274509804 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | −0,1243 | 0,80225 | 0,883116883 |
| Barbados | (Intercept) | −1,38629 | 0,07951 | 0,25 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | −19,1798 | 0,99701 | 4,68091E-09 |
| Belize | (Intercept) | −2,11021 | 6,73E-05 | 0,121212121 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | −1,02528 | 0,372791 | 0,358695684 |
| Bermuda | (Intercept) | −2,48491 | 0,016967 | 0,083333333 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 1,568616 | 0,240143 | 4,8 |
| British Virgin Islands | (Intercept) | −0,69315 | 0,423492 | 0,5 |
| Cayman Islands | (Intercept) | −2,48491 | 0,016967 | 0,083333333 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 1,232144 | 0,34834 | 3,428571429 |
| Dominica | (Intercept) | −1,09861 | 0,341388 | 0,333333333 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | −18,4675 | 0,99726 | 9,54302E-09 |
| Dominican Republic | (Intercept) | −2,70805 | 0,00874 | 0,066666667 |
| Grenada | (Intercept) | −19,5661 | 0,996159 | 3,18101E-09 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 19,56607 | 0,996159 | 314,366,016,4 |
| Guyana | (Intercept) | −2,59339 | 1,49E-12 | 0,074766355 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 0,253988 | 0,625873 | 1,289156626 |
| Haiti | (Intercept) | −20,5661 | 0,998149 | 1,17023E-09 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 19,87292 | 0,998211 | 427,267,710,5 |
| Jamaica | (Intercept) | −4,00733 | 6E-12 | 0,018181819 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 0,986908 | 0,288266 | 2,682926731 |
| St. Kitts and Nevis | (Intercept) | −1,70475 | 0,026576 | 0,181818182 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 1,299283 | 0,276282 | 3,666666667 |
| St. Lucia | (Intercept) | −2,60269 | 0,000383 | 0,074074074 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 4,394449 | 0,000761 | 81 |
| St. Vincent and the Grenadines | (Intercept) | −20,5661 | 0,995659 | 1,17023E-09 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 18,89209 | 0,996012 | 160,225,393 |
| Suriname | (Intercept) | −2,56495 | 0,000473 | 0,076923077 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 1,083345 | 0,221111 | 2,954545455 |
| The Virgin Islands | (Intercept) | 23,56607 | 0,999763 | 17,163,809,213 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 3,84E-10 | 1 | 1 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | (Intercept) | −1,29614 | 6,21E-10 | 0,273584906 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 0,87493 | 0,012529 | 2,398706897 |
| Turks and Caicos | (Intercept) | −1,50408 | 0,054352 | 0,222222222 |
| | Intent_Sell_Drug | 1,098612 | 0,360664 | 3 |

## Annex II - Anecdotal evidence of court cases

**Case A: Firearms and drug trafficking together: CR S 82 / 2017 (HCJ T&T, 2021)**

In a 2021 case in Trinidad and Tobago, the accused, Bisham Ramlogan, faced charges of firearm and ammunition possession and drug trafficking after Coast Guard officers discovered a cache on a stationary boat at sea. The Coast Guard, acting on intelligence, found Ramlogan along with three other men on board. A search of the boat revealed five firearms, ammunition, and a package containing cocaine hidden in a compartment under the engine. Ramlogan denied any connection to the illicit items. Substantial evidence pointed to an international cocaine operation involving the transport of drugs from Venezuela. Although this was not officially confirmed.

**Case B: Firearms and drug trafficking together: MCCrApp No. 129 of 2023 (CoA Bahamas, 2023c)**

In this 2023 case from the Bahamas, Charles Bodie faced multiple charges related to possession of drugs, firearms, ammunition, and firearm components, following a police search on his property in Marsh Harbour, Abaco. The search revealed 2,900 pounds of

marijuana, two kilograms of cocaine, three firearms, firearm magazines, and assorted ammunition hidden within two vehicles parked on Bodie's property. Bodie, a mechanic and tow truck driver, claimed that a man named 'Bird' had paid him $600 to store a vehicle and denied knowledge of the items found.

**Case C: Drug trafficking with the presence of firearms: Cr. App. No. 27-32 of 2008 (CoA T&T, 2014)**

The case from Trinidad and Tobago involved six individuals, who were engaged in transporting cocaine to Monos Island. Four of them arrived by boat and stored packages of cocaine, totalling 544.6 kilograms, in one caretaker's quarters with his assistance. Firearms played a critical role in this operation, as two of the four men were visibly armed upon arrival, using their weapons to intimidate and deter interference, as well as to protect the trafficked drugs, while the heads of the operation left to arrange for the next portion of the commodity to arrive at the property. The firearms, which included rifles, a sub-machine gun, pistols, and a revolver with assorted ammunition, were intended to protect the drugs and enforce control over the premises. The caretaker reported that he was instructed by the traffickers that the armed men would shoot anyone who attempted to enter the quarters, except for him. The armed men, as well as presumably the drugs, originated from Venezuela.

**Case D: Drug trafficking with the presence of firearms: SLUCRD 2011/0284,0292,0322,0333 (ECSC, 2024b)**

In a 2011 case in Saint Lucia, police intercepted a vessel carrying cocaine, cannabis, ammunition, firearms, and grenades. The defendants claimed it was legitimate cargo, but they faced charges of drug trafficking and illegal possession of firearms, ammunition, and grenades.

The search revealed 29.46 kilograms of cocaine, valued at $870,000 Eastern Caribbean dollars, and 46.37 kilograms of cannabis. Firearms seized included a 12-gauge shotgun and thirty-five 9 mm rounds of ammunition. Additionally, the officers found five live grenades and related detonators. The combination of drugs and weapons, especially grenades, indicated a serious intent to transport and potentially use these items for violent purposes or intimidation in drug trafficking operations. The court noted that such weapons are commonly used by drug trafficking networks to avoid interception by law enforcement or to establish control within illicit trades.

**Extra Case E: Large scale firearms trafficking case: MCCrApp. No. 19 of 2018 (CoA Bahamas, 2019)**

Large scale firearms trafficking case: MCCrApp. No. 19 of 2018 (CoA Bahamas, 2019)

The case took place in the Bahamas in 2016. Edward Barrett, the appellant and owner of an import company called Sapona, was involved in transporting firearms and ammunition. Barrett arranged for a pilot, Dennis Walters, to transport cargo from Ft. Lauderdale, U.S., to Grand Bahama. Customs officers discovered a Drago rifle, High Point rifle, Taurus revolver, and various ammunition and firearm components hidden in a television box, a blue bin, and a Tide detergent box labelled under another name. Barrett claimed he was acting as an agent for a new client but had not completed the necessary import authorisation form.