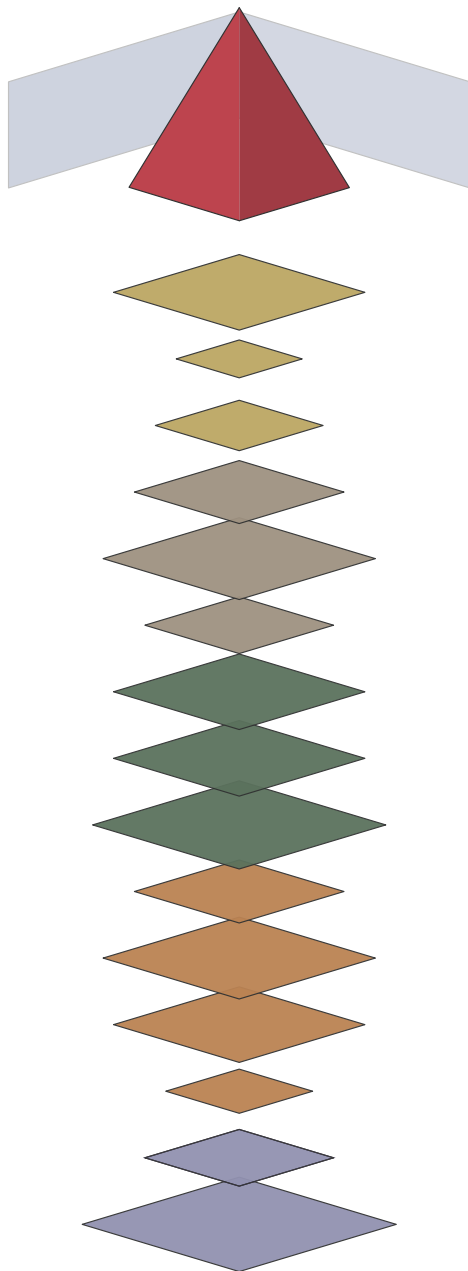


 **LIBERIA**



 **5.5
CRIMINALITY SCORE**

23rd of 54 African countries
8th of 15 West African countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS 5.4**

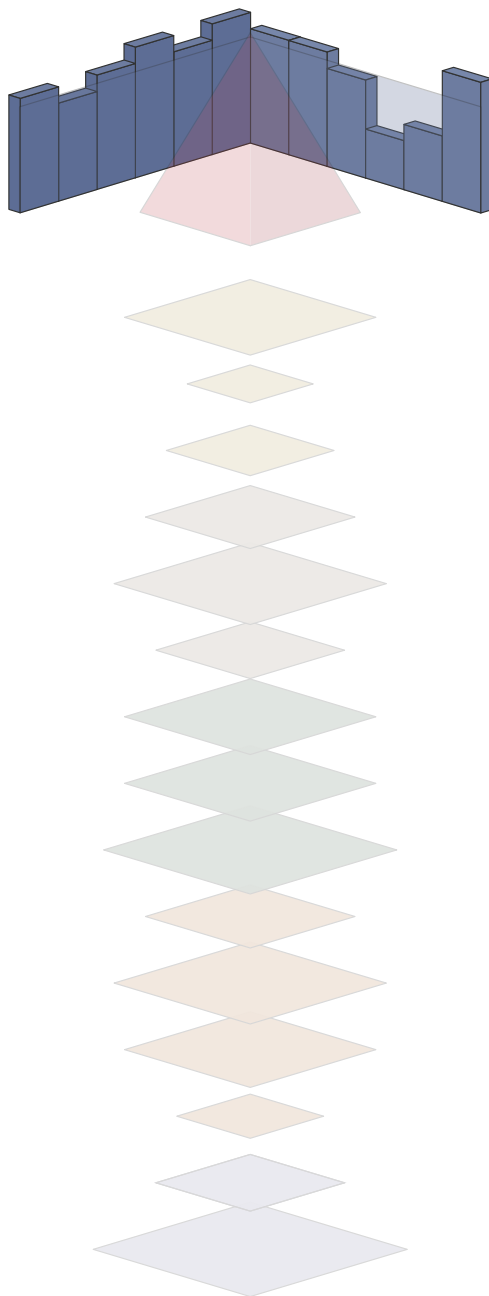
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6
HUMAN SMUGGLING	3
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	4
ARMS TRAFFICKING	5
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.5
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	4.5
FLORA CRIMES	6
FAUNA CRIMES	6
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7
HEROIN TRADE	5
COCAINE TRADE	6.5
CANNABIS TRADE	6
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.5
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	4.5
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.5

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS 5.6**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	3
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.5
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	6.5
FOREIGN ACTORS	6
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6

 **3.25
RESILIENCE SCORE**






3.25 RESILIENCE SCORE

35th of 54 African countries
12th of 15 West African countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	3.5
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	3
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	3.5
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	4
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	3.5
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3.5
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	3.5
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	3
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	1.5
PREVENTION	2
NON-STATE ACTORS	4



5.5 CRIMINALITY SCORE

 CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.4
 CRIMINAL ACTORS	5.6



CRIMINALITY

Criminal Markets

PEOPLE

Liberia functions as a source and destination country for human trafficking, with a significant number of victims being exploited within its borders. Forced labour and sex trafficking are widespread, with victims often subjected to domestic servitude, forced begging and labour in industries such as street vending, mining, and rubber plantations. While some trafficking activities involve organized agents, the overall network appears to be more opportunistic than coordinated. Economic hardship and the lack of birth registrations contribute to the vulnerability of potential victims. Liberia also serves as a transit hub for human trafficking, mainly owing to the increase in ungoverned spaces and weak detection capabilities at entry points. Instances of trafficking involving fraudulent job recruitment schemes and forced marriages have been reported, but few cases result in persecution.

Human smuggling in Liberia is characterized as low-level, low-profit, and relatively non-violent thanks to the country's membership in the Economic Community of West African States, which allows for freedom of movement across borders. However, Liberia's permeable and poorly guarded borders, combined with relaxed formal checks at well-manned border posts, enable smuggling activities. Many Liberians trying to cross into Niger end up stranded in the Sahara Desert, and, the arrival of Ivorian refugees has increased exposure to human smuggling. Although not all smuggling activities are carried out by criminal groups, it is believed that they have contributed to the growth and formation of criminal networks. Smuggling routes established during the civil war era remain active, mostly for small-scale commodities but potentially for transporting people as well. Extortion and protection racketeering are pervasive in many sectors of Liberia and are not only carried out by criminal networks but also by private-sector actors, such as banks.

TRADE

Firearm and ammunition smuggling in Liberia is considered moderate, facilitated by the country's porous borders with Guinea, Sierra Leone, and the Ivory Coast. Smuggling rings, including those operating through the Freeport of Monrovia and receiving shipments from the US, have been identified. Specific communities act as centralized

distribution points for illegal artisanal weapons, while the influx of refugees from neighbouring conflict-affected states contributes to the trafficking of small and light weapons. The increase in crimes such as armed robbery, rape, and murder can be attributed to the country's deteriorating economy, characterized by high unemployment and poverty rates. Consequently, individuals seek self-protection, which drives the expansion of the illegal firearm market.

Counterfeit goods trading has emerged as a significant and growing issue as a result of Liberia's weak regulatory and enforcement infrastructure. It is estimated that more than half of the goods imported into Liberia are counterfeits, including items such as food, cosmetics, alcohol, and pharmaceuticals. The trade of counterfeit goods is common within the domestic market and through illicit border trafficking. Particularly worrisome is the smuggling of counterfeit medicines, primarily from Guinea-Conakry, where Fulani merchants play an influential role in the trafficking. Additionally, the illegal distribution of copyrighted materials contributes to the problem. Corruption adds to the delay in efforts to combat counterfeits, as long queues and inadequate customs and police presence at the borders aid the smuggling of goods.

Illicit trade in excise goods remains a concern in Liberia. The lack of capacity and political will within the Liberian government, which is focused on national reconstruction following the civil war, as well as dealing with the aftermath of the Ebola virus and the pandemic, and the shortcomings in the operations of the Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA) have driven many people to engage in the illicit trade in excise goods as a means of survival.

ENVIRONMENT

Deforestation poses a critical issue in Liberia, as the country faces one of the highest deforestation rates worldwide. Illegal logging and timber smuggling have become a pervasive industry in Liberia, involving government officials and various entities. The timber trafficking 'syndicate' encompasses loggers, ministry officials, customs officials, and shipping companies. There are instances where authorities have awarded illegal timber export permits, enabling the sale of teak logs without facing consequences. Predatory international logging and agricultural firms, coupled with weak domestic legal protections, present huge threats to the remaining forests.



Liberia also grapples with challenges related to the illegal wildlife trade. The country serves as a source and transit point for this illicit activity, with Monrovia acting as a leading trading hub. Widespread hunting of bushmeat, including critically endangered animals, persists throughout the country, driving many species to the brink of extinction. Smuggling routes for pangolins and other wildlife are mostly concentrated in the southeastern region. The smuggling operations benefit from individuals exploiting porous borders and easily bribed border officials. Despite attempts to ban the sale of bushmeat, the trade continues. The pangolin trafficking network in Liberia involves hunters, middlemen, brokers, and traffickers, with Asia serving as a main destination for pangolins. Liberia also has to deal with illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, posing threats to shark and ray populations.

Nonrenewable resource crimes, particularly the smuggling of gold and diamonds, persist in Liberia because of inadequate government regulation and widespread poverty. Most of the mining activities in the country are artisanal and often involve ex-combatants in remote areas. Illicit gold mining is prevalent in River Gee province, while Gbarpolu County is a hotspot for illegal diamond mining. Gold smuggling to Guinea is common, driven by higher prices in the neighbouring country. The illegal diamond trade is dominated by Lebanese families with connections to Belgium and the UAE. Smuggling of gold and diamonds occurs across Liberia's borders, with unchecked flows of foot and vehicle transport. Government oversight in the gold and diamond sectors is weak, marked by nepotism and political indifference. The rise in illicit mining poses risks on account of illegitimate political interference and a lack of enforcement of mining laws.

DRUGS

Liberia acts as a transit hub for heroin trafficking from Latin American and Asian countries to European markets. While the domestic heroin market in Liberia is limited, its ports and territory provide favourable conditions for drug smugglers. Notably, the heroin trade intersects with the mining industry, where some mineworkers are encouraged to use heroin to enhance productivity and work longer hours. On the other hand, the cocaine trade in Liberia has a marked and rising impact on regional drug consumption patterns. Liberia serves as a transit country for cocaine shipments from Latin America to Europe, with criminal networks capitalizing on artisanal landing sites along the coastline. Limited security in these areas opens doors for drug smuggling and the trafficking of other contraband. Concerns have been raised regarding the handling of drug seizures, highlighting mismanagement and mishandling of evidence.

Liberia has also emerged as a prominent producer and consumer of cannabis, with consumption on the rise since the country's civil conflict. Most of the cannabis consumed in Liberia is locally produced, with Bong and Nimba counties identified as major cultivation areas. The availability of marijuana is widespread, and local cultivation is not widely seen as a huge concern among the public. However, there is an influx of marijuana being smuggled into Liberia from Ghana, Sierra Leone, and even the US. Larger cannabis operations are likely connected to established gangs or trafficking networks. The trade between Liberia and Sierra Leone is particularly robust, while routes extending to Guinea and the Sahel region also play an important role.

The use of synthetic drugs, particularly the opioid Tramadol, has been on the rise in Liberia. Alongside Tramadol, non-prescription drugs such as Valium and Diazepam have also been reported. The unregulated pharmaceutical sector allows easy access to these drugs without prescriptions or restrictions. Alarms have been raised about the increasing drug use among Liberia's youth, with Tramadol being mainly consumed by students. The availability of Tramadol in pharmacies with fewer restrictions contributes to its popularity. Authorities have also noted a rise in the prevalence of amphetamine-type stimulants and intravenous drug use in recent years.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes are a growing issue in Liberia, especially as the country recovers from the impact of civil war, the Ebola virus, and the pandemic. The absence of a legal and regulatory framework hampers the collection of comprehensive information on cyber-dependent offenses and convictions. Nevertheless, Liberia experiences a range of cybercrimes, including ransomware, DDoS attacks, botnets and social engineering. Online businesses in the country are particularly susceptible, facing persistent attacks on their websites and fraudulent transactions. The lack of awareness about cybercrime compounds Liberia's vulnerability in the online realm.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes, including corruption, embezzlement, and misuse of funds, are deeply entrenched in Liberia, especially among public officials holding positions of power. Corruption is prevalent as a result of a prevailing culture of impunity and lack of accountability, resulting in financial fraud within the government and judiciary. Despite frequent allegations against senior government officials, successful convictions are rare, often hampered



by suspicious circumstances such as the disappearance or death of defendants or their transfer to new positions without proper investigations. The hawala system, an informal funds transfer system, has become unregulated, enabling criminal networks associated with the Sahel region to move substantial sums of money outside the official banking sector, and fuelling the rise of fraudulent activities.

Criminal Actors

Organized crime in Liberia does not exhibit traditional mafia-style structures and widespread violence despite the country's past civil conflict. Instead, smaller criminal networks, primarily comprising loosely organized youth connected through ethnic, familial, or conflict-era ties, dominate the criminal landscape. These gangs, largely composed of former combatants, engage in street crime in urban areas. While some gangs are opportunistic and less organized, others are smaller, more focused, and receive support from state actors. The operational structure of Liberian gangs, influenced by traditional West African criminal networks and command structures developed during the civil war, remains unclear. Gang activities, centered mainly in urban areas, include armed robbery and drug distribution, and gangs are often well-armed and prone to violence. The crime situation in Liberia has worsened during the pandemic, and the country experiences high levels of criminality attributed to a culture of impunity, drug abuse, and high unemployment. There has been an uptick in violent robberies, non-violent crimes, and home invasions, typically perpetrated by young male assailants.

Regarding state-embedded actors, corruption largely permeates different levels of government in Liberia, eroding public trust in state institutions. This form of criminality differs from, but can intersect with, the illicit activities of criminal networks involved in trafficking and smuggling. The current administration has witnessed a rise in corruption within the private sector, with inexperienced senior officials commonly soliciting bribes. The government has shown little commitment to seriously address the issue, leaving corruption largely unchecked. In relation to private sector actors, they mostly operate through opaque and unlicensed money exchange bureaus and by expediting the registration of international ships, intended for trade-based money laundering purposes because of Liberia's unregulated frameworks.

Foreign actors play a heavy role in transnational organized crime networks in Liberia, often with the assistance of individuals within and outside the government. These foreign actors include Guinean and Mandingo family networks engaged in legitimate businesses but also involved in smuggling and money laundering. There are also Liberian-based networks with international criminal elements, particularly from Nigeria, mixed up in ambitious criminal activities such as bank robberies. Lebanese and Indian nationals, mostly engaged in legitimate businesses, may also manipulate or subvert the law for their own gain, potentially engaging in illicit activities. Additionally, there are cases of forced labour exploitation by Chinese-owned enterprises and instances of sexual exploitation of children by foreign nationals in Monrovia. While Liberian criminal gangs are predominantly composed of Liberians, foreign actors closely follow. In recent years, terrorist activities by transnational organizations have escalated.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Addressing criminal networks and organized crime is not prioritized on the government's agenda, as the country is still grappling with the aftermath of the Ebola outbreak and limited resources. The political landscape is tarnished by incidents of violence against opposition leaders and reports of fraud during elections. The government's lack of political will to prosecute financial crimes, suppress corruption reports, and undermine integrity institutions, contributes to an enabling environment for organized

crime in Liberia. Corruption remains rife, affecting various sectors of society and the government. The government has received criticism for appointing politically aligned individuals to key positions, which undermines accountability institutions and weakens their effectiveness. As a result, there is a lack of confidence in the government and a worsening perception of corruption in the country. Despite having legal frameworks in place for transparency and access to information, there are setbacks in their practical implementation.



Liberia has taken steps to align its laws with international conventions and protocols to combat organized crime, including drug control and human trafficking. However, there are still outstanding treaties and conventions that Liberia has yet to ratify, and the effective implementation of legal frameworks remains a difficult task. Additionally, there are inconsistencies between Liberia's legal frameworks and international instruments regarding human smuggling and human rights. International cooperation often relies on donor support, and the legislation and ratification processes are tied to accessing funds from the international community. However, despite the challenges, there are some efforts to reform laws and policies relevant to the control of trafficking and other organized crime.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Liberia faces formidable challenges attributed to capacity gaps and corruption. Insufficient numbers of prosecutors, public defenders, and judges, coupled with overloaded court dockets, contribute to slow progress in court cases. Many Liberians lack trust in the formal legal system and instead seek justice outside of it, believing that pursuing cases through formal channels would require costly bribes at various levels. Additionally, the government has failed to comply with the law prohibiting arbitrary arrest and detention, as magistrates have issued unilateral writs of arrest, and arrests have been made without prior judicial authorization. Insufficient public defenders and prosecutors hinder access to justice, with some jurisdictions lacking these essential roles. The pre-trial detention rate is high, and overcrowding, lack of government support, and insufficient medical care have resulted in deaths in prisons. The bail system is inefficient and susceptible to corruption, with reports of judges using the possibility of bail as a means to solicit bribes.

Liberia's law enforcement system faces numerous obstacles that curtail its effectiveness. With limited resources and coverage mainly concentrated in Monrovia, the police struggle to maintain nationwide law enforcement and security functions. Criminal complicity, including bribery and corruption, further compromises the system's integrity and erodes public trust. Despite improvements in certain law enforcement and security agencies, the overall capacity to respond to serious crimes remains limited. In the realm of combating human trafficking, Liberia has experienced a decline in investigated cases and prosecutions. The socio-economic implications of the pandemic have exacerbated these challenges, with resource limitations hindering victim identification and the initiation of investigations.

Liberia's borders are highly vulnerable to organized crime, with only a fraction of the entry points having a security presence. The country's permeable border controls, limited law enforcement capacity, and proximity to major drug transit routes contribute to an intensified flow of illicit drugs into and through Liberia. Attempts to manage the borders were temporarily increased following the military coup in Guinea, with the executive ordering a heightened presence of national security forces along the border to protect Liberia's territorial integrity and manage potential refugee influx from Guinea. However, sustaining the capacity to safeguard the borders remains a problem as border patrol vehicles and motorbikes are often in disrepair or lack fuel for routine patrols. This situation creates an open space for transnational criminals to engage in illegal activities. Reports indicate that some Liberian border control officers also engage in corrupt practices, such as soliciting bribes from travellers at police checkpoints, highlighting the decreased capacity of law enforcement agencies to implement robust border surveillance.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Liberia battles to combat money laundering and illicit financial activities. Despite efforts to strengthen the anti-money laundering (AML) regime, enforcement and compliance remain weak. The Central Bank of Liberia has conducted AML training and examinations but struggles to ensure robust enforcement. While interagency coordination has improved, actionable financial intelligence and systematic investigations leading to convictions are lacking. The Financial Intelligence Unit suffers from institutional turmoil and a lack of necessary equipment and capacity for effective financial intelligence analysis. Corruption, political interference, and limited resources further prevent money laundering investigations and financial transparency. Financial institutions have a constrained ability to detect money laundering and weak financial controls and are exposed to the risks of trade-based money laundering through registered international ships.

Liberia, being a low-income country dependent on foreign assistance and remittances, possesses abundant natural resources such as minerals, forests, and favourable agricultural conditions. Its economy relies on exports of iron ore, rubber, diamonds, and gold, with emerging products such as palm oil and cocoa. However, the economic regulatory environment in Liberia faces hurdles, including issues related to money laundering, crime, corruption, and human trafficking, which are linked to drug consumption and youth idleness. The prevalence of informal practices and bribery undermines the capacity



of formal regulations, discouraging legitimate businesses, particularly those adhering to anti-corruption legislation and transparent reporting standards. Liberia's ranking as one of the most secretive jurisdictions globally highlights the weak monitoring regulations that have facilitated its status as a tax haven, particularly in the shipping sector. Regulatory bodies in Liberia are plagued by weaknesses and corruption, with regulators often colluding with business owners to evade regulations in exchange for kickbacks. Economic conditions in Liberia have deteriorated, and there is heightened distrust towards the government following the pandemic.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The support for trafficking victims and witnesses in Liberia encounters notable difficulties because of limited awareness, inadequate resources, and insufficient training among authorities. Many trafficking victims go unrecognized, and there is a lack of training on standard operating procedures and referral mechanisms for relevant personnel. Resource constraints hamper the provision of comprehensive services, and there is no formal policy for offering alternatives or financial assistance to victims. Shelters are scarce, ill-equipped, and fail to meet basic needs, particularly for male victims and those with disabilities. While attempts have been made to raise awareness of sexual and gender-based violence crimes and provide support, overall assistance for victims of organized crime, including drug treatment centres, remains inadequate. Witness protection measures are limited and short-term, and the pandemic has affected

reporting and access to justice. Additionally, marginalized groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, encounter additional obstacles in reporting crimes due to social stigma and fear of police abuse.

Liberia's approach to crime prevention has predominantly been reactive rather than proactive, relying on external assistance for major criminal cases. Efforts to combat illicit drug trafficking and transnational organized crime have received support from international organizations. However, the government's own preventive actions are limited, and the pandemic has further delayed their effective implementation of prevention programs.

Liberia's civil society plays a crucial role in advocating for human rights, security sector reform, governance, and accountability. The country boasts a robust network of civil society organizations supported by international partners to enhance their capacity and advocacy initiatives. However, certain groups, specifically those focused on LGBTQ+ issues, operate cautiously because of fear of reprisal. In recent years, civil society organizations have participated in demonstrations and policy monitoring. Journalists in Liberia face significant hardships, with reports of attacks, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation. While there has been some improvement in press freedom, journalists continue to be targeted, particularly when covering sensitive topics like female genital mutilation. The lack of accountability for these attacks and the absence of protective measures undermine the work of non-state actors.

