

RESEARCH CONFERENCE



Keeping Independence Alive: Belize @45

September 30 – October 1, 2026

Belmopan, Belize

Introduction

The Belize Policy Research Institute (BELPRI) at the University of Belize, in collaboration with the Institute of Social and Cultural Research - National Institute of Culture and History (ISCR-NICH) will hold a research conference on the theme ***Keeping Independence Alive: Belize @ 45*** in Belize September 30 to October 1, 2026.

September 21, 2026, will mark 45 years or 16,425 days of independence for Belize. It is normal to have commemorative research reflections at ten-year periods after independence. However, '45 years' assumes special significance. It is likely that some of the few remaining figures who played prominent roles in achieving independence may not be around for the 50th anniversary. The Belize @ 45 conference will also stimulate practice and preparation for the larger 50th anniversary activities to come in 2031.

In 1981, independence came for Belize with high and, perhaps, some unrealistic, expectations. The key political goal was breaking from British domination and gaining freedom. Independence also was to be the beginning of building a new decolonized nation with mental emancipation. It came with promises and hopes of improved livelihoods, economic prosperity and better governance. How has Belize done over these 45 years? How can Belize do better?

Objectives

The Conference core objectives are threefold:

1. To critically explore and assess the meaning of Belize's independence, its successes, failures and contradictions over the past 45 years.
2. To discuss and propose policy measures for innovative options for building a better Belize.
3. To procure papers to propose a special issue of the UB Journal of Belize Affairs on the theme of the Conference.



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Key Thematic Areas and Issues for Belize @ 45

Belize's experience of independence over these 45 years have seen a mix of both successes and failures, some glimmers of hope with some sobering disillusionment. There are multiple broad issues to explore and assess this independence experience. These include, but are not restricted to:

(a) The Economic Record

- The performance and sustainability of economic sectors
- The benefits and risks of a service economy
- Income inequality
- Entrenched women and youth unemployment
- Economic integration: Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean

(b) Social Vulnerability and Poverty

- Persistent poverty and different measuring models
- The record on social welfare provision and access
- Expanding social and economic rights
- Women and gender since 1981
- The experience of the LGBTQ+ community
- Youth and development

(c) Decolonizing Governance

- Constitutional reform: Attempts and failures
- Fundamental rights and freedoms
- Political corruption political clientelism and unregulated money in politics
- The record on people's participation in governance
- The fusion of legislative and executive powers
- Access to justice
- The record and state of civil society organizations
- The record and state of the media
- Improving local governance
- The human rights landscape



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(d) Citizen Security

- The drivers of increasing crime and violence
- The lack of capacity of the state to address the situation
- The use and abuse of state of emergencies
- The human rights aspects
- The effects on development

(e) National Security

- Protecting our Borders
- Transnational Crime
- The cases at the International Court of Justice (ICJ)
- After the ICJ?

(f) Environmental Resilience

- How have we done on sustainable use?
- Climate change and resilience
- The record on disaster preparedness and response
- Environmental rights in the Constitution?
- Assessing International Environmentalism

(g) Migration and Development

- Migration and development since 1981
- Towards a migration and development policy
- Ethnic and racial relations
- Diaspora relations

(h) Education for All

- Improvements and failures
- How free is education today?
- The perpetuation of the Church-State model
- Decreasing rates of literacy and numeracy
- The record and state of libraries
- Mental emancipation



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(i) Health for All

- National Health Insurance
- The brain drain of health care professionals
- The Cuban Medical Brigade
- Lessons from COVID

(j) Land Tenure and Land Use

- Who owns Belize? Changes since Independence
- Towards a new land policy
- Customary land rights

(k) Indigenous Policy and Practice

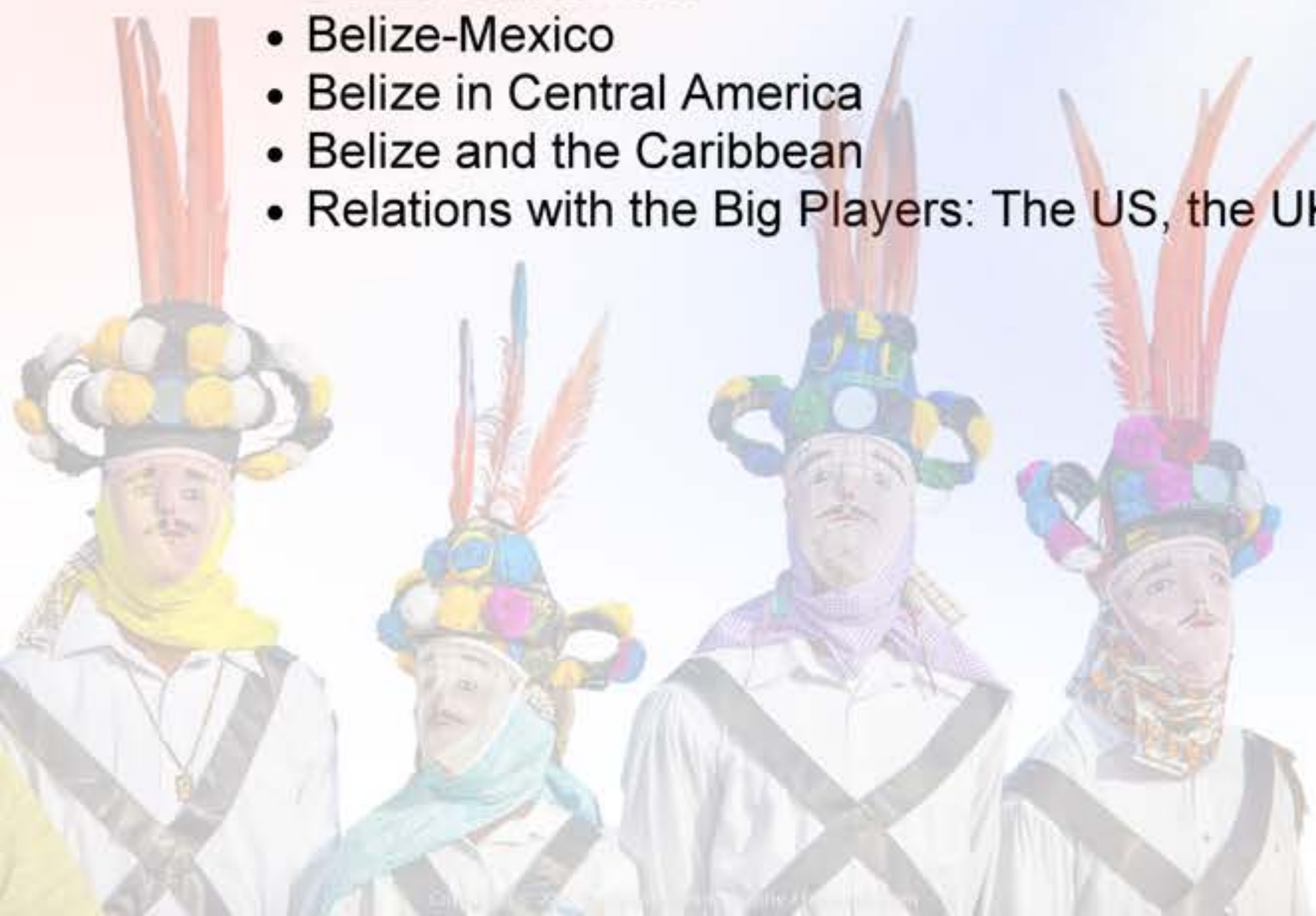
- Indigenous rights in a changed Belize
- Customary land rights
- Cultural traditions vs neo-liberalism

(l) Culture and the Arts

- History and issues of representation
- Cultural policies, issues and opportunities
- Heritage and the creative economy
- The state of the arts

(m) Regional and Foreign Affairs

- Belize's foreign policy since Independence
- Belize-Guatemala
- Belize-Mexico
- Belize in Central America
- Belize and the Caribbean
- Relations with the Big Players: The US, the UK, Russia China etc.



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Abstract and Paper Guidelines

1. Paper abstracts are to be between 250 - 350 words and must be submitted by end of the working day (5 pm Belize time) on 27 July 2026. Send abstracts to belpri@ub.edu.bz.
2. The word limit for papers is 4,000 words. Copies of papers and/or summary presentations are required by 23 September 2026. To be considered for publication, final copies of papers will be due within a month after the conference.
3. It is recommended that, in addition to the central focus on the experience of 45 years of independence, that papers, where feasible include identifying:
 - The relevant promises and aspirations of independence in 1981.
 - Reflections on next steps for improving the process of nation building as Belize moves to 50 years of independence.
 - Issues and challenges that require research or more research for the Golden anniversary.
 - How will digital technology and AI benefit or hinder the continuing decolonization of Belize?

Conference Format

- In-person with live audience (lecturers, students, government officials, CSOs, the media, the diaspora and the public will be invited).
- The Conference will be live-streamed and recorded.
- Registration will be required but will be free.
- There will be opening lecture on the theme of the conference, followed by a 'Memory Round Table' of key Belizeans who played critical roles in the lead up to independence.
- Accepted papers will be grouped together thematically in panels of no more than three presenters over two days.

For questions and more information, contact BELPRI-UB at belpri@ub.edu.bz or +501-223-0256 Ext. 2070