

Mapping Trends of Research on Human Rights in Belize (2000-2025)

Joyanne De Four-Babb¹

David Robertson¹

Abstract

The overall purpose of the study was to map the trends in academic, peer-reviewed research on human rights in Belize, published between 2000 and 2025. This review was produced using a structured, reproducible, bibliometric methodology. The data was harvested from Google Scholar using Publish or Perish software. The initial search string “human rights” AND “Belize” generated over 330 articles. Follow-up searches using terms such as “violence” and “Belize,” “Garifuna and Belize,” and “disabilities and Belize” were used to ensure that key articles were identified. Duplicates, non-peer reviewed materials, doctoral dissertations, reports and other grey literature were excluded from this bibliometric analysis. After screening, 95 peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and book chapters were included for final analysis. The results showed that academic literature on human rights in Belize covered various topics such as indigenous land rights; indigenous people’s rights (non-land) (Afro-descendant/Garifuna and Maya); gender identity and LGBTQ+ rights; business/economic human rights violations; health and human welfare, including HIV/AIDS; women and children’s rights; crime violence and citizen security; gender-based violence; education social justice, and human rights; Inter-American Human Rights system; borderland rights; environmental injustice and human rights abuse; legalizing human rights in the Caribbean; gender identity and LGBTQ+ rights, and disabilities rights. Still, research on human rights in Belize remains wide open for future work.

Keywords: bibliographic analysis, academic literature review, human rights, Belize, Publish or Perish

¹ University of Belize

Corresponding Author: Joyanne De Four-Babb, Research Director, University of Belize, Belmopan, Belize.
email: jbabbb@ub.edu.bz.

Introduction

Belize, a multicultural and multiethnic nation, with a complex postcolonial history, faces persistent human rights challenges amid its commitments to international conventions and periodic universal reviews. Despite growing global and regional scholarship on human rights, evidence-based research specifically focused on Belize is spotty and limited in its coverage. This study responds to that need by conducting a bibliometric mapping of peer-reviewed human rights literature on Belize published between 2000 and 2025. By systematically capturing the evolution, themes, and gaps in this literature, we aim to provide a foundational resource that encourages more targeted, context-sensitive, and impactful human rights research in Belize and the wider Caribbean and Central American regions.

Zahidi and Otherman's (2024) study on human rights in Papua New Guinea (PNG) provided inspiration for this paper. They used bibliometric analysis of data generated from a search of the Scopus database to identify the topics, trends, and geographical location of authors who had published research on human rights in PNG. The authors also used VOSviewer software to help them visualise, analyse, and evaluate the global trends in these publications. Both Belize, independent from Great Britain since 1981, and Papua New Guinea (PNG), independent since 1975, are Commonwealth countries, with postcolonial democratic structures, therefore, the PNG study was a fair choice for a comparison and guide for us as authors.

The overall purpose of our paper is to map the existing trends in academic literature (peer-reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters) on human rights in Belize, published between 2000 and 2025, using a structured, reproducible bibliometric method which we describe in detail in the methodology section of this paper. Even though we had no access to an extensive library system or expensive analytical software like VOSviewer, we still managed to conduct a bibliometric analysis on human rights in Belize by using the freely available software Publish or Perish (Harzing, 2016; 2023) to "retrieve and analyze academic citations from various databases" (Odunewu et al., 2025, p. 87). As Ruppar (2025) reminded:

Whatever approach authors use to review and synthesize the literature on a topic, there are several points to keep in mind: (1) Ensure that a review methodology is chosen that fits the review's purpose and research questions. (2) Follow the established methodological guidelines to ensure rigor in the review. (3) Provide rationales for methodological decisions (Ruppar (2025, p. 207).

We harvested references from Google Scholar, a freely available sociometric database that indexes academic papers from open access repositories and commercial sources and provides citations (Falagas et al., 2025). Our study addressed the following questions:

- i. What have been the major trends of the research as evidenced in titles, abstracts, and key words in the field of human rights in Belize between 2000 and 2025?

- ii. What have been some gaps in the areas studied?

We make recommendations for future research based on our findings. This paper will add to the body of human rights research in Belize by providing a baseline assessment of human rights literature spanning 25 years.

Bibliometric Analyses

As a result of the increasing amount of scholarly information available through scientific databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, systematically planned reviews of published literature have been increasing in social science and humanities research. Such reviews provide comprehensive overviews and analyses of research published on a range of issues (Haddaway et al., 2023; Raitskaya & Tikhonova, 2020; Samnani et al., 2017). Ruppap (2025, p. 207) argued, “rigorous review articles are beneficial for summarizing and synthesizing literature, identifying gaps in the existing research, and proposing next steps to advance the science.” The authors also cautioned that reviewers should “ensure that they are using the right type of review for their intended purpose and are following the methodological guidelines for their review type to avoid introducing bias into the review” (p. 207).

There are many different kinds of literature reviews, each differentiated by its defining characteristics. Grant and Booth (2009) identified the key attributes of 14 types of reviews and mapped each against a Search, Appraisal, Synthesis and Analysis (SALSA) framework. Their list included: critical review, literature review, mapping review/systematic review, meta-analysis, mixed studies review/mixed methods review, overview, qualitative systematic review/qualitative evidence synthesis, rapid review, scoping review, state-of-the-art review, systematic review, systematic research and review, systematized review and umbrella review. The choice of the type of review depends on the kind of review authors can realistically do within the constraints of time, availability of data sources, access to databases and software, as well as the objective of the review.

Systematic literature reviews (SLR) are considered the “top of the literature review food chain” (Ruppap, 2025, p. 207) because they provide a comprehensive review of papers drawing from well-established databases such as Scopus, and Web of Science. SLRs “provide a ‘bird’s-eye’ overview of the ground covered in the subfield to date, the gaps that remain, the main trends, and the most pressing directions for further research (Zahidi & Othman, 2024, p. 109). SLRs are rigorous and seek to collate evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria in order to answer a specific research question. They are usually carried out in 6 to 12 months, by more than one reviewer. They aim to minimize bias by using explicit, systematic methods documented in advance with a protocol guided by standards that address the format, structure and expectations of systematic reviews (Haddaway et al., 2023; Templier, & Paré 2017).

Systematic literature reviews are growing as a research methodology for human rights research. A quick Google Scholar search using the keywords: “systematic review” AND “human rights” in the title of the study revealed 68 studies between 2000 and 2025, 18 of which have been published since 2024. Some recent titles of systematic reviews included: human rights-based approaches to right to health (Patterson, 2024), fostering human rights in responsible ai: (Baldassarre, 2025); the intersection between energy justice and human rights (Basil & Heffron, 2025); Islamic Law and human rights controversies (Rumadan et al., 2023); human rights dynamics and consequences of COVID-19 control measures (Spasojevic, 2024); definitions of rights education for children (Gillet-Swan et al., 2025); and human rights protections and HIV prevalence among MSM who sell sex (Oldenburg et al., 2018). In the Latin American and Caribbean contexts, systematic reviews on human rights are also increasing. For example systematic literature reviews have been conducted on Latin American states' compliance with international human rights law (Danceanu, 2019); and human rights education in schools within the Latin American context (Fernández Fonseca et al., 2024). A Google Scholar search using the search terms “human rights” AND “Belize” “anywhere in the article” and time frame 2000 to 2025 identified 114,000 results, but same search “in the title of the article” generated only four studies between 2000 and 2025.

There is also growth in systematic reviews in Caribbean research. A Google Scholar search using the key terms “systematic review” and “Caribbean” yielded 294 hits of systematic reviews published since 2000, 62 of which were published since 2024. The systematic reviews in the last five years have tended to focus on health related issues including mental health stigma (Gallimore et al., 2023), intimate partner violence among LGBTQ+ adults in Latin America and the Caribbean (Huster, 2025); adolescent pregnancy (Ribas, 2021); adverse pregnancy and perinatal outcomes (Blanco et al., 2023); prevalence and incidence of stroke (Cagna-Castillo et al., 2023); Indo-Caribbean youth and suicidal behavior (Ruiz Camacho & Sukhram, 2024); factors associated with gaming disorder (Hernandez-Vasquez et al., 2022); and interventions and policies to deal with obesity among school-age students in Latin America and the Caribbean (Vega-Salas et al., 2023). There were also a few reviews on environmental research such as microplastic pollution on beaches in Latin America and the Caribbean (Mesquita et al., 2022), financial literacy research in Latin America and the Caribbean (Mendez Prado et al., 2022).

In terms of Belizean research, there were very few systematic reviews beyond a study on attitudes of primary school teachers towards inclusive education in Belize (Jones, 2020) and on environmental issues such as the impacts of soil and water pollution on ecosystems in Latin America and the Caribbean (Husaini et al., 2025). There was also some research on Belize in the context of other Caribbean countries e.g. establishment of a regional office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the Caribbean Community (Lucia, 2023) and other draft resolutions.

Absent from the research is systematic review of any human rights research on specific Caribbean countries like Belize. Doing a detailed systematic literature review of human rights research in Belize would fill a

significant knowledge and empirical research gap; however, time and access to resources (software and paid databases as discussed in the methodology section) eliminated this enticing option for us as researchers at this juncture. Therefore, we opted for a form of evidence synthesis (Haddaway et al., 2023) that would provide an evidence map of the relevant research on human rights in Belize published since 2000. Through our process, we were able to map existing research and identify the kinds of published research on human rights in Belize. We highly recommend that future work be carried out on a systematic review of human rights research in specific Caribbean countries or the region, including Belize.

Delimitation of the Study

One delimitation of our study was the type of literature included in our bibliometric analysis. There is a plethora of publicly available literature on human rights in Belize available from a wide range of sources. Literature on any topic may be generated from academic or commercial publishing systems, as well as literature from unpublished, non-peer-reviewed sources. The latter type of literature is classified as grey literature (Damarell et al., 2025) and includes, blogs, podcasts; social media posts (e.g., tweets); conference abstracts, posters and proceedings, country profiles, dissertations and theses available from sites such as ProQuest; videos; publications/reports/white papers from governments, academics, think tanks, organizations, business or industry; institutional repositories; patents, pharmaceutical data, and unpublished trial data; unpublished research; statistics and datasets; news articles; trade and popular magazines; slide decks; or factsheets (see Damarell et al., 2025, Table 1, p. 3 for an even more-encompassing list). While this grey literature adds to the knowledge landscape of any topic, these writings may not go through the same scrutiny process as a peer-reviewed publication.

For this paper, we focused on literature published in traditional academic or commercial publishing systems, and included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and peer-reviewed book chapters published by reputable publishing houses. However, we advise that the information included in grey literature is still a valuable source of information and we recommend that future research explores these areas to get a more complete picture of human rights in Belize.

In the next sections we provide a brief background on human rights climate in Belize before describing the methodology of the bibliometric analysis used in this paper. We then discuss our findings in terms of the main trends in research on human rights in Belize between 2000 and 2025. We close the paper with our recommendations for future research agendas on human rights in Belize.

Human Rights in Belize

Belize is a linguistically and culturally diverse nation characterized by complex multiethnic demographics. It is the only country in Central America where English is the official language; however, Belizean Kriol, Spanish, Garifuna, and at least three Mayan languages are widely spoken. The country is sparsely

populated, with approximately 44 persons per square mile and a total population of 397,483 (2022) distributed across 22,970 square kilometres (8,867 sq mi). Belize ranks 115th on the Human Development Index, with an HDI of 0.721, placing it among the lower-ranked countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region (UNDP Human Development Reports, 2025). Demographically, mestizos constitute the largest ethnic group at 51.7% of the population. Other major groups include Creole (25.2%), Indigenous Maya (Yucatec, Mopan, Q'eqchi') (9.8%), Garifuna (Afro-descendant) (4%), East Indian (1.55%), Mennonite, and several smaller communities (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2024).

Human rights are the rights and freedoms to which all individuals are entitled by virtue of being human (The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2025). These rights represent the “ethical standards for how governments should behave toward citizens” (Skarstad, 2024, p, 299). Since its independence in 1981, various Belize governments have recognized, respected, and upheld human rights through its constitutional, legal, and international obligations. As shown in Table 1, Belize has a good treaty ratification record, having ratified several Human Rights treaties (Moore, 20027; United Nations, 2025). Ratification implies that a country is expected to regularly report on these obligations through the Universal Periodic Review. Yet, many treaties remain not ratified (see Table 2). Additionally, Belize has denounced five of the 49 ILO conventions it had ratified, so that Belize is currently subject to 44 ILO conventions.

Table 1: International Obligations Ratified by Belize		
Year	International Human Rights Treaties	
1986	CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
1990	CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
1990	CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
1996	ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
2001	ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
2001	ICRMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
2003	OP-CRC-AC	Optional Protocol to CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict
2003	OP-CRC-SC	Optional Protocol to CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

2011	CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
2015	ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
2015	OP-CAT	Optional Protocol to CAT
2015	ICPPED	International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

Table 2: Other Main International Instruments Not Ratified by Belize

OP-ICESCR	Optional Protocol to ICESCR
ICCPR-OP 1	Optional Protocol to ICCPR
OP-CEDAW	Optional Protocol to CEDAW
OP-CRC-IC	Optional Protocol to CRC on a communications procedure;
OP-CRPD	Optional Protocol to CRPD
ICCPR-OP 2	Second Optional Protocol to ICCPR, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty
International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention	
International Labour Organization Convention No. 189 concerning Domestic Workers and Convention	
International Labour Organization Convention No. 190 concerning Violence and Harassment.	

Every four to five years, Belize, like all UN Members states, undergoes a unique peer review of its human rights records called the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a mechanism established by the Human Rights Council (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2025a). Belize's last UPR was completed by the HRC in January 2024. Belize received 166 recommendations and it supported 127 recommendations at the adoption of its UPR outcome at Human Rights Council 56, in July 2024 (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2024; 2025b). Many of the recommendations revolved around ratifying the international conventions, listed in Table 2, including the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). Belize was also asked by several nations to establish a national human rights institution in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) and provide it with adequate human and financial resources to carry out its mandate. Another recommendation from Paraguay was to "establish a national mechanism for implementation of, and reporting and follow-up on, human rights recommendations, considering the

possibility of receiving cooperation for this purpose” (United Nations Human Rights Council [UNHRC], 2024). A final group of recommendations revolved around strengthening “political, administrative and legislative measures to eliminate discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, persons with disabilities, Afrodescendant people and Indigenous Peoples, ensuring their equal access to all basic services (Mexico); abolishing the death penalty (France); and strengthening the protection of human rights defenders (France) United Nations Human Rights Council (2024).

Belize’s human rights record remains complex. According to the US Department of State (2025) and United Nations Human Rights Council (2024) many human rights violations have persisted unchecked, including arbitrary or unlawful killings; abuse and inhumane treatment by security and prison officers; arbitrary arrests and detentions; backlog of judicial cases; children’s rights; child sexual abuse; death penalty; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence; lack of a national human rights institute; people trafficking; protection of migrant children; reparations for people of African descent; refoulement of refugees to a country where they would face serious harms, such as a threat to life or freedom or other mistreatment that would constitute a separate human rights abuse; serious corruption by government officials; and substantial barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services.

Belize has failed to regularly report and inform the public about its adherence to the rights covered in the various human rights treaties it has signed (Moore 2007). This prevents the established international monitoring mechanism from assessing Belize’s adherence to the rights covered in the treaties. Moorex theory of human rights into everyday practice that will improve and fundamentally transform the lives of people so that the dignity of all in Belize is respected (Moore, 2007, p. 232).

Moore argued that it is the world of human rights organizations and other members of civil society, the continuing process of dispelling the myths and misconceptions about human rights has been largely successful over the years. Many in Belize have been inspired by a world movement to fight for their rights and have become increasingly energized and emboldened in their attempt to hold the government accountable for its violations of human rights. While the possibility for topics for research on human rights is expansive, we wondered to what extent were these varied issues taken up in the human rights research in Belize? While Belize has ratified human rights conventions, is there enough information available for reporters to make informed reports and to enact the recommendations. Could the lack of response be as a result of limited evidence-based research? These are questions that helped propel the need for this study.

In the next section, we discuss the methodology used for this study because as Donthu et al. (2021) argued “the techniques chosen and the decisions associated with each step to perform bibliometric analysis are critical because they influence the results obtained and the inferences that can be drawn from the analysis” (p. 295).

Methodology: Bibliometric Analysis

While the numbers of systematic and other kinds of reviews have been increasing in academic research, the methodological, procedural, and technical decisions used in a majority of literature reviews need to be better documented so as “to increase trustworthiness, get meaningful results, and develop a cumulative body of knowledge” (Templier & Paré, 2017, p. 503). Therefore, in this section, we describe our steps of our protocol: data identification and harvesting, data screening and inclusion, data analysis and visualization; and coding protocol and analytical criteria.

Bibliometric analysis is quantitative analysis of large amounts of academic literature which is frequently used to summarize and synthesize literature and identify emerging trends, collaboration patterns, and impact (Donthu et al., 2021; Odunewu et al., 2025; Zahadi & Othman, 2024). The publications, citations, and authors are typically sourced from reputable databases such as Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus. Donthu et al. (2021) provided a detailed description of their bibliometric methodology, its different techniques, and reliable, step-by-step guidelines to help other researchers conduct rigorous bibliometric analysis with confidence. We were guided by their process in (i) searching for literature (ii) reviewing the title and abstract based on specified criteria, in this case a Belize focus and human rights, published between 2000 and September 2025.

Phase 1: Data Identification and Harvesting

We defined our search strategy and search strings (Vizarreta & Betta, 2022). We used combinations of terms and Boolean operators e.g. “human rights” AND “Belize” in title, keywords, abstract, and full article in the title, abstract, body of the article, and key words. The aim was capture as much of the relevant literature as possible. We used accessible, open-source tools such as Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar to locate our primary sources of data, because we had little access to paid versions of Scopus and Web of Science.

For data retrieval, we used Harzing’s Publish or Perish software (version 8.18.5091) (Harzing 2016, 2023), which is also open-source. We opened PoP, selected Google Scholar as the data source, pasted the search string into the query box. We set the number of results to the maximum (e.g., 1000). We then clicked search and PoP pulled in all the articles, their titles, authors, years, journals, and citation counts. Non-substantive items (for example conference abstracts, or items where the search terms only appeared in the references) were discarded. We opted to use Google Scholar because as shown in the screenshot (see Figure 1), without paid Scopus access, the database only yielded 21 items, less than a tenth of the yield using Google Scholar’s subscription-free service. Part of the limitation to accessing the articles is the paywall; additionally, many regional journals are not included in Scopus or Web of Science. Once the search was complete, in PoP, the results were exported and saved in CSV format. This file served as the raw data for analysis.

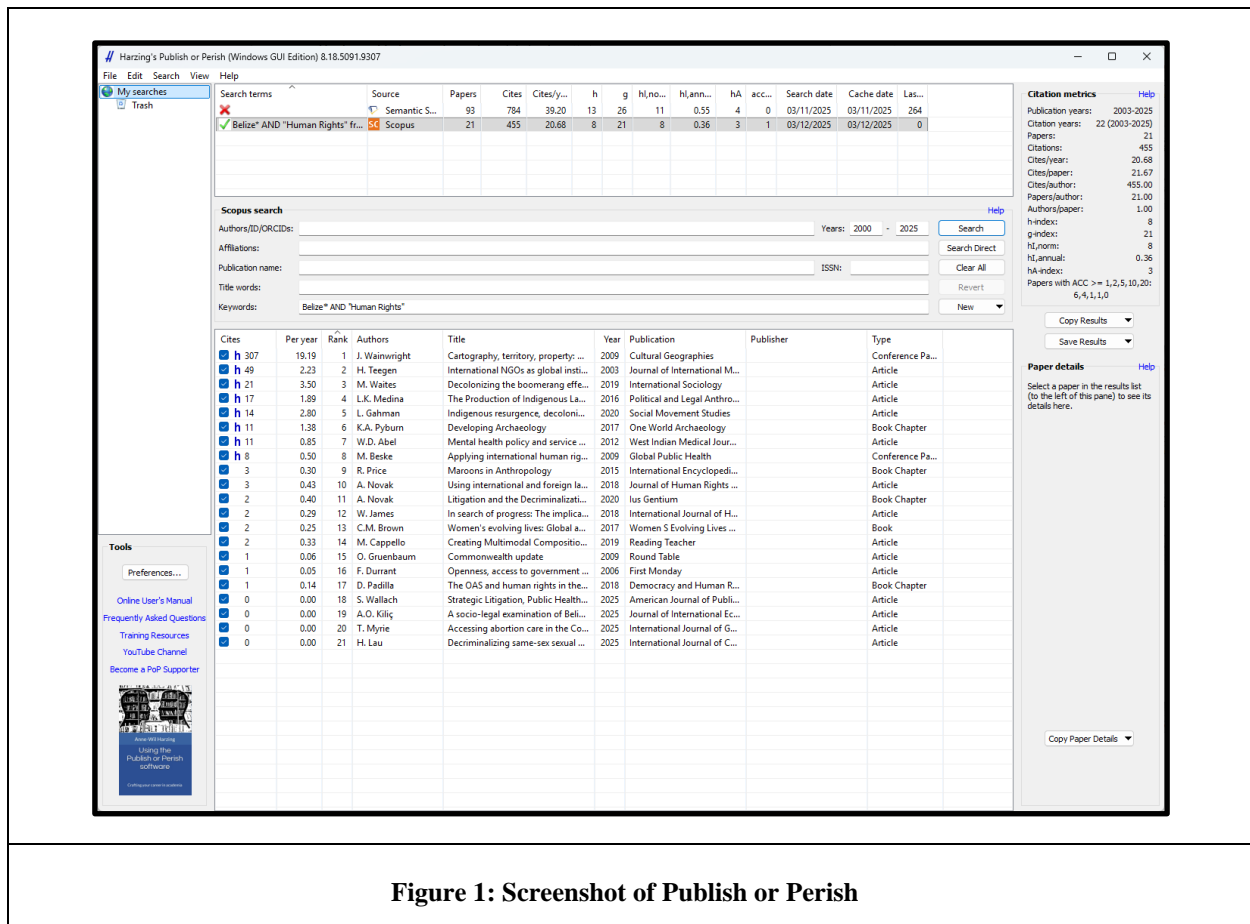


Figure 1: Screenshot of Publish or Perish

Phase 2: Data Screening and Inclusion

The resulting listings from Phase 1 were stored in free applications, LibreOffice Calc, a comma separated values (CSV) file like Google sheets or Excel. We then conducted alternative searches by scouring databases such as EBSCOHOST, Semantic Scholar, PubMed, Medline, and JSTOR for traditional academic or commercial published articles and book chapters. Most of these searches generated information overlapped with the PoP, Google Scholar findings. The records were then screened for duplicates, which resulted in 367 unique sources.

Each author then screened the titles, keywords and abstract in the PoP list. We used our eligibility criteria identified in Tab 3. We included academic articles, books, book chapters that directly addressed human rights in Belize or used Belize as a primary case study. Sources that only cited Belize without meaningful exposition were excluded, for example 39 sources had a regional focus, such as Caribbean or Central America. Sources that did not involve identifiable human rights themes were excluded. We included only English-language, peer-reviewed articles published between January 2000 and October 2025. We stuck to English because neither of us spoke Spanish, which would be the next largest published language for human rights in Belize. We excluded all dissertations, theses, articles that only mentioned Belize in passing, news

articles, published reports and travel guides. These exclusions were marked in the spreadsheet against a column "Belize" and marked it with a one for Belize-related and a zero otherwise. We also included works that focused explicitly on Belize, not regionally in CARICOM or Latin America. In this way we can document the research in Belize.

Table 3: Eligibility Criteria	
Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer reviewed journal articles, reputably published books and book chapters	Grey matter: reports etc.
Published in English	Published in languages other than English
Published between 2000 and 2025	Published before 2000
Conducted in Belize or Belize a significant part of a regional case study	Non-Belizean focus
Focus on a human rights in Belize	Focus on regional or international human rights issues in which Belize is a minor case

Phase 3: Data Analysis and Visualization

Descriptive analysis was carried out using RStudio, to compute tallies by year of publication, by author to determine the most prolific authors, and by publication type. Initially, each source from the review set was identified as being a peer-reviewed journal article, a chapter in an edited volume or book, a technical governmental or NGO report, a thesis, or a conference abstract. The Belize-specific sources were sorted by publication type and only peer-reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters were retained for further textual analysis. The articles were screened individually by the first author and then the second author to identify themes for each source. The titles and abstracts for articles were considered. The opening paragraph or introduction was considered for book chapters that did not have an abstract. If articles had multiple themes, then up to three dominant themes could be identified for each source.

Phase 4: Analytical Criteria

For our datamapping we used the R statistical programming language in R-Studio. As discussed above, other tools exist that can be used to compute tallies and create visualizations. We used R because of our own familiarity, but also that it is the de facto standard platform for data analysis, which supports replicability. Most of the analyses can be done using basic functions in R such as `filter()` and `count()`. We were also interested in examining which themes co-occur. For this we used the Jaccard index (Leydesdorff, 2008), which is a descriptive statistical measure used to quantify the similarity between two sets by comparing their overlap relative to their combined size. In this analysis, we applied the Jaccard Index to measure thematic co-occurrence patterns in Belize-focused research articles. Specifically, for each pair of

themes, we calculated the proportion of articles containing both themes relative to the total number of articles containing at least one of them. This approach ranges from 0 (no co-occurrence) to 1 (perfect co-occurrence), providing a normalized measure that accounts for differing theme frequencies.

Methodologically, our analysis involved several systematic steps. First, we extracted thematic data from Belize-focused articles and created a binary matrix indicating theme presence in each publication. We then computed pairwise Jaccard indices for all theme combinations using the formula $J(A,B) = |A \cap B| / |A \cup B|$, where A and B represent sets of articles containing each theme. The resulting similarity matrix can be visualized as a heatmap with a grey-scale gradient representing index values. Conceptually, this approach is similar to a simple cross-tabulation table, except that the Jaccard normalizes cooccurrences with the overall frequencies. Consequently it is possible for two themes that are very uncommon to nonetheless have a high Jaccard value if they nearly always appear together. The Jaccard index can be generated using basic functions, such as `matrix()` and `filter()` in R and displayed using `ggplot()` functions.

We decided on a structure for the presentation of findings, that is similar to the Papua example (Zahidi & Otherman, 2024). We chose various presentation techniques including bar charts, line graphs and tables to present the data. We also theorised about what the trends and clusters in the dominant tell us about the state of human rights research in Belize, the dominant areas of research and the gaps in the published literature.

Limitations of the Methodology

In the absence of access to resources, we had to rely on open-source tools to replicate in principle the approach that Zahidi and Othman (2024) took. David found an open-source tool offered by a professor (or maybe emerita) at Middlesex University of London called Publish or Perish (PoP). PoP served as a good choice for data retrieval and getting citation metrics. PoP acted like the librarian to retrieve and organize the data. However, we acknowledge that databases and search strings have constraints (Vizarreta & Betta, 2022) and may contain errors. Therefore we carefully cleaned the bibliometric data (Donthu et al. (2021, p. 295) that we acquired, by doing searches to ensure that the paper really existed and was from a credible source. We removed all duplicates and erroneous entries.

The phase of harvesting and screening the data could have been enhanced through the use of a fee-based systematic review tool like Covidence (Kellermeyer et al., 2018). We could have used a free tool like Rayyan to speed up the citation sharing and double scoring process (Kellermeyer et al., 2018), and track our decisions to include or exclude articles. In this way our review protocol could have been independently verified (Patterson, 2024). We highly recommend that future reviews employ such software to produce verifiable protocols.

The data for this literature review was based on peer-reviewed journal articles published in English only. The research only canvassed English language, peer-reviewed articles available in full text online available from Google scholar. Belize is a multilingual society and some researchers may have written in another language. Furthermore, cost and accessibility made us unable to compare our Google Scholar results with paid versions of Scopus, and Web of Science; hence the utility of Publish or Perish and Google Scholar (Repanovici, 2010).

Finally, we note that “assertions of bibliometrics can be quite subjective given that bibliometric analysis is quantitative in nature, wherein the relationship between quantitative and qualitative results is often unclear” (Donthu et al., 2021, p. 295). It is recommended that the assertions should be supplemented by content analysis. Additionally, we did not engage in any of the advanced techniques of bibliometric analysis toolbox identified by Donthu et al (2021) such as citation and/or publication related metrics or science mapping, citation analysis, co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, co-word analysis, co-authorship analysis (Donthu et al., 2021 p. 288). This is an area for future research.

In the next section, we discuss the findings of our study in relation to the research questions: the major trends of the research as evidenced in titles, abstracts, and key words in the field of human rights in Belize between 2000 and 2025; and the gaps in the areas; and our recommendations for future research.

Main Trends in Research on Human Rights in Belize (2000-2025)

The initial list of items retrieved by PoP from Google Scholar was screened according to our criteria. Duplicate items were removed from the generated list, resulting in 367 unique items, which were then inspected for inclusionary and exclusionary criteria described above in Table 3. Screenings of title, key words and abstract were done independently, by the first author followed by a screening by the second author. Items were required to address some aspect of human rights, and specifically apply to Belize. For example, some (n=39) were excluded that were human-rights related but were regional or global, rather than specifically involving Belize. One item was excluded that involved animal rights. What remained were and initial 114 items, which were then categorized by type of publication as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Publications by Type		
Type	Count	Percentage
Journal Article	69	60.5%
Chapter	26	22.8%
Tech Report	9	7.9%

UN Report	5	4.4%
Thesis	3	2.6%
Conference paper	2	1.7%

The Technical Reports, UN reports, theses and conferences papers were then excluded leaving 95 journal articles and chapters as “the review set” (Patterson, 2024, p. 608) to be analysed.

Themes in Human Rights Research in Belize

Each of the 95 items was then considered for its themes. The total number of themes was 285 from the 114 sources; on average each source had 1.5 themes. Table 5 lists the themes in descending order of frequency of occurrence and some examples of the papers reflecting those themes. The two most frequently research themes were on the issues of indigenous land rights, and indigenous people’s rights, including Afro-descendent and Maya peoples. Studies on disability rights were present but few. Absent from the published research were studies on migrants, trafficking, many of the areas listed as concerns in the UPR 2024. Maybe research on these areas is reported in the grey literature, but not in published academic journals and peer-reviewed books and this is a gap that can be filled within the next few years. Additionally, we noted that the theme was published if picked up by international researchers that relevant to developments in the region e.g. the publications on LGBTQ+ after the Belize ruling rippled across the Caribbean and was mentioned and compared by many researchers. This resulted in a systematic evolution of publications on a theme.

Table 5: List of the Themes		
Theme	Count	Some Examples
Indigenous Peoples’ Rights (non-land) (Afro-descendent /Garifuna and Maya) (see MacKay, 2002)	22	Barrett, E. E. (2024). Baines, 2011; Gahman, Penados, and Greenidge, 2020; Norales, 2003; Gough, 2022; Bonner, 2001
Indigenous Land Rights	20	Anaya, 2008; Cain and Leventhal, 2017; Campbell and Anaya, 2008; Gahman et al., 2020; Grandia, 2016; Haines, 2016; 2018; Nettheim, 2007; Novogrodsky, 2012; Parks, 2011; Wainwright & Bryan, 2009; Medina, 2024
International Human Rights Norms	17	Shoman, 2019; Balboni et al., 2007; Gray et al, 2018

Gender Identity and LGBTQ+ rights	16	Bulkan and Robinson, 2017; Caserta and Madsen, 2016; Evans, 2012; Novak, 2018; 2020; Lazarus, 2020; Orozco, 2018; Tisdale, 2018; James, 2017.
Health & Human Welfare (including HIV Aids)	13	Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2006; Gray and Mishtal, 2019; Killion and Cayetano, 2009 Andrewin & Chien 2008; Pope & Shoultz, 2012.
Business/Economic Human Rights Violations (see Bantekas, 2021)	11	Duffy, 2000; Gould, 2017; Krylova & Rico, 2024; Moberg, 2000; Pisani & Pisani 2018; Henry, 2010; Mustafa & Reeder, 2009
Women & Children's Rights	10	Edberg et al., 2011; Gray & Mishtal, 2019; Myrie, 2025; Rich, 2017; Uzwiak, B. A., & Curran, S. (2016).
Crime, Violence, and Citizen Security	7	Hanson et al., 2004;
Education Social Justice & Human Rights	7	Almendarez, 2013; De Four-Babb, et al., 2024; Penados, 2019.
Inter-American Human Rights System	7	Dulitzky, 2010;
Borderland Rights	6	Jones, 2012;
Environmental Justice	6	Duffy, 2000; Gould, 2017; Jiang and Cao, 2024
Gender-based Violence	6	Beske, 2009, 2014, 2016; Pargass & Clarke, 2003.
Death Penalty & Privy Council	4	Fiadjoe 2003; Tittlemore, 2004.
Legalizing human rights in the Caribbean	4	Bascombe, 2005; Biholar, 2023; Caserta, 2018; Hefler, 2002.
Disability rights	3	Magnusson et al., 2017.

Co-occurrence and Distribution of Themes over Time

We were interested to see which themes occurred in the same publications. Several interesting patterns emerged from this analysis. Notably, articles related to environmental justice coincided with articles involving business-related violations. Sexual orientation and gender identity were associated with

international human rights norms. Women and children's rights were more strongly associated with crime and health than they were to gender-based violence. These patterns provide valuable insights into the interdisciplinary landscape of Belize-focused human rights research and highlight opportunities for more integrative scholarship.

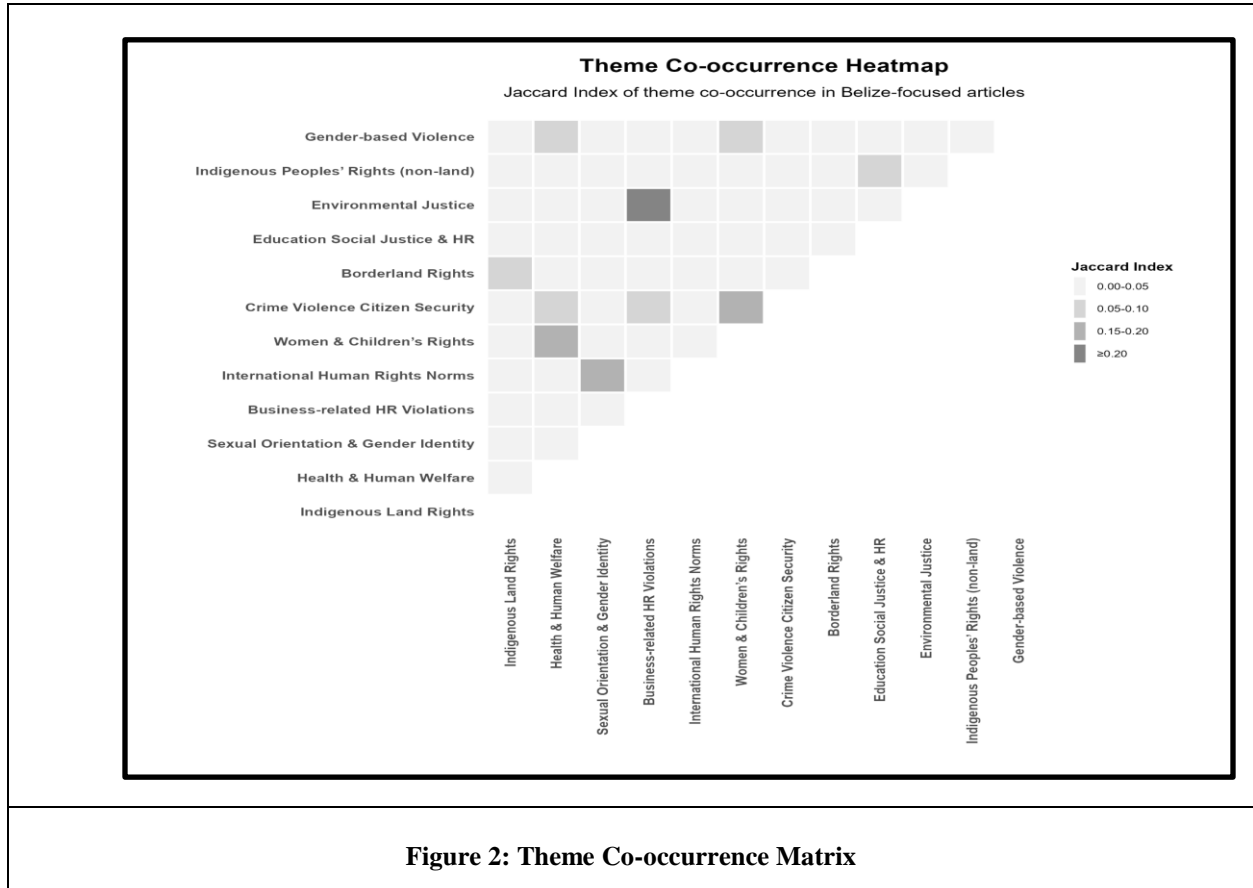


Figure 2: Theme Co-occurrence Matrix

The themes of publications were not equally-distributed over the time period (2000 – 2025). Figure 3 shows a display of the frequencies of the themes by year. The number of items ranged from zero to a high of ten per year. Indigenous land rights, one of the most common themes, only had publications in the years from 2005 to 2021, and business-related human rights only appeared after 2009.

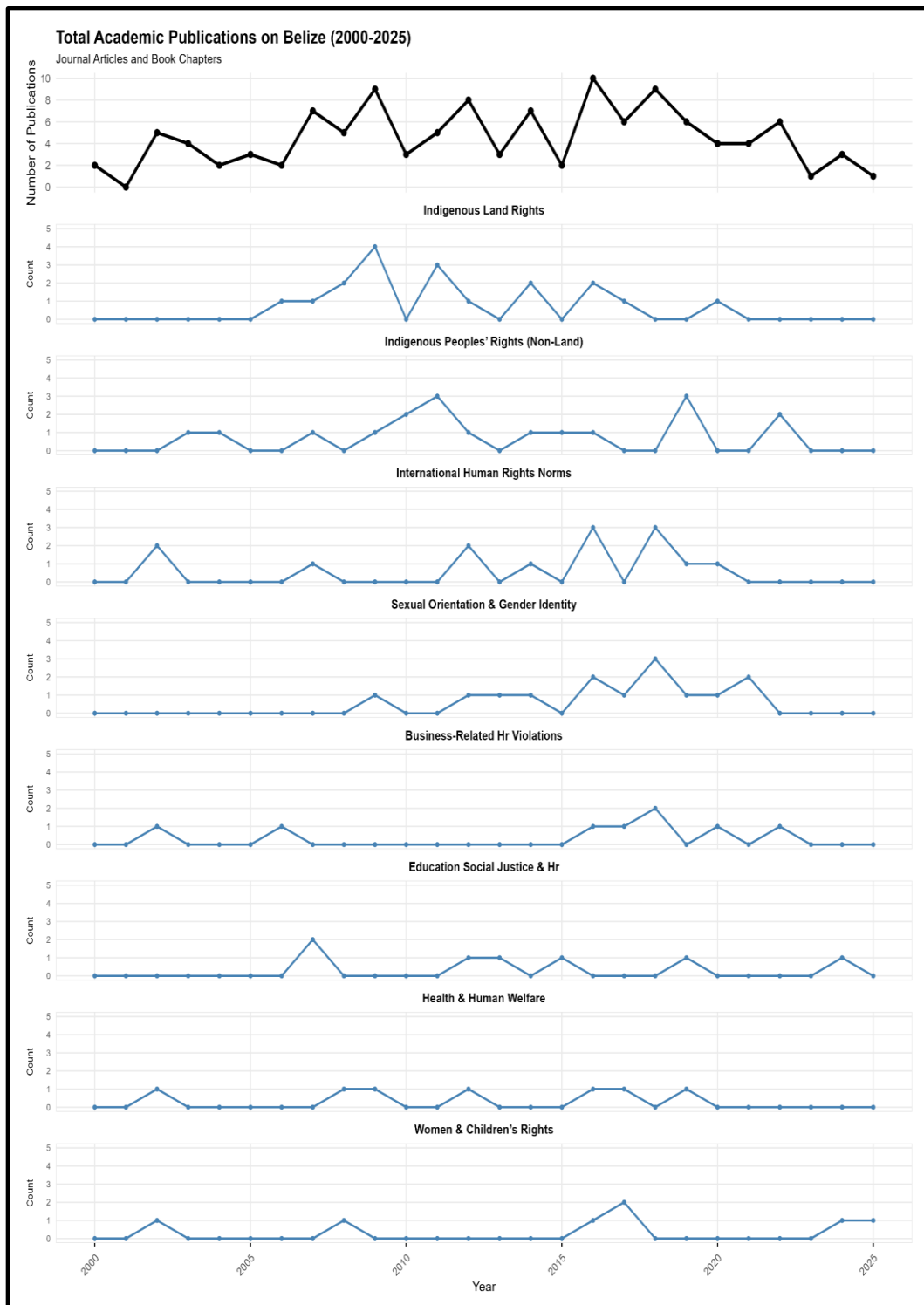


Figure 3: Publication Themes by Year

Authorship of Publications

We also wanted to find out, who has been publishing peer-reviewed human rights research about Belize. To address this, we examined the publications and identified authors with more than one publication. The author's affiliations were determined via a web search. In cases of ambiguity, we prioritized the institutional page if possible or else relied on social media (ResearchGate, ORCID, or Google Scholar). The top authors and their affiliations are listed in Figure 4. Notably, none are based in Belize, and only one is based in the Caribbean region. The top countries for affiliations are the USA (8) and the UK (5).

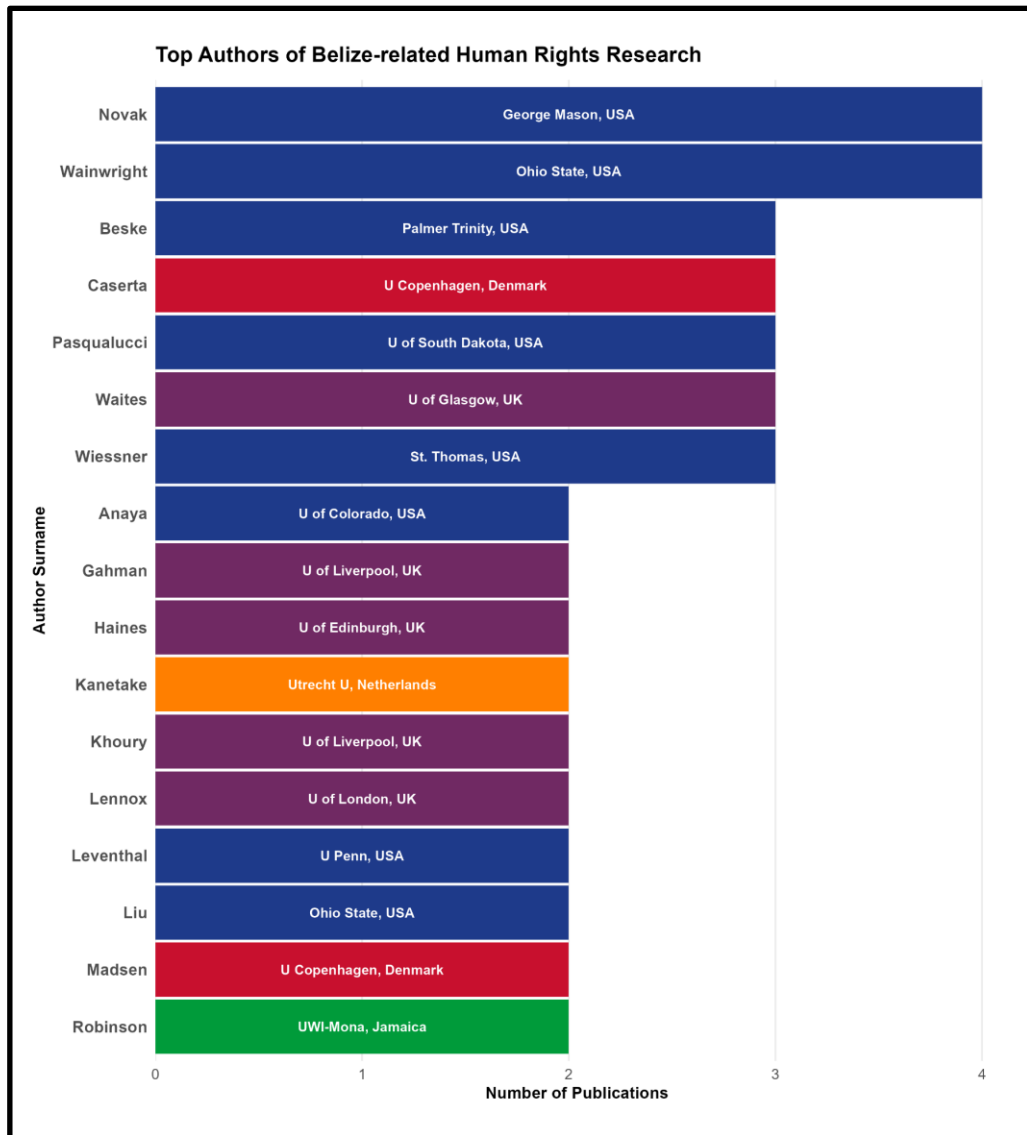


Figure 4: Authorship of Peer-Reviewed Research on Human Rights in Belize

This showed that more local researchers need to get involved in the publication process of research on human rights in Belize.

Discussion of Findings

The most prevalent themes in human rights research in Belize have been associated with Indigenous People's Rights. This focus reflects Belize's demographics, with Maya and Garifuna people constituting significant portions of the indigenous population. It also reflects Belize's history, both colonial and post-colonial, underscoring how territorial sovereignty, cultural preservation, and self-determination remain central to the country's human rights discourse. Scholarly work in this area has largely examined the interplay between domestic courts, the Inter-American human rights system, and international norms, particularly the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and ILO Convention 169. Studies such as Anaya (2008), Campbell and Anaya (2008), and Grandia (2016) illustrate how legal advocacy and transnational litigation have shaped domestic policy and community-led resistance. Notably, the thematic co-occurrence analysis (see Figure 2) indicates that indigenous rights scholarship frequently intersects with environmental justice and business-related human rights violations, highlighting the tensions between extractive development, land dispossession, and the right to free, prior, and informed consent.

Research on Women's and Children's Rights appears eight times in the analysis, representing a significant but not dominant focus within Belize-specific human rights literature. The co-occurrence analysis reveals that Women's and Children's Rights research is more strongly associated with Crime Violence Citizen Security and Health & Human Welfare than with Gender-based Violence specifically. This suggests that scholarship tends to frame these rights within broader contexts of public security, health systems, and social welfare rather than primarily through a gender-based violence lens. Notably lacking were sources exploring the intersection of women and children's rights with employment or education.

Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity emerged as a significant theme with 10 occurrences in Belize-specific research, indicating substantial scholarly attention. However, the literature is predominantly concentrated on international legal norms (strong thematic co-occurrence) and the landmark decriminalization case (*Orozco v. Attorney General of Belize*, 2016). Studies such as Novak (2018), Caserta & Madsen (2016), and Tisdale (2018) focus heavily on transnational litigation strategies, Commonwealth legal frameworks, and the role of the Inter-American human rights system in advancing LGBTQ+ rights. This reflects a "top-down" analytical focus on legal reform and international advocacy. A notable gap exists regarding lived experiences, societal attitudes, and everyday discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Belize. While the introduction notes that discrimination and violence persist, the peer-reviewed literature captured in

this analysis provides limited empirical insight into the socio-cultural realities, stigma, intersectional vulnerabilities (e.g., related to ethnicity, class, or rural/urban divides), or what community-led resilience strategies may exist. Future research would benefit from grounding the legal achievements in the everyday contexts they are meant to transform.

Disabilities Rights as a theme appeared four times in Belize-specific research, indicating it is a recognized but relatively underdeveloped area of scholarship. The literature identified includes mental health system assessments (e.g., Pan American Health Organization, 2013), community-based rehabilitation evaluations (Magnusson et al., 2017), and broader disability-inclusive analyses within health and welfare studies. This suggests that existing research has primarily been framed through a health and service-delivery lens, focusing on systemic needs, gaps in care, and program implementation—aligning with Belize's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2011. As noted by Robertson (in press), Belize is comparatively delayed in creating protections for people with disabilities in the context of inclusive employment.

Belize has distinctly multicultural and multiethnic demographics. Mestizos, the largest ethnic group, make up just under 52% of the population (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2024). The remaining population include Creole, Indigenous Maya (Yucatec, Mopan, Q'eqchi'), Garifuna (Afro-descendant), East Indian, Mennonite, and other communities. The multicultural setting makes intersectional analysis essential for human rights research. The thematic co-occurrence matrix (Figure 2) shows some clustering such as Indigenous Land Rights with Environmental Justice and Business-related Human Rights Violations. Yet, few studies deliberately examine how, for instance, gender, age, or disability intersect within those contexts. Even in prominent domains like sexual orientation and gender identity, research has prioritised legal decriminalisation over how LGBTQ+ identities are lived across ethnic, religious, and rural-urban divides. This represents a significant gap, as Belize's human rights landscape is characterised by layered inequities that single-axis frameworks cannot adequately capture. It is not just a gap in the literature, but also points to a great opportunity to study intersectionality in Belize, where identity, rights, and inequality converge in many context-specific contexts.

Conclusion

We have noted through this study there is while published work on the human rights in Belize exists, it is critical for researchers to have a better understanding of the research landscape and how it has evolved between 2000 and 2025; hence our decision to map the field of human rights research in Belize. We conclude by making recommendations for topics for research and strategies that may be employed to extend the published literature in this area.

In terms of what to research, we found that the recommendations from the UPR 2024 are a great place to begin a systematic plan for deciding on topics for research. For example, one area of research can focus on

why Belize's has failed to ratify certain conventions such as the the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance. Another area of focus could be Belize's legal adherence to the death penalty. Belize had not taken any decision to abolish it or to accede to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Why does Belize still have the death penalty, despite not have used it for over 30 years? Another UPR recommendation includes the establishment of "a national mechanism for implementation of, and reporting and follow-up on, human rights recommendations, considering the possibility of receiving cooperation for this purpose." What progress has been made in this area? Other recommendations involve strengthening political, administrative and legislative measures to eliminate discrimination, ensuring their equal access to all basic services (Mexico). The research gap is: To what extent are marginalised groups in Belize (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, persons with disabilities, Afrodescendant people and Indigenous Peoples) discriminated against? France recommended the strengthening of the protection of human rights defenders in Belize. To what extent are human rights defenders in Belize protected? A last area is despite the calls for Belize to establish a national human rights institution, in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) and provide it with adequate human and financial resources to carry out its mandate, there are significant delays. Researchers may explore the historical evolution of this recommendation and the factors that enable and constrain its establishment of the national human rights institution. The 166 recommendations of the UPR are fertile ground for researchers to identify topics. These research gaps need to be filled to support the evidence-based reporting needed.

Having identified the topics for research, researchers need to have a systematic approach to conduct the research. From our review, much of the research has been done by independent researchers, that are outside of Belize. There have been some clusters of research around indigenous land rights and LGBTQ+ cases. We also observed a strategy by Beske to extend doctoral work into peer-reviewed published papers. We therefore recommend that for those researchers currently engaged in doctoral work, to create publications to contribute to comprehensive, accessible peer-reviewed research on human rights in Belize so as to add to the publication record.

Finally, we noted that research on particular topics comes in waves. So another strategy is to anticipate research that can be done on the evolution and developments of human rights legislation in Belize. Currently, there is an absence of research on Occupational Safety and Health or a framework for the protection of asylum seekers. Little has been done on disabilities or the implementation of specific Acts. These are wide open field to build a body of research that will make a significant contribution.

To conclude, it is critical that researchers capture the historical evolution of human rights in Belize, as well as the lived experience of those who may be discriminated against or who have their human rights

infringed. This project provided us with a glimpse of the state of research on human rights and Belize. For interested scholars, it is a case of “every sweet have its sour” in that our search demonstrated only a modest amount of scholarly work has been done on the relevant human rights topics. The sweet part is the scholar will face is having little trouble to find relevant gaps in the literature for further research.

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