

Editorial: Contemporary Human Rights Challenges in Belize

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Human rights are the rights and freedoms to which all individuals are entitled by virtue of being human (Skarstad, 2024). They are a country's measure of its protection of its citizens in terms of basic freedoms, including "freedom of expression, religion, assembly, and association and the fair and equal access to education, employment, housing, health care, and other vital necessities of life" (Moore, 2007, p. 200). In 2025, the University of Belize received a three-year grant to execute a 95% European Union funded project entitled Strengthening Human Rights Advocacy Among Youth in Belize Through Academic Research, Capacity Building, and Human Rights Education. This special issue actualizes one of the outputs of that project because it increases the availability of evidence-based data on human rights in Belize.

This special issue of the Journal of Belizean Research brings together a collection of eight articles that explore the current challenges, legal frameworks, and social dynamics of human rights in Belize. The contributions highlight several critical areas within Belize's human rights context and span diverse and pressing topics, from the implications of emergency governance to the persistent issues of discrimination faced by marginalized communities. The articles in the volume discuss issues pertinent to economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. Multiple papers address the systemic exclusion and marginalization of persons in Belize. Together, these articles provide an in-depth look at how rights are lived and sometimes lost in Belize, using diverse methodologies and theoretical frameworks to shed light on ongoing challenges and opportunities for a more just and inclusive society.

Flavius tackles the issue of indigenous and land rights through her examination of the political economy of Garifuna rights. She uses theoretical-historical analysis to show how globalization and tourism contribute to the erosion of communal land tenure and cultural commodification of the Garifuna, in contrast to the more recognized Maya land claims.

Garcia and his co-authors focus on human rights in Belize in the age of artificial intelligence. They argue that the uncritical application of AI could result in increased surveillance, job losses, social inequality, thereby exacerbating existing problems.

Godoy-Guillen analyses the rise of the institutionalization of emergency governance in Belize during the COVID-19 pandemic and assesses how such "states of exception" potentially creates zones in which human rights are suspended.

Hartman and his colleagues examine the challenges in accessing healthcare and rehabilitation services, as well as employment discrimination for the disabled. Their research positions rehabilitation and inclusion

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as fundamental human rights, exploring integrated legal and theoretical analyses to inform policy interventions.

Mano highlights the vulnerabilities faced by migrant sex workers in Belize resulting from the structural exclusion faced by migrant sex workers due to criminalization and social stigma. She explores three key themes of legal ambiguity, structural marginalization, and systematic invisibility. She concludes that risks are systematic and current protections may be insufficient for these sex workers.

Orozco and Anderson present the case of Grace, a working class woman who has become a human rights defender and advocate for her bi-sexual son. The article uses Grace's case to highlight the intersectional nature of inequality, highlighting the specific vulnerabilities that she faces as a woman who has had to address broader issues of gender-based violence and discrimination.

Vairez and his research team discuss the challenges faced by adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic through their research on well-being and human rights. The results showed that mental health among some adolescents deteriorated and adolescents were adversely affected by the verbal and physical abuse and loss of income in the home during the periods that they were at home during COVID-19.

This special issue increases the availability of evidence-based data on human rights in Belize. However, as De Four-Babb and Robertson conclude in their paper that mapped the trends in human rights research in Belize between 2000 and 2025, human rights research remains wide open for future work.

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