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Introduction

This edition of the Department of Government, Sociology, Social Work and Psychology's Policy Brief Series offers research-based insights into matters of acute importance to Caribbean governance, development, and social wellbeing.

The issue opens with Jwala Rambarran's examination of the structural debt-climate trap confronting Caribbean Small Island Developing States. This submission, presented on behalf of the Caribbean Policy Development Centre, proposes an integrated reform framework linking debt justice, climate finance, and economic transformation as essential prerequisites for genuine fiscal sovereignty by 2030.

This edition then turns to Diana Weekes-Marshall's policy update on Barbados' journey from de-risking and FATF greylisting to full compliance with international anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing standards, drawing out lessons of enduring relevance for regional financial governance.

The brief continues with Rico Yearwood's carefully evidenced indictment of pre-trial delay across Commonwealth Caribbean criminal justice systems, which marshals regional case law and human rights standards to make a compelling case for systemic reform.

Finally, this issue closes with Alicia Haynes' timely assessment of technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women and girls in the Caribbean, calling for urgent and coordinated policy responses at the regional and national levels.

Overall, this April 2026 edition will appeal to readers seeking rigorous, policy-relevant analysis of the challenges confronting the region, and represents the Department's continued commitment to making scholarship accessible to policymakers, practitioners, and the wider public. With that being said, the views expressed in this publication are those of the contributing authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the Department or the University. The Department is grateful to each author for their scholarly contribution to this edition.

As always, we welcome your feedback and invite readers conducting policy-relevant research to submit their work for future issues.



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Caribbean Emancipation 2030: Breaking the Debt– Climate Trap in Caribbean SIDS

Mr. Jwala Rambarran

Key Points

- Caribbean SIDS are trapped in a reinforcing debt–climate cycle: climate shocks drive borrowing, rising debt limits resilience, and limited resilience magnifies future losses.
- Despite contributing less than 1 per cent of global emissions, the region faces disproportionate climate burdens (e.g., a single hurricane can undo a decade of fiscal reform).
- The global financial architecture is misaligned: debt frameworks ignore climate risk and adaptation is being financed through debt.
- The Caribbean Emancipation 2030 Framework calls for vulnerability-based finance, automatic debt-suspension clauses, grant-based loss and damage funding, and a regional negotiating platform under CARICOM.

Introduction

Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are facing a deepening structural crisis at the intersection of sovereign debt and climate vulnerability. Successive global shocks between 2022 and 2025, including pandemic-recovery pressures, geopolitical instability, energy and food price spikes, and the

sharpest global interest rate tightening cycle in four decades, have exacerbated long-standing regional vulnerabilities.

By 2025, public debt ratios across Caribbean economies remained well above the conventional 60 per cent of GDP debt sustainability threshold (Sahay 2005; Greenidge et al. 2012). Five Caribbean SIDS recorded debt levels exceeding 75 per cent of GDP, placing them among the most indebted SIDS worldwide, while six other countries reported debt ratios between 60 and 75 per cent.

Despite contributing less than 1 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, the Caribbean has experienced more severe climate change impacts, particularly hurricanes, which have become systemic macroeconomic risks (Nurse et al. 2014; IPCC 2022). Severe hurricanes generate large, recurrent fiscal shocks by destroying infrastructure and productive capacity (Acevedo 2016), and raise public debt by approximately 18 per cent above pre-storm trends within three years (Cavallo et al. 2024).

This convergence is not temporary. It reflects a structural debt–climate trap in which climate shocks drive borrowing, which in turn reduces fiscal space for resilience, and limited resilience magnifies future losses (Alayza et al. 2023). Under current global rules, even fiscally disciplined Caribbean states remain one major hurricane away from renewed debt distress.

In response to this structural reality, the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC), representing organised civil society across the region, has updated its Caribbean Emancipation 2030 Framework, originally published in mid-2022 (Rambarran 2022).

The updated framework proposes an integrated reform agenda that links systemic debt justice, vulnerability-based climate finance, and a just economic transformation. Emancipation in the twenty-first century must entail fiscal sovereignty, climate justice, and structural resilience.

This policy brief presents the strengthened Caribbean Emancipation 2030 Framework and outlines its implications for Caribbean policymakers, international partners, and civil society actors.

The Caribbean Debt–Climate Trap

Caribbean SIDS face distinct fiscal and climate challenges. They are caught in a reinforcing system in which sovereign debt and climate vulnerability interact in predictable cycles.

2.1 Debt Sustainability Is Climate-Contingent

Caribbean economies are narrow, import-dependent, and heavily reliant on tourism. Repeated borrowing for post-disaster reconstruction has contributed to persistently high public debt (CDB 2013; Mohan and Strobl 2020). Even sustained fiscal consolidation cannot insulate states from climate-driven reversals. Jamaica illustrates this fragility. After reducing public debt from approximately 145 per cent of GDP in 2013 to about 60 per cent by 2024 under IMF-supported adjustment programmes (IMF 2024), Jamaica was hit by Hurricane Melissa, which caused losses exceeding 40 per cent of GDP and necessitated substantial new recovery borrowing (IMF 2025). A single climate event can undo a decade of fiscal re-

form. Debt sustainability in the Caribbean is therefore contingent on climate stability (Munevar 2018), an increasingly unrealistic assumption.

2.2 Climate Shocks Are Macroeconomic Shocks

In Caribbean SIDS, disasters are economy-wide events. Hurricane Maria (2017) caused losses in Dominica equivalent to roughly 226 per cent of GDP (IMF 2018). Hurricane Dorian (2019) pushed The Bahamas' fiscal deficit above 13 per cent of GDP (Zegarra et al. 2020). Hurricane Irma (2017) devastated Barbuda, which experienced severe tourism revenue compression (Rambarran 2022)

Empirical research confirms that natural disasters significantly raise debt-to-GDP ratios in SIDS (Mohan and Strobl 2021; Cavallo et al. 2024).

2.3 Adaptation Is Being Financed Through Debt

Climate finance flows to the Caribbean remain heavily loan-based (Mohan 2023). At the same time, income-based eligibility rules restrict access to concessional windows despite high vulnerability (UNCTAD 2022). Barbados' access to the IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) to support climate reform remained debt-creating, even when the funding was concessional (IMF 2024). Several countries in the Eastern Caribbean rely on World Bank infrastructure loans to strengthen resilience (World Bank 2016), thereby increasing liabilities while reducing risk. The paradox is clear. Countries most exposed to climate shocks must borrow to adapt.

2.4 Insurance Provides Liquidity, Not Reconstruction

Regional catastrophe risk insurance mechanisms, such as the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF), provide rapid payouts but offer limited coverage (Abah 2021). Following Hurricane Maria, Dominica received approximately US\$19 million from CCRIF, while losses exceeded US\$1 billion (CCRIF 2024). Parametric insurance instruments provide short-term liquidity, not comprehensive rebuilding. The residual financing gap is met through borrowing, reinforcing the debt cycle.

2.5 The Global Debt Architecture Ignores Climate Vulnerability

The global sovereign debt system remains fragmented and creditor-driven (Volz et al., 2020; UNCTAD, 2022). There is no standing multilateral mechanism that incorporates climate exposure or vulnerability criteria. The G20 Common Framework has failed to deliver timely debt relief to vulnerable states (Hurley et al., 2024). Caribbean debt restructurings—Barbados (2018) and Jamaica (2010, 2013)—required deep domestic adjustment before relief. The architecture treats debt distress as episodic liquidity stress rather than structural vulnerability.

Why Integrated Reform Is Necessary

The case for integrated debt–climate reform rests on four empirical realities:

3.1 Climate Shocks Systematically Raise Debt Ratios

Mohan and Strobl (2021) show that natural disasters significantly increase public debt in Caribbean SIDS. Debt sustainability in highly exposed states cannot be assessed independently of climate risk.

3.2 Adaptation Financing Gaps Persist

UNEP (2023) estimates that adaptation needs in developing countries are 10–18 times current flows. For Caribbean SIDS, where adaptation is existential, the annual financing gap remains substantial. Underinvestment in resilience increases future disaster losses. When shocks occur, borrowing fills the gap. The adaptation deficit feeds directly into the debt–climate cycle.

3.3 Global Interest Rate Shocks Amplify Climate Risk

UNCTAD (2024) confirms that the 2022–2024 global tightening cycle increased debt-service burdens across emerging markets and SIDS. Rising refinancing costs coincide with rising climate losses, compounding vulnerability. External monetary tightening, therefore, amplifies climate exposure.

3.4 Reform Precedents Demonstrate Feasibility

Reform is technically and politically feasible. Barbados' 2022 debt-for-climate swap mobilised US\$150 million for marine conservation while reducing debt service costs (IMF 2024).

The UN adopted the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (UNGA 2024a), establishing an institutional basis for moving beyond income-only criteria.

Antigua and Barbuda's 2024 Agenda for SIDS

advanced vulnerability-based reforms (UNGA 2024b).

These precedents demonstrate feasibility but remain fragmented.

3.5 Bridging the Evidence to Action

The empirical record is consistent. Climate shocks, debt dynamics, and global financial conditions interact in reinforcing ways. Addressing them separately will provide only temporary stability and will not break the structural cycle. Integrated reform is therefore not aspirational; it is economically necessary.

Policy Implications

The Caribbean debt–climate trap is structural and cannot be resolved through incremental fiscal adjustments, isolated climate projects, or temporary liquidity support. Policy responses must be systemic, integrated, and vulnerability-driven. Five implications follow directly for policymakers.

4.1 Debt Sustainability Frameworks Must Incorporate Climate Risk Explicitly

Traditional debt sustainability analyses (DSAs) used by the IMF, the World Bank, and creditors assume macroeconomic stability and treat disasters as exogenous shocks. In highly exposed SIDS, this assumption is unrealistic. Climate events are recurrent, not exceptional. DSAs must systematically incorporate forward-looking climate-risk projections. This includes stress-testing debt trajectories against increasingly frequent extreme events and embedding state-

contingent clauses in sovereign debt instruments. Without integrating climate exposure into DSAs, fiscal sustainability assessments will consistently underestimate risk and overestimate the repayment capacity of Caribbean SIDS.

4.2 Concessional Finance Eligibility Must Shift from Income to Vulnerability

Per capita income does not capture structural exposure to climate shocks. Caribbean countries, classified by multilateral development banks and international financial institutions as middle- or high-income, incur disaster losses that, proportionally, exceed those of many low-income countries. Concessional windows and grant-based financing must reflect exposure to climate risk rather than income classification alone. Failure to reform eligibility rules will continue to force highly exposed states into debt-creating finance.

4.3 Climate Finance Architecture Must Prioritise Grants for Highly Exposed States

The current dominance of loan-based climate finance contradicts both economic logic and principles of climate justice. Adaptation and loss-and-damage financing in highly vulnerable states deliver global public benefits but offer limited short-term fiscal returns. For Caribbean SIDS, adaptation and loss-and-damage finance should be primarily grant-based. Loan instruments may be appropriate for revenue-generating mitigation projects, but not for disaster recovery or adaptation in states facing repeated climate shocks. If climate finance deepens indebtedness, it reinforces the debt–climate cycle rather than breaking it.

4.4 Risk Financing Must Move from Liquidity to Resilience

Insurance mechanisms and rapid-disbursement facilities provide important liquidity, but they do not address the structural financing gap for reconstruction and long-term resilience. Risk financing strategies must integrate three layers:

- Immediate liquidity (insurance, contingent credit).
- Automatic debt-service suspension during disasters.
- Medium-term reconstruction finance aligned with resilience investment.

Policy design should move beyond standalone insurance toward integrated risk and debt management frameworks.

4.5 Debt Relief Must Be Linked to Structural Economic Transformation

Debt restructuring that restores short-term liquidity while leaving economic structures unchanged invites recurrence. The evidence shows that narrow production bases and import dependence amplify vulnerability. Fiscal space generated through debt relief must be transparently allocated to:

- Renewable energy expansion to reduce fossil fuel import dependence.
- Climate-resilient infrastructure.
- Diversification into blue and green economy sectors.
- Adaptive social protection systems.

Debt justice must translate into resilience investment. Otherwise, future climate shocks will perpetuate fiscal instability.

4.6 Summary for Policymakers

The findings imply that:

- Fiscal consolidation alone will not secure sustainability.
- Climate finance alone will not ensure resilience.
- Insurance alone will not secure recovery.
- Growth without diversification will not ensure economic sovereignty.

Integrated reform that links debt architecture, vulnerability-based finance, and structural transformation can help to break the Caribbean's debt–climate trap. For decision-makers, the choice is therefore not between reform and the status quo. It is between systemic redesign now and recurring fiscal crisis after each major climate event.

Recommendations

Considering the above, Caribbean Emancipation 2030 makes the following recommendations to help Caribbean SIDS break their debt-climate trap:

5.1 CARICOM should establish a regional debt–climate negotiation platform to coordinate talks with the IMF, the World Bank, private creditors, and COP processes.

Barbados' 2018 restructuring and Jamaica's earlier exchanges highlight the high transaction costs

of individual negotiations. Coordinated bargaining strengthens leverage and reduces delays documented in fragmented debt restructuring processes. Shared vulnerability profiles justify a collective strategy.

5.2 International Financial Institutions should formally integrate the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) into concessional eligibility criteria.

Dominica’s 226 per cent GDP loss from Maria and The Bahamas’ 25 per cent GDP loss from Dorian show that vulnerability —not income— determines fiscal risk. Income thresholds misclassify high-risk SIDS. Adopting the MVI aligns finance with exposure.

5.3 Creditors should embed automatic climate-shock clauses that suspend debt service across all Caribbean debt instruments.

Empirical studies confirm that disasters increase debt burdens. Barbados successfully included natural-disaster clauses in restructured bonds. Automatic suspension would reduce the procyclical fiscal tightening observed in Dominica and the Bahamas after disasters.

5.4 High-Income countries should fully capitalise the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) with grants based on their historical share of emissions.

Caribbean SIDS contribute less than 1 per cent of global emissions yet suffer disproportionate losses. Loan-based climate finance has increased debt in Caribbean countries. Grant-based loss and damage funding prevents further debt escalation.

5.5 Caribbean Governments should legislate fiscal transparency rules that direct debt-relief savings towards building climate resilience.

Grenada’s post-Ivan debt crisis demonstrated how reconstruction borrowing can crowd out development. Post-Melissa, Jamaica is likely to traverse a similar trajectory. Fiscal savings from debt relief can fund resilience investments, which in turn reduce long-term disaster costs.

Conclusion: Completing Emancipation Through Structural Reform

The Caribbean debt–climate trap is systemic, not episodic. Climate shocks, sovereign debt dynamics, and global financial rules interact in reinforcing cycles that undermine sovereignty and resilience. Incremental reform will not suffice. Integrated reform, linking debt justice, vulnerability-based finance, and structural transformation, is both economically necessary and politically feasible.

Emancipation in the twenty-first century must entail fiscal autonomy, climate justice, and democratic resilience. Caribbean Emancipation 2030 offers a justice-based reform strategy grounded in empirical evidence and lived Caribbean experience.

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From De-risking to FATF Compliance: Barbados - A Policy Update

Diana Weekes-Marshall, PhD

Key Points

- De-risking (the termination of correspondent banking relationships by international banks) posed an existential threat to Caribbean economies, with 21 of 23 Caribbean banks losing at least one such relationship by 2016.
- In February 2020, Barbados was placed on the FATF grey list, directly intensifying de-risking pressures and threatening the country's access to global financial markets.
- Through sustained legislative reform, institutional coordination, and demonstrated operational effectiveness, Barbados achieved FATF delisting in February 2024 and full removal from all international watchlists by August 2025, providing a practical roadmap for the wider Caribbean.
- Maintaining this progress requires continuous AML/CTF improvement, diversified correspondent banking relationships, investment in financial technology, and active Caribbean participation in international standard-setting processes.

Introduction

The Caribbean region has faced several existential threats to its connection to the international financial system through a phenomenon called "de-risking". This was followed by years of immense scrutiny under the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) regime for anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist fin-

ancing (AML/CTF) compliance.

This policy brief examines Barbados' journey from being targeted for "de-risking" by its correspondent banks during 2015 to 2020, to being placed on the FATF "grey-list" in February 2020, to achieving full removal from international watchlists in February 2024.

It analyses the root causes of de-risking in the Caribbean context, Barbados' strategic response through comprehensive AML/CTF reforms, and the policy implications for maintaining financial system integrity and international connectivity going forward. It also shows that the issue of de-risking never really disappeared but later evolved into the 'grey listing' of the country under the FATF rules in the UK and EU.

1. Understanding De-risking and Its Implications

1.1 Definition and Context

De-risking refers to the practice whereby international correspondent banks terminate or restrict business relationships with domestic respondent banks, money service businesses, and other financial institutions they perceive as high-risk. In the Caribbean context, this manifested as the severing of critical correspondent banking relationships that enabled local banks to process international wire transfers, clear cheques, and facilitate cross-border transactions essential for trade, remittances, and economic activity.

For small island developing states like Barbados, correspondent banking relationships are the lifeline to the global economy. Their loss severs access to inter-

national markets, eliminates trade finance, and disrupts remittance flows that constitute a significant share of regional GDP.

1.2 Regional Impact

The Caribbean experienced severe de-risking effects beginning around 2014-2015 and the threat of complete financial exclusion loomed over of their economies. A 2016 survey by the Caribbean Association of Banks revealed that 21 of 23 banks across 12 Caribbean countries had lost at least one correspondent banking relationship, with 58 percent of respondent banks affected.

Although many countries in the region were affected, in Barbados, eight correspondent banking relationships were terminated, although many were subsequently reestablished (Central Bank of Barbados 2021). Belize was most impacted as more than half of their correspondent banking relationships were terminated, making wire transfers, credit card payment processing, and cheque clearing from US banks virtually impossible (Alleyne et al. 2017).

2. Root Causes of De-risking in the Caribbean

2.1 Escalating Compliance Costs

The primary driver of de-risking was the dramatic increase in compliance costs associated with increasingly stringent AML/CTF regulations. International correspondent banks faced regulatory requirements from multiple frameworks, including Basel Committee standards (2010 and 2012), the Foreign

Account Tax Compliance Act (2010), and evolving Global Forum standards (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2014). These regulations, while well-intentioned, often featured unclear or inconsistently applied guidelines, creating significant compliance burdens and legal uncertainty.

For correspondent banks, the cost of doing business in the Caribbean presented a challenging proposition: relatively small transaction volumes and modest profit margins weighed against potentially massive fines for compliance failures, reputational damage, and the resource-intensive nature of maintaining adequate due diligence systems. Many concluded that the risk-reward equation did not justify continued Caribbean operations (Alleyne et al. 2017).

2.2 Perception of High Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Risk

In many instances, correspondent banking relationship terminations were not based on actual wrongdoing by Caribbean business or financial institutions (FI's) but reflected the correspondent banks' assessment of possible risks posed and compliance costs, which often outweighed potential profits. Several factors contributed to this perception: the prevalence of International Financial Centres offering offshore financial services; cash-intensive tourism economies; and critically, unfavourable mutual evaluation reports from the FATF and Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF), highlighting deficiencies in AML/CTF frameworks (Alleyne et al. 2017).

2.3 Not Based on Regulatory Requirements

The FATF itself clarified that de-risking was not a regulatory requirement, yet international banks making business decisions based on their risk assessments arrived at the same outcome: Caribbean FI's were increasingly isolated from global financial networks, regardless of their individual compliance records (FATF 2016).

3. Economic and Social Consequences for the Caribbean

The impact of de-risking extended well beyond banking inconvenience, threatening the fundamental economic viability of Caribbean nations.

3.1 Socio-Economic Effects

De-risking severely disrupted cross-border financial systems, constraining wire transfers, remittances, and access to capital for investment, trade, and credit - elevating transaction costs, concentrating financial flows among fewer counterparties, and amplifying systemic vulnerability. Working-class families were disproportionately affected as remittance costs rose and transfer limits were imposed, notably in Jamaica, where remittances comprise about one-fifth of GDP (Gordon 2019).

Financial exclusion accelerates poverty, erodes purchasing power, and fuels economic marginalisation - heightening risks of crime and human trafficking. Combined with climate change, energy insecurity, and food price volatility, it poses a serious threat to the stability of vulnerable Caribbean economies.

3.2 Unintended Consequences

The World Bank considered financial integrity and financial inclusion to be complementary, stating that "financial inclusion is a necessary precondition to effectively mitigate risks and combat financial crimes" (World Bank Group 2016). De-risking, therefore, could severely threaten the financial integrity of Caribbean territories by reducing nations' abilities to ensure the fair participation of their citizens in the financial sector. Paradoxically, de-risking created incentives for the very behaviours AML/CTF regulations sought to prevent. Cut off from formal banking channels, some businesses and individuals turned to informal remittance providers and even physical cash transportation.

4. Barbados' Path to the FATF Grey List

4.1 FATF Grey-listing and Strategic Deficiencies

In February 2020, FATF placed Barbados on its List of Jurisdictions Under Increased Monitoring - commonly known as the "grey list. This designation signalled strategic deficiencies in Barbados' AML/CTF regime requiring urgent attention.

FATF (2020) identified five critical areas for Barbados to strengthen its AML/CTF effectiveness: 1) Risk-Based Supervision; 2) enhance Beneficial Ownership Transparency to prevent legal persons and arrangements from being misused for criminal purposes; 3) increase the Financial Intelligence Unit Capacity improving financial intelligence provided to law enforcement agencies for AML/CTF; 4) Aligning Investigations, Prosecutions, and Sanctions with the

country's risk profile, and reducing backlogs in adjudication of criminal cases; and 5) Asset Confiscation and International Cooperation.

4.2 Link Between De-risking and AML/CTF Deficiencies

The connection between Barbados' FATF grey-listing and de-risking pressures was direct and reinforcing. International correspondent banks increasingly relied on FATF assessments when making risk decisions about jurisdictions. Grey-listing signalled enhanced risk, justifying more stringent due diligence requirements and, in some cases, complete relationship termination. Thus, addressing AML/CTF deficiencies was not merely about regulatory compliance-it was essential for maintaining Barbados' connectivity to the global financial system.

5. Barbados' Strategic Response: The Path to Delisting

5.1 Institutional Coordination

Barbados responded to its February 2020 grey-listing with high-level political commitment and comprehensive institutional coordination. An AML Network was established, comprising representatives from across the financial services regulatory framework.

5.2 Legislative and Regulatory Reforms

Barbados undertook substantial legislative reforms, including the enactment of the Proceeds and Instrumentalities of Crime Act, 2019 and amendments to existing AML/CTF legislation such as the

changes to the Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (Prevention and Control) Acts, 2011-23, 2019-23 and the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Acts, 2015, 2019-34. Beyond statutory changes, the government improved regulatory frameworks, enhanced supervisory practices, strengthened FIU analytical capabilities, and increased resources for financial crime investigations and prosecutions (FATF 2024).

The reform program combined technical legal compliance with demonstrated operational effectiveness-a crucial distinction, as FATF's methodology increasingly emphasised not just having appropriate laws on the books, but showing they are effectively implemented.

5.3 Timeline to FATF Removal

The delisting process unfolded as follows:

- **February 2020:** Grey-listing and development of Action Plan with FATF and CFATF
- **2020-2023:** Four-year implementation period addressing all five strategic deficiencies
- **October 2023:** FATF agreement: Barbados substantially completed its Action Plan. Qualified for onsite assessment.
- **January 9-11, 2024:** FATF onsite visit to verify effectiveness and sustainability
- **February 23, 2024:** FATF Plenary formally removing Barbados from the grey list

This achievement reflected sustained commitment across multiple government administrations and demonstrated that effective AML/CTF reform re-

quires multi-year institutional development, not just rapid legislative fixes.

6. Cascading Effects: UK and EU Blacklist Removals

Despite Barbados' FATF delisting in February 2024, and its almost immediate removal from the UK's high-risk third countries list, removal from the EU's AML/CTF blacklist did not occur until August 5, 2025—a delay of 17 months.

7. Threats Posed by Remaining on International Lists

The impact of being placed on international 'grey-lists' and 'black-lists' can be quite severe for both individuals and the country.

7.1 Enhanced Due Diligence Requirements

Following FATF guidance often results in more extensive documentation requirements for routine transactions; significant delays in payment processing; higher transaction costs and in many cases, it can lead to outright refusal by correspondent banks and EU FI's to conduct business with Barbadian counterparties.

7.2 Economic and Investment Impacts

A country's economic functionality is directly undermined, with effects cascading across every level. Businesses unable to maintain banking relationships face closure, personal transactions — from property purchases to education — suffer costly delays, and foreign direct investment retreats as investors price in the reputational and operational risks of grey-listed jurisdictions.

7.3 Reputational Damage

A particularly damaging impact may be the reputational stigma associated with being listed. This signals an elevated money laundering and terrorist financing risk, regardless of actual country-specific circumstances. This reputational damage can undermine decades of work a country has taken to build its profile as a reputable international business and financial services centre.

7.4 Threat to Financial System Stability

At the systemic level, continued listing threatens to accelerate de-risking, potentially severing remaining correspondent banking relationships and isolating the country from international financial markets. For a small, open economy dependent on international trade, tourism, and financial services, such isolation would constitute an existential economic threat.

8. Benefits of Being Removed or 'Delisted'

8.1 Immediate Benefits

Removal from grey lists delivered tangible benefits such as: 1) Reduced due diligence burdens; 2) Restored investor confidence; 3) Better business facilitation; and 4) Restoration of reputation.

8.2 Expected Correspondent Banking Improvements

While delisting may remove regulatory barriers, and hopefully ease due diligence, commercial decisions by correspondent banks may take additional

time to adjust. Nonetheless, the expectation may be that reduced compliance costs and reputational risks should encourage correspondent banks to maintain or expand Caribbean operations, improving the availability and cost-effectiveness of correspondent banking services.

8.3 Positioning for Emerging Opportunities

Barbados is well-positioned to capitalise on several emerging trends:

Fintech and RegTech Innovation Implementation of national instant payments platforms such as BiMPay can be used to enhance financial inclusion while maintaining AML/CTF compliance.

Alternative Payment Infrastructure: Caribbean-wide initiatives such as the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System, the pilot for intra-regional payments and exploration of Central Bank Digital Currencies offer potential pathways to reduce dependence on traditional correspondent banking while maintaining international connectivity.

Regional Leadership: Barbados' successful navigation of FATF processes positions it as a regional leader and potential model for other Caribbean jurisdictions still working to address AML/CTF deficiencies.

9. Policy Recommendations: Maintaining Progress and Strengthening Resilience

9.1 Sustaining AML/CTF Effectiveness

Recommendation 1: Maintain Institutional Capacity

The AML Network that coordinated Barbados' delisting effort should be maintained as a permanent coordinating mechanism. Sustained cross-agency collaboration, information sharing, and strategic planning are essential for adapting to evolving threats and maintaining operational effectiveness.

Recommendation 2: Continuous Improvement Culture

Rather than viewing FATF compliance as a one-time achievement, Barbados should embed continuous improvement into AML/CTF frameworks. This includes regular risk assessments, updating policies and procedures to reflect emerging typologies, and maintaining robust training programs for supervisors, compliance officers, and financial crime investigators.

9.2 Addressing Remaining Correspondent Banking Challenges

Recommendation 3: Proactive Engagement with Correspondent Banks

While delisting removes regulatory barriers, commercial relationships require active cultivation as they showcase Barbados' strengthened AML/CTF framework, demonstrate its supervisory effectiveness, and build confidence in the jurisdiction's risk management capabilities.

Recommendation 4: Diversify Correspondent Relationships

Over-reliance on a small number of correspondent banks creates systemic vulnerabilities and in-

creases concentration risk. Barbados should pursue relationship diversification, including exploring partnerships with regional banks, development finance institutions, and emerging payment technology providers.

Recommendation 5: Leverage Technology to Reduce Compliance Costs

Investment in RegTech solutions-automated transaction monitoring, sanctions screening, and customer due diligence tools to help local FI's demonstrate robust compliance while reducing operational costs, making Barbadian institutions more attractive to correspondent banking partners by reducing their compliance burden.

9.3 Regional and International Cooperation

Recommendation 6: Support Regional AML/CTF Capacity Building

Barbados should share its expertise with other CARICOM members, supporting capacity building and facilitating knowledge transfer. Regional AML/CTF strength benefits all member states by reducing systemic risks and enhancing the Caribbean's collective reputation.

Recommendation 7: Engage in International Standard-Setting

Barbados should seek active participation in FATF, CFATF, and relevant international forums to ensure that Caribbean perspectives inform the development of AML/CTF standards. Small states face unique challenges in implementing global standards designed primarily for larger, more diversified economies, and Caribbean voices must be heard in these

discussions.

10. Conclusion

Barbados' progression from early de-risking threats in 2016, through FATF grey-listing in February 2020, to full removal from international watchlists by August 2025 represents a significant policy achievement with enduring implications for its economic future. Sustained political commitment, effective institutional coordination, and demonstrable operational improvements enabled the country to remedy strategic AML/CTF deficiencies while preserving financial stability and economic activity.

While delisting has created meaningful opportunities, these gains must be safeguarded through continued vigilance, institutional capacity building, and readiness for future mutual evaluations. Barbados now faces the ongoing task of maintaining AML/CTF effectiveness, strengthening correspondent banking relationships, investing in technological innovation to diversify payment channels, and engaging in regional and international standard-setting initiatives. Financial connectivity remains critical to economic viability in an increasingly integrated global system.

Although the de-risking pressures that affected Caribbean financial systems between 2015 and 2020 have not fully disappeared, Barbados' experience demonstrates that small states can successfully navigate complex regulatory challenges through strategic planning and sustained adherence to international standards. In this regard, Barbados offers a practical

roadmap for both consolidating its own progress and supporting regional partners confronting similar risks.

The policy imperative is therefore clear: to build on the foundations established through delisting, maintain robust AML/CTF performance, and leverage institutional and technological innovation to secure a resilient, inclusive, and internationally connected financial system aligned with Barbados' long-term development objectives.

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Arresting Pre-trial Delay in the Commonwealth Caribbean: An Indictment of Regional Criminal Justice Systems?

Rico J. Yearwood

Key Points

- Pre-trial delay has reached crisis proportions across the Commonwealth Caribbean, with documented cases spanning up to 50 years.
- The causes are interconnected: inadequate disclosure, weak police investigations, resource shortages, and external shocks such as COVID-19 combine to produce delays that no single actor alone can remedy.
- The consequences extend well beyond the courtroom; unreasonable delay breaches constitutional rights, generates costly compensation awards against the State, fuels prison overcrowding, and erodes public confidence in the rule of law.
- Reform requires coordinated action: comprehensive Criminal Procedure Rules, stricter deadlines, abolition of preliminary inquiries, investment in human resources, and technology-supported case management across all tiers of the judicial system.

INTRODUCTION

“Delay defeats the course of justice; Justice is sweetest when it is freshest...”¹

Pre-trial delay is not foreign to Caribbean criminal justice systems. However, in recent years, it has

increasingly festered, with instances of pre-trial delay being eighteen (18) years,² twenty (20) years³ and even fifty (50) years.⁴ In the context of criminal law and justice, pre-trial delay refers to any prolonged period that elapses before an accused’s trial commences. Pre-trial delay is divisible into two categories: (i) pre-arrest delay, which occurs between the completion of the police investigation and the notification of the charges being brought against the accused (Caplan 1978, 1041); and (ii) post-arrest delay, which occurs between the accused’s arrest and their trial.⁵ What constitutes undue pre-trial delay is determined on a case-by-case basis by a court of law.⁶ However, case studies from within the Caribbean reveal that pre-trial delay can be relatively mild, moderate or extreme in scale (see Table I below).

Table I – Examples of Lengths of Pre-trial Delay in the Caribbean

MILD		
Country	Case Name	Lengthy of Delay
Guyana	Gordon Sandiford v DPP	14 months
Barbados	Frank Gibson v AG	29 months
MODERATE		
Country	Case Name	Lengthy of Delay
Trinidad & Tobago	The State of Trinidad & Tobago v Alif	8 years
Antigua & Barbuda	Wyre and Bailey v AG of Antigua & Barbuda	8 years, 6 months
EXTREME		
Country	Case Name	Lengthy of Delay
Barbados	Dwayne Phillips v AG and DPP	18 years
Barbados	Kenrick Rouse v AG and DPP	20 years
Jamaica	George Williams v AG of Jamaica	50 years

The Caribbean region is not immune to the debilitating effects of pre-trial delay on criminal justice systems. As Justice Wit correctly stated, “The cancer of delay has spread over the whole of the Commonwealth Caribbean (and beyond).”⁹ The causes of pre-

trial delay in the region are legion and include institutional inertia, systemic issues, resource issues and unforeseeable and uncontrollable external phenomena. However, whatever are the reasons for the delay, ultimately, the State bears the responsibility of bringing the accused to trial.¹¹

That pre-trial delay is now a common feature in our criminal justice systems is borne out by the renowned Needham's Point Declaration on Criminal Justice Reform (CCJ Academy for Law 2023), which reflects a collective commitment by Caribbean nations to address the most pressing issues in their criminal justice systems (Blackman 2025). This Policy Declaration embodies practical solutions and recommendations for the modernisation of regional criminal justice systems and was adopted under the aegis of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) Academy for Law by regional stakeholders, including senior ministers of government, judicial officers, prosecutorial agencies, criminal defence attorneys, heads of protective agencies and civil society organisations.

So pervasive is pre-trial delay in the region that it may be societally perceived as a necessary evil or a natural and inevitable consequence for any accused (Osborne 1980, 5). However, there is nothing 'necessary' or 'natural' about pre-trial delay in any sense. On the contrary, any delay in justice is a denial of justice because delay is the enemy of justice (Raj-nauth-Lee 2024, 1). Consequently, every regional criminal justice system that is consistently plagued by pre-trial delay is failing to fulfil its most vital purpose and remains at risk of unmanageable dysfunction.

This policy brief will examine the problem of

pre-trial delay in the Caribbean. It will (i) provide practical examples of reasons for pre-trial delay; (ii) highlight some legal, economic and societal consequences arising therefrom; and (iii) offer viable policy recommendations to address this scourge.

REASONS FOR PRE-TRIAL DELAY

I. *Systemic Issues*

One systemic issue that contributes to pre-trial delay in the Caribbean is the failure of the prosecution to furnish the accused with timely or adequate pre-trial disclosure as seen in the 2025 Barbadian case of *Dwayne Phillips v AG and DPP*. Here, the claimant was charged with aggravated burglary in 2006. In 2024, i.e. eighteen (18) years later, his trial still had not commenced because of the prosecution's failure to provide pre-trial disclosure. Consequently, the court dismissed the charge and awarded him \$45,000.00 for the violation of his constitutional right to be tried within a reasonable time.¹²

Another systemic issue is inefficient police investigations and mishandling of evidence. This issue was addressed by Justice Wit in August and *Babb v R* as follows:

"Having seen quite a lot of criminal cases coming from the Commonwealth Caribbean, it strikes me how often these investigations seem to be marginal and minimalistic... It goes without saying that... delay and unsatisfactory police investigations... do have a detrimental effect on the quality of law enforcement and, hence, on the wellbeing of the people."¹³

Moreover, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report indicates that the slowness of police investigations is a chief cause of backlogs in Caribbean criminal justice systems (United Nations Development Programme 2020, 9). Several stakeholders opined that officers have a knee-jerk reaction to serious crimes by “arresting first and investigating later” and that they fail to complete case files with dispatch. Additionally, the late production of police evidence results in pre-trial delay. Sometimes the evidence can be so insubstantial that cases are dismissed after the accused has spent a protracted time on remand (United Nations Development Programme 2020, 42).

The dilatory conduct of the stakeholders in criminal litigation is another contributor to delay as is exemplified by the 2020 Antiguan and Barbudan case of *Wyre and Bailey v AG of Antigua & Barbuda*, where the claimants were charged for drug offences in 2010 and only brought to trial in 2019. The court observed that the claimants, the prosecution and the State contributed to the pre-trial delay of eight (8) years and six (6) months through the numerous adjournments and institutional challenges in the matter. Ultimately, the court awarded both claimants \$7,500.00 and \$5,000.00, respectively, for the breach of their constitutional right to a trial within a reasonable time.

II. Resource Issues

In addition to a lack of financial and material resources, regional criminal justice systems continually suffer from a shortage of human resources, in-

cluding judicial officers, judicial, legal and administrative assistants and sometimes prosecutors and criminal defence attorneys, all of whom are integral to the optimal administration of justice (United Nations Development Programme 2020, 35). This shortage contributes to inevitable delays and is borne out in the Guyanese case of *Gordon Sandiford v DPP*, where a claimant charged with murder spent fourteen (14) months on remand without the necessary preliminary hearing being held owing to the notorious shortage of magistrates in the relevant district. While the court acknowledged that there was a shortage of magistrates, it found that this could not legitimise the unreasonable delay that occurred.

This issue was also highlighted in *Wyre and Bailey v AG of Antigua & Barbuda*, where the court noted that “...the major part of the delay within the first five years after the charge, stemmed from systematic and institutional problems occasioned by inadequate resources and insufficient number of judges in the Criminal Division of the High Court.”¹⁴

Further, stakeholders have emphasised the need for more criminal defence attorneys, prosecutors, trained case managers, judicial research assistants and other support personnel in most Caribbean jurisdictions. Notably, in Belize, there is an insufficiency of magistrates to deal with criminal matters (United Nations Development Programme 2020, 35).

III. Uncontrollable External Factors

Pre-trial delay caused by systemic and resource issues is compounded by unforeseeable, uncontrollable and unprecedented events that are exogenous to the criminal justice system. These events include nat-

ural disasters, debilitating pandemics and unavoidable challenges in global supply chains.¹⁵ Cases such as *Harewood v The State* and *Campbell v AG et al* show the tremendous scale of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations of criminal courts in Barbados,¹⁶ while the latter case also demonstrates how the volume of volcanic ashfall from St. Vincent & The Grenadines severely affected some magistrates' courts in Barbados.¹⁷ Other unpredictable events that can hamstring regional courts are seen in *Wyre and Bailey v AG of Antigua & Barbuda*, where the court noted that “[b]etween 2012 and 2015, the High Court was plagued with disruptions due to bomb threats, sewage problems, water issues, as well as poor air quality which affected the health of the court staff which further contributed to the delays.”¹⁸

CONSEQUENCES OF PRE-TRIAL DELAY

The consequences of pre-trial delay in criminal justice systems are innumerable. Indeed, such consequences can be legal, economic and societal in nature.

I. Legal Implications

Most Caribbean Constitutions enshrine the fundamental right to a trial within a reasonable time if one is charged with a criminal offence. Moreover, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the American Convention on Human Rights (1969) — which embody international obligations for Caribbean countries — likewise protect this right (United Nations Human Rights Office

of the High Commissioner 1966); (Organization of American States 1969). Consequently, if accused persons are not brought to trial within a reasonable time, this will result in constitutional and/or international breaches for Caribbean States. What is considered a ‘reasonable time’ within which to bring an accused to trial is contingent on the circumstances of each case, including the length of and reasons for the delay and the conduct of both the accused and the State. Accordingly, unreasonable pre-trial delay can occur at various junctures and is not determined by any mathematical or prescriptive formula.¹⁹

II. Economic Implications

A breach of the constitutional right to a trial within a reasonable time can lead to judicial awards of compensation to an accused person against the State. Such awards can be substantial, ranging from thousands to millions of dollars,²⁰ depending on the gravity of the circumstances surrounding the pre-trial delay. Needless to say, these monies have to be disbursed by the State from the public purse. Moreover, pre-trial delay is often associated with high pre-trial detention and overcrowding of prisons. In 2022, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative revealed that pre-trial detainees formed more than fifty percent (50%) of the total prison population in some Caribbean countries (International Board of Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative 2022, 7). Obviously, the longer accused are kept on remand, the higher the strain will be on the public purse, which is utilised to maintain these individuals. These obligations that States incur due to pre-trial delay can place heavy economic burdens on taxpayers in Caribbean countries.

Additionally, pre-trial detention has economic implications for an accused by disrupting their economic prospects, adversely affecting their ability to earn income and pushing their families toward poverty (International Board of Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative 2022, 7).

III. Societal Implications

Pre-trial delay tends to prompt adverse societal perceptions, reactions and expectations regarding criminal justice systems. Accused persons, victims and/or their relatives, and the public at large will increasingly lose faith and confidence in a criminal justice system when delayed justice feels like no justice at all. This is worrisome because a loss of faith and confidence in the criminal justice system is a loss of faith and confidence in the courts which are supposed to be the guardians of humans rights, democracy and the rule of law. A study commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat reflects a similar sentiment — “Delays may prove injurious to the defendant, to the interests of society and even to the criminal justice system itself in that if citizens lose their respect for the system there is a danger they will take the law into their own hands. Incontrovertible proof is not necessary for it to be acknowledged that delay in the criminal justice process is a real cause for concern” (Osborne 1980, 18).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This brief proposes the undermentioned policy recommendations to aid in addressing the issue of

pre-trial delay.

Short/Medium-term Targets

In tackling systemic contributors to pre-trial delay, Caribbean countries should prioritise the following low-hanging fruit:

1. Conscientious evaluations should be conducted to identify the root causes of pre-trial delay in regional criminal justice systems which should then lead to the preparation and promulgation of comprehensive Criminal Procedure Rules that will tackle those root causes. The Needham’s Point Declaration (discussed above) can be employed as a principled benchmark in this regard.

2. A criminal charge should not be preferred against a person unless the police have accumulated sufficient evidence that reaches a desirable threshold. This will ensure the timely provision of pre-trial disclosure to accused persons. Moreover, pre-trial disclosure should be provided within a strict, definite period, with additional time only being granted to do so in exceptional cases where there is a cogent justification for the delay in making it readily available.

3. There should be compulsory training at the national and regional level for investigative officers regarding the accumulation and production of quality evidence to support a criminal charge. Further, stronger relationships between police investigators/prosecutors and the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) need to be forged to enhance prosecutorial work. At the preliminary stage, the DPP’s office can render legal insight, advice and support to the police investigators/prosecutors on the quality

and strength of the available evidence. This will help in determining which matters should or should not go through the pre-trial criminal process. This will also save valuable time and resources and reduce pre-trial delay.

4. Strict deadlines — with no unwarranted adjournments — should be imposed for the prosecution and the accused to complete tasks. Deviations from these deadlines should be justified in exceptional circumstances only.

5. Time-consuming Preliminary Inquiries should be abolished and replaced with quicker and more effective alternatives like paper committal procedures and other feasible types of ‘sufficiency hearings’.

Long-term Targets

1. Material resource issues can be addressed through the introduction of more robust criminal case management systems at all tiers of the judicial system which can be supported by the utilisation of reliable technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) where appropriate and necessary.

2. Human resource issues can be solved by steadily creating and/or increasing the number of positions for relevant actors in the criminal justice process e.g. judicial officers, judicial assistants, case managers, prosecutors, criminal defence attorneys (perhaps through the establishment of a Public Defenders Department) etc. These jobs should be rendered more attractive to ensure continued interest therein by qualified and competent individuals. For example, more competitive and handsome salaries,

performance bonuses, scope for upward mobility and valuable opportunities for training and professional development can be offered to the holders of these offices.

3. To neutralise extrinsic factors, Caribbean governments should engage relevant experts or consultants to conceive, design and implement sustainable and resilient contingency plans and systems that will remain viable and effective for criminal justice processes during any unpredictable or uncontrollable phenomena.

Conclusion

The brief has demonstrated that there is a plethora of bottlenecks in the criminal justice systems of the Commonwealth Caribbean that lead to pre-trial delay. However, as stated earlier, the constitutional duty remains on the State to ensure that an accused is brought to trial speedily. Therefore, while Caribbean States continue to arrest individuals suspected of committing criminal offences, they must also seek to arrest pre-trial delay in their respective criminal justice systems. Similarly, while these States continue to prepare indictments for accused, they must also address the indictments of their criminal justice systems, one of which is pre-trial delay.

In other words, in order to administer fair and efficient criminal justice, Caribbean countries must be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. However, the onus cannot be placed on a single person or department. All relevant stakeholders have a pivotal role to play in arresting the issue of pre-trial delay.

Notes

1. Gordon Sandiford v The Director of Public Prosecutions. 1979. (1979) 28 WIR 152 (Crane CJ) (High Court of Guyana), at 157. Hereafter, Gordon Sandiford v DPP.
2. Dwayne Phillips v Attorney General and Director of Public Prosecutions. 2025. (CIV0202/2023) (Griffith J) (High Court of Barbados). Hereafter, Dwayne Phillips v AG and DPP.
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5. Frank Gibson v The Attorney General. 2010. [2010] CCJ 3 (AJ) (Caribbean Court of Justice), para. 46. Hereafter, Frank Gibson v AG.
6. Frank Gibson v AG, para. 58.
7. The State of Trinidad & Tobago v Nawaz Ali. 2025. [2025] UKPC 35 (Judicial Committee of the Privy Council).
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10. Stuart and Scott Harewood v The State. 2024. [2024] CCJ 19 (AJ) BB (Jamadar J) (Caribbean Court of Justice), para. 35. Hereafter, Stuart and Scott Harewood v The State; Wyre and Bailey v AG of Antigua & Barbuda, at 5–10, paras. 15–30.
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12. Dwayne Phillips v AG and DPP.
13. August and Gabb v R, para. 159.
14. Wyre and Bailey v AG of Antigua & Barbuda, at 7, para. 20.
15. Stuart and Scott Harewood v The State, para. 35.
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18. Wyre and Bailey v AG of Antigua & Barbuda, at 6, para. 17(i).
19. Frank Gibson v AG, para. 58.
20. Dwayne Phillips v AG and DPP; George Williams v AG of Jamaica.

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Protecting Caribbean Women Against Digital Harm: Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

Alicia Haynes

Key Points

- Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) (including harassment, non-consensual image sharing, cyberstalking, and doxxing) is a growing threat to women's safety, livelihoods, and rights across the Caribbean.
- Digital platforms are not neutral: algorithmic design amplifies misogynistic content, and survivors are routinely left to manage harm themselves, with few formal pathways to justice.
- In a regional survey, 25% of Caribbean women and girls reported being victims of non-consensual image sharing, with over 50% of those affected experiencing job loss, family ostracism, or repeated retraumatisation.
- TFGBV is a collective governance failure, not an individual risk, and requires legislative reform, platform accountability, survivor-centred reporting, and meaningful integration of feminist organisations into digital policy design.

Introduction

A central concern associated with the accelerated uptake of digital technologies is the gendered impact of emerging forms of violence against women and girls. Digital technologies and social media platforms have been promoted as tools that expand access to information, enable communication, create

work opportunities and foster community. Women and girls are key users of these platforms, leveraging digital tools to advance their careers, build social networks, and mobilise feminist movements.

Despite women's increased participation and visibility online, gendered harm proliferates in digital spaces, reflecting the pervasiveness of entrenched inequalities. Platform design, governance structures, and participatory cultures are shaped by axes of power that disproportionately disadvantage women and girls as users of these interfaces. Digital platforms, therefore, extend social inequalities and power relations, demanding urgent attention from researchers, policymakers, institutional actors, women's organisations and technology corporations.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) refers to any act that is committed or amplified with the use of digital tools and communications technologies, that results in sexual, psychological, social, political, and economic harm and infringes on human rights and freedoms (UN Women 2025a). These digital tools can range from mobile devices, gaming and social media platforms, messaging apps, emails and other characteristic technologies. TFGBV is embedded within discriminatory norms at the intersections of gender, race, class and other identity signifiers with far-reaching implications in the absence of clearly delineated pathways to justice.

With the recently concluded 16 Days of Activism from November 25th, 2025, to December 10th, 2025, the established UN theme "UNiTE to End Digital Violence against All Women and Girls" signalled

the urgent need to attend to all forms of TFGBV against women and girls. In the Caribbean, rates of violence against women are alarming, with estimates indicating that as many as one in two women experience violence in their lifetime in countries such as Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago (UNDP, 2023). This prevalence underscores how offline violence converges and becomes reconstituted within digital environments (A. Haynes 2024; Barratt 2018)

Caribbean feminists have long contended with violence against women in physical environments that increasingly transcend into the online realm, with a myriad of implications for women's online and offline experiences (T. Haynes 2016; A. Haynes 2024). Movements such as #LifeinLeggings, #Tam-bourineArmy, Caribbean Feminist and Girls Care JA incorporate a multipronged approach to gendered violence. These strategies include amplifying visibility, counterdiscourse to sexist and misogynistic ideologies, petitioning governments and policymakers for context-specific reforms, facilitating teach-ins and providing other forms of community care and capacity-building in their approach to activism. Despite these sustained efforts, there is a paucity in official correlation of data and research on the links between women's experiences of violence across online and offline spaces and the broader impacts on their livelihoods and well-being (OAS 2023, EIGE 2017). While global institutions such as the United Nations (2024) have documented multiple forms of digital violence, in the Caribbean context, one of the most pressing concerns is the normalisation of misogyny online. This includes the manosphere, widespread cyberbullying, and the sharing of non-consensual images and

content, particularly for school aged girls, among other abusive online interpersonal interactions.

The Problem

Digital platforms are not neutral infrastructures; they operate as economic systems that monetise attention, amplify visibility and shape participatory cultures (Jenkins, Ito, and boyd 2015). Within these environments, women's participation is accompanied by intertwined forms of gendered harm that structure and constrain their digital practices. There are no clear pathways for addressing digital violence. Survivors are expected to manage risks by toggling digital privacy settings, blocking trolls, utilising the reporting tool and disengaging or withdrawing altogether from online platforms. Gendered digital harm includes harassment, misogynistic commentary, impersonation, reputational attacks, surveillance, doxxing, non-consensual circulation of images, and coordinated backlash against women who are visible, outspoken, or politically engaged.

While UN Women (2025b) articulates the links between women's experiences with violence online and offline, there is much uncertainty regarding best practices for policy implementation and regulation, particularly in Caribbean contexts where online harms extend offline. Data protection often applies to institutional actors, leaving ordinary users of technology exposed. A multipronged approach is essential to address the speed and scale at which platform features continue to evolve. Women's safety must be prioritised by ensuring efficient and timely responses to acts of violence, while simultaneously investing in

preventive strategies.

TFGBV Online

The expansion of the manosphere and the circulation of red pill ideology across message boards and blog communities have intensified hostile online environments for women to occupy. These spaces promote sexist discourses that reinforce women's essentialized gender roles, police women's sexuality, and legitimise harassment. Ward (2020) encapsulates this dynamic as "the misogyny paradox," wherein hostility towards women is intertwined with simultaneous desire, characteristic of a broader culture of contempt that depicts women as manipulative, resource-seeking, and emotionally excessive beings. As the boundaries between online and offline worlds continue to blur, digitally mediated behaviours amplify these risks, extending hostility into women's lived realities. Online platforms reproduce inequalities at the intersection of gender, race and sexuality, but provide a complex view of the evolving modalities through which violence manifests.

For Caribbean women and girls, one of the most urgent concerns is image abuse, including the non-consensual sharing and threatened release of intimate images. Such threats are used to shame, discredit, and coerce women into compliant behaviours. Given the cultural dynamic in the Caribbean where familiarity and proximity within communities are pronounced features of daily reality, such harms could be devastating to women's reputation. Particularly for a younger demographic of girls, the sharing of non-consensual images is a function of cyberbullying, a symptom that is evident in schools and exacerbates

psychological harm and social exclusion. In a survey undertaken with 200 Caribbean women and girls, 25% reported being victims of nonconsensual image sharing, while 66% were personally aware of victims (Valentine and d'Auvergne 2024). Given that digital conventions lend to content going viral, concerns extend beyond the rapid accumulation of viewership of intimate content to the risk that such material may resurface and be weaponised against victims at any time. Digital features that enable social media users to screenshot and redistribute content across multiple accounts and platforms further complicate containment, rendering such material difficult to retract once circulated.

Valentine and d'Auvergne (2024) also document that over 50% of the 200 surveyed women reported being ostracised by family and friends, rejected from jobs and retraumatised by resurfaced content. As Edmondson (2003) explicates, women are governed by markers of respectability that continue to discipline their public presence. In a region where sexuality remains heavily policed, survivors struggle to reintegrate into their communities, given the social sanctions accorded to their tarnished reputations. Mainstream media also sensationalises criminal acts against women, playing a central role in shaping how violence against women is legitimised, and perpetuating harmful discourses that shroud violence in victim-blaming.

Despite this, Caribbean feminists have sought to address TFGBV by rendering these issues urgent, particularly given their continuity with offline patterns of harm (A. Haynes 2024). However, the rise of the manosphere in trying to reorient a gendered or-

der in the online space continues to overshadow women's voices, with many feminists delineating new approaches to being in the online space.

Women also experience unwarranted sexual advances across messaging boards and gaming environments. These behaviours are amplified because of algorithmic conditions underpinned by racial and gendered logics. Cyberstalking and digital surveillance, often perpetrated by past and present intimate partners, further shape women's experiences. Perpetrators monitor communications, install spyware on women's accounts, or use GPS tracking to exert control. Yet, victims are left without effective legal recourse, particularly where digitally enabled coercive control is neither explicitly defined nor criminalised within existing frameworks.

At the same time, women who rely on online visibility to advance their professional identity often engage in forms of self-surveillance to align with corporate brand expectations. Women's economic participation online increased during the COVID-19 period, consolidating digital spaces as critical sites of livelihood and survival. (UN Women, 2020). Under such conditions, participation in digital spaces may compel women to endure misogynistic commentary, reputational risk, and harassment, given that withdrawal may jeopardise income, professional opportunity, and social networks. Much of women's digital labour and engagement online surrounds bread-and-butter concerns within the political economy of digital capitalism. These dynamics affect not only influencers but also ordinary users whose livelihoods and advocacy depend on a sustained digital presence. Platform design thus converts economic precarity into

heightened vulnerability. For Caribbean women, these risks are compounded by geopolitical disadvantage, in particular, small markets, limited advertising revenue, and restricted access to global brand partnerships. Strategic visibility and engagement are imperative, albeit without insulation from harm. This complex view of women's participation online and how violence emerges has devastating implications within a capitalist and consumerist environment that drives engagement. These conditions highlight the need for robust digital safeguards.

Policy Implications

Safeguarding women in digital environments is increasingly urgent, given the growing demand for women's publicly facing participation online for work, activism, and community engagement. Although TFGBV has gained increased visibility in global policy discourse, the phenomenon remains insufficiently regulated in digital environments. Gendered digital harm in the Caribbean is sustained by interconnected failures in platform, media regulation, governance and policy implementation. TFGBV must therefore be understood as a fundamental threat to the human rights of women and girls in digital public life. These dynamics frequently transcend geopolitical boundaries and are shaped by the circulation of cultural ideologies and content across digital spaces.

Policy responses must move beyond addressing isolated incidences of harm to confront the governance structures that enable violence to proliferate. These conditions include platform design that prioritises engagement over safety, algorithmic amplification

of misogynistic content, inadequate content moderation and evidence-preservation processes, and mainstream media narratives that sensationalise violence. Although policy discourses often invoke gender analysis frameworks, such inclusion appears tokenistic and insufficiently operationalised. A multilayered approach is required, one that recognises TFGBV as a collective governance failure rather than an individual risk to be managed by women themselves. Effective responses must integrate platform accountability, institutional responsibility, survivor-centred support, and prevention-oriented strategies across sectors.

Policy Recommendations

Update legislative frameworks to formally recognise and criminalise key manifestations of TFGBV, including non-consensual image dissemination, doxxing, digitally enabled coercive control, and deepfake sexual imagery, moving beyond the limited scope of existing instruments such as the Computer Misuse Act and the Cybercrime Bill.

Disaggregate gender-based violence data to explicitly capture online and technology-facilitated forms of harm, enabling evidence-based interventions and stronger survivor-support mechanisms.

Establish survivor-centred reporting pathways at the national level, developed in partnership with social institutions and victim support agencies, prioritising confidentiality, timeliness, dignity, and psychosocial support, including guidance on preserving digital evidence and training for institutional actors.

Hold platform corporations accountable by requiring enforceable content moderation standards that address harassment, surveillance, and algorithmic amplification of misogynistic content, moving beyond reliance on automated systems alone.

Enforce corporate accountability for digital labour by requiring brands and platform-affiliated companies to embed safety obligations into contracts, provide support mechanisms for women experiencing abuse linked to corporate campaigns, and ensure that reporting harm carries no economic penalty.

Invest in and formally integrate feminist organisations into digital governance and policy design through sustained funding, formal consultation processes, and the inclusion of gender specialists in digital transformation bodies.

Mandate ethical media reporting standards across broadcasting and journalism sectors, prohibiting victim-blaming, requiring perpetrator-accountability language, protecting survivor anonymity, and institutionalising training on digital harm and secondary victimisation.

Pursue regional coordination and international investment to develop context-specific definitions of digital harm, harmonised regulatory frameworks, and enforceable procedural safeguards suited to the Caribbean's geopolitical and resource limitations.

Conclusion

This brief examines TFGBV as a continuum of harm that disproportionately affects women and girls.

When violence is dismissed as speculative, it is stripped of its structural dimensions and less likely to be treated as a policy concern. Women's safety cannot remain the burden of victims or feminist advocates; it must be embedded within platform governance, corporate accountability, and public policy frameworks. Accordingly, the recommendations call for legislative deterrents to work in tandem with corporate and media accountability, and sustained investment in feminist community-based work.

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