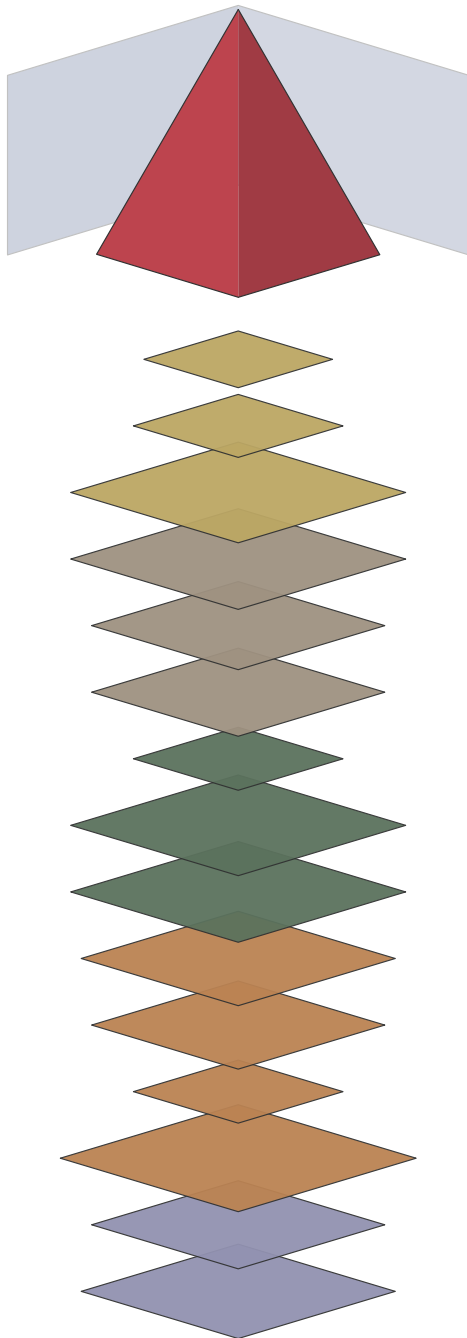




# SOUTH AFRICA



**7.18**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

3<sup>rd</sup> of 54 African countries  
1<sup>st</sup> of 13 Southern African countries



**CRIMINAL MARKETS 6.87**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	4.5
HUMAN SMUGGLING	5
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	8
ARMS TRAFFICKING	8
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	7
FLORA CRIMES	5
FAUNA CRIMES	8
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	8
HEROIN TRADE	7.5
COCAINE TRADE	7
CANNABIS TRADE	5
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	8.5
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.5



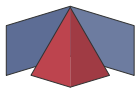
**CRIMINAL ACTORS 7.5**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	7.5
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	8
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.5
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.5

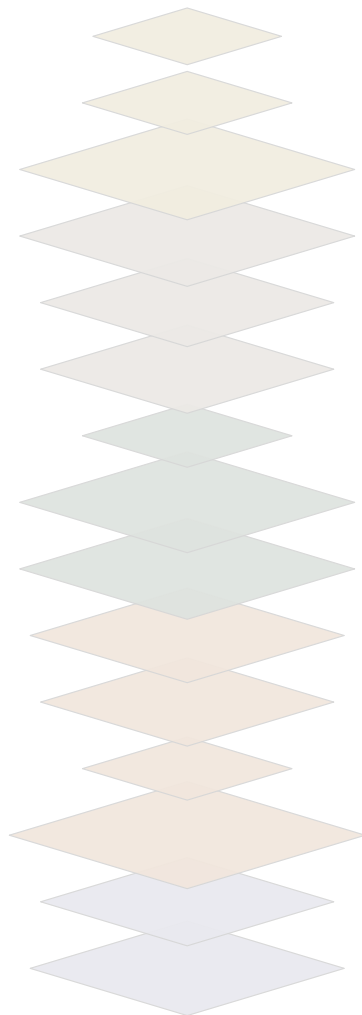
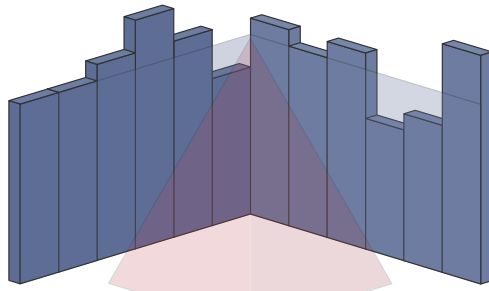


**5.63**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**





# SOUTH AFRICA



5.63

## RESILIENCE SCORE

4<sup>th</sup> of 54 African countries  
1<sup>st</sup> of 13 Southern African countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.5
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	5.5
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	6
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	7
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	6
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.5
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	6
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	5.5
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	6
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4
PREVENTION	4.5
NON-STATE ACTORS	7



7.18

## CRIMINALITY SCORE



CRIMINAL MARKETS **6.87**



CRIMINAL ACTORS **7.5**



# CRIMINALITY

## Criminal Markets

### PEOPLE

South Africa serves as both a source and destination country for human trafficking, although the market is not particularly pervasive in the country. Various forms of trafficking occur, including sex trafficking, child labour, domestic servitude, organ smuggling, child-brides, illegal child adoptions, debt-bondage, forced surrogacy and the use of body parts for muti, a form of human sacrifice practiced by some African tribes. Labour exploitation, particularly in the agricultural sector, is a concerning problem. Labour exploitation is becoming more significant as a threat than sex trafficking, with false job opportunities identified as the most common method of trafficking. Criminal syndicates are increasingly organized, and trafficking along the southern migration route is increasing. Corruption, the authorities' lack of willingness to investigate the crime and the perception that human trafficking is mainly sexual exploitation remain significant challenges for the country. Many victims are unlikely to report exploitation due to conflict between foreign and local workers.

Despite being an active market, human smuggling has significantly less reach in South Africa than in other African countries. Nevertheless, it is a breeding ground for corruption, primarily related to the movement of foreign nationals using bribes instead of valid passports. Professional criminal networks run this market, making it highly organized and cash-based. However, the government often misidentifies human trafficking as human smuggling crimes, making it difficult to differentiate between these activities and resulting in a lack of specific information about them. Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Lesotho are the primary sources of smuggled individuals to South Africa. The southward route is the most used by people from the Horn of Africa to reach Southern Africa due to the region's attractiveness as an oil- and mineral-rich area. The smuggling of undocumented foreign nationals into South Africa often takes place on buses crossing the border, a practice in which South African police and immigrations authorities are often complicit. Human smugglers use violence and abduction to extort money from victims' families, capitalizing on their vulnerability during transit.

Extortion and protection racketeering have become prevalent criminal practices in South Africa, affecting

diverse groups of individuals and organizations. These practices impact informal businesses, residents in poorer communities, mining companies and the transport industry. Some extortion networks in Gauteng have rebranded themselves as legal security companies, but they often use violence and illegal methods to achieve their objectives. Nightlife extortion networks in Cape Town have also expanded to target cafes, restaurants and luxury apartments, while local business forums, otherwise known as the 'construction mafia', in KwaZulu-Natal have invaded construction sites, demanding money or a stake in projects. Criminal syndicates have also found new ways to enrich themselves, such as through extortion rackets targeting small businesses and construction companies in Cape Town. Kidnapping for ransom and extortion has become an established and lucrative criminal practice in South Africa.

### TRADE

South Africa is grappling with a significant issue of arms trafficking, with millions of illegal firearms in circulation, many of which originate from domestic sources such as firearms stolen from licensed civilian owners, or 'lost' or stolen from government departments. The absence of effective control over police-issued firearms, as well as firearms in police evidence stores and armories, has allowed organized criminals to obtain weapons from these governmental facilities. The widespread availability of illegal firearms has given more power to organized criminal groups and networks, thereby undermining the state's ability to address the problem. Over the past two decades, the use of firearms in targeted killings has increased, reflecting the increasing professionalization of criminal services, where armed violence is just another illicit commodity for sale. Moreover, South Africa is a significant arms sponsor, and its local arms industry supplies countries with questionable human rights records and/or links to war crimes.

Counterfeit goods have also become a significant problem in South Africa, with footwear, clothing, leather goods, electrical equipment, watches, medical equipment, perfumes, toys, jewellery and pharmaceuticals among the most counterfeited goods. While customs officials are effective at detecting and detaining containers and small consignments of counterfeit goods at various ports of entry, many of these goods are still imported from China and other countries, with some slipping through undetected. The manufacturing activities in the



counterfeit industry have become more sophisticated, with syndicates sourcing raw materials from various countries and outsourcing packaging requirements to cheap suppliers. Counterfeit goods manufacturing facilities have expanded significantly across the country in recent years.

The prevalence of illicit trade in excise goods in South Africa also remains problematic, with the ban on alcohol and cigarettes during the COVID-19 pandemic leading to weak enforcement and the legal industry flooding the market with untaxed and illegal products. More than a year and a half after the ban was lifted, illicit tobacco still accounts for over half of the total market in South Africa. However, the distinction between trade in counterfeit goods and illicit trade in excise goods remains blurred in the country.

## ENVIRONMENT

Although South Africa is considered a low-risk area for illegal logging, this crime is a growing issue. The country is a consumer of illegal timber and other flora products from other southern African countries. The illegal trade of cycads generates significant profits, with some individual specimens selling for hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars on the international market. Incidents of violence between rangers and poachers have occurred, with poachers destroying wild plant specimens to increase their value and reduce trading competition. In recent years, there have been cases of illegal possession of succulent plants, with the poaching of conophytum species more prevalent than illegal logging. Plant crime is rarely prosecuted, and there is little funding devoted to combatting it.

South Africa is primarily a source country for wildlife crime, with the illegal wildlife trade involving the poaching of high-value species such as rhino, lion and elephant from the Kruger National Park, as well as the illegal trade of animal parts to external markets, mainly in Asia. The number of rhinos killed across South Africa has largely been declining since 2014. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the trend has slightly reversed, with more cases of rhino poaching in 2021 and 2022 compared to 2020. On the other hand, illegal killings of elephants have been consistently declining since 2015, indicating that there is no large-scale elephant poaching networks in the country. The illicit abalone economy in the Western Cape province is controlled by Chinese criminal groups in alliance with South African gangs. Abalone poaching is deeply entrenched in the Cape underworld, with links to violence, gun running and the drug trade. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is also pervasive

in South Africa, with the main species targeted being crayfish and sharks. These activities are driven by a demand primarily from the Chinese market, with most of the products ending up in Hong Kong.

The illegal trade of non-renewable resources, particularly gold, diamonds and copper, is rampant in South Africa. The illegal trade of chrome and platinum group metals also takes place, with enforcement officials tracing the metals through Mozambique to Switzerland, Canada and China. The illegal gold mining activities run by crime syndicates composed of illegal miners, known as zama zamas, dominate the illicit market. Tens of thousands of these illegal miners operate in abandoned mines or in working mines entering through abandoned shafts. Illegal mining is extremely dangerous, with high risks of injuries, deaths and gang violence. Illegal gold is laundered into formal supply chains in South Africa, and illegally produced gold is melted down into doré bars consistent with the purity of jewellery. Second-hand jewellery and registered precious metals dealers play a greater role in financing the illegal activity than scrap metal dealers. Once laundered, gold is primarily exported to the UAE, Switzerland and, to a lesser extent, India and China. The theft of copper has also escalated to unprecedented levels in South Africa.

## DRUGS

The heroin trade generates billions of rand in annual revenue in South Africa, making it a significant commodity. It has also led to the country becoming one of the largest heroin consumer markets on the continent, with the market being controlled by violent gangs in major cities. These organized criminal groups originate in South Africa and both southern and West Africa, with direct links to South Asian networks. In Durban, drug gangs have begun selling cheap heroin packed into pharmaceutical-style capsules, known on the street as 'caps'. South Africa has become a critical node in international Afghan-produced heroin smuggling rings to Europe, Africa and Australia, and sometimes for Pakistani or Iranian heroin. The drug is trafficked along what is referred to as the 'southern' or the 'maritime route' from the southern coasts of Pakistan and Iran by boat through the Indian Ocean.

South Africa has also become a key player in the global cocaine trade, with a growing domestic market and connections to Europe, Hong Kong and Australia. Most of the cocaine comes in shipping containers from Brazil and then transits through South Africa to other destinations. The country's high-level police corruption, excellent transport infrastructure and resource shortages in drug control facilitate the transit of the drug. South Africa also



has the highest prevalence of cocaine consumption in Africa, with international, regional and domestic groups involved in its distribution.

In contrast to cocaine and heroin, cannabis is the most widely used drug in South Africa, but the trade is moderate compared to other high-prevalence consumer countries on the continent. Domestic and regional organized criminal groups, in conjunction with corrupted state security officials, facilitate the trade of cannabis by air, land and sea routes. However, the illegal movement and sale of cannabis have not generally been characterized by violence, and South Africa has seen a dramatic reduction in cannabis seizures. Cannabis for local consumption is produced and grown in South Africa predominantly in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, as well as in neighbouring countries such as Lesotho, Swaziland and Malawi. Due to legalization, there have been shifts in the country's production, with less demand for low-grade cannabis.

Regarding synthetic drugs, South Africa has become a new trafficking route for methamphetamine to East Asia. While the manufacture of the drug exists in South Africa, the country is also a transit hub for methamphetamine sourced from Nigeria and Western Asia. Recent seizures suggest that there is an influx of Afghan methamphetamine being trafficked into Africa through South Africa, which is also a major consumer market for the drug. Gang distribution and control of the 'tik' market are present in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay. Estimated methamphetamine use levels in some areas of the country are among the highest reported in the world, suggesting that the number of users may be far higher than previously thought. Chinese syndicates appear to be providing chemical precursors for West African and Nigerian methamphetamine production and distribution syndicates in South Africa. South African crime groups have reportedly exchanged abalone catches for methamphetamine, forging cash-free trade relationships with Cape gangs that control the local drug market. Although the Mandrax market is not as lucrative as other drugs, it is still popular in South Africa, with India and China being the suspected sources of precursors.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

South Africa is currently facing a surge in cybercrime, with local actors perpetrating attacks against victims around the world. Over recent years, South Africa has seen the highest number of threat detections on the continent, with email threats being the most common, followed by ransomware and business email compromise. Cybercrime increased in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic, as more people work remotely and shop

online, providing more opportunities for cybercriminals. Hackers are able to shut down key infrastructure and services, defraud the government and steal money and data from corporations and individuals. Due to a general lack of expertise and capacity in government agencies, insufficient cyber defenses in the public and private spheres, and a lack of awareness of online risks among the public, the country has been particularly impacted by ransomware attacks targeting critical infrastructure, with it being the worst affected country on the continent in this regard.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

South Africa is grappling with various financial crimes such as fraud, tax evasion, embezzlement, fund misappropriation, illicit financial flows and robbery. Among these, fraud is a primary concern, with a significant number of South Africans falling prey to digital fraudsters. Financial institutions in the country are exposed to various types of financial frauds, and cybercriminals are specifically targeting the well-developed financial infrastructure of South Africa, making it an attractive destination for financial crimes. Additionally, mobile payment methods have become a prime target for cyber-enabled fraud, and the use of third-party applications has surged by almost double. South Africa is also one of the top countries globally where people are most likely to fall victim to online romance scams, with suspects exploiting social media and dating sites to find and connect with their targets. Fraud detection and prevention approaches are weak in the country, making it easier for perpetrators to operate.

## Criminal Actors

South Africa is plagued by quasi-criminal style networks or syndicates that have transnational connections and engage in various criminal activities such as drugs, fraud, stock theft and armed robberies. The criminal economy is fuelled largely by networks with corrupt relationships. Organized criminal activities include drug trafficking, hits on armoured vehicles transporting cash, known as cash-in-transit operations, poaching syndicates, robbery, cell phone theft, metal dealers and cable thefts. Other crimes, such as vehicle hijackings, house robberies and business robberies as well as kidnapping for ransom or extortion, are also criminal activities carried out by such networks. South Africa has a long history of corruption between state actors and criminal organizations, leading to widespread mistrust in the government and law enforcement. Corruption is pervasive across different state departments, including senior levels within prosecution and prison services. The political system has been



accused of being a kleptocracy, damaging the image of the South African police and leading to a significant drop in trust from the public.

Mafia-style groups are well-armed, and their operations are associated with a high level of violence. These groups typically emerge in geographically and topographically defined contexts before spreading more widely after achieving success. While gangs are prominent in Cape Town and the Western Cape, they can also be found in pockets in Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela Bay and to a lesser extent Durban. Different cost-benefit calculations are at play: in the Western Cape, gangs tend to amplify their notoriety by cultivating a public image, while Johannesburg gangs avoid publicity to evade law enforcement attention and prevent disruptions to their operations. The construction mafia has also engaged in violent disruptions of construction sites and extortion of protection fees from businesses. Certain business forum groups have clear links to political players, with some accused of acting as surrogates for certain politicians.

Foreign criminal actors, particularly from West Africa, South America, China, Pakistan, Israel and southern and eastern European nations, have a strong presence

in South African criminal markets, especially in major cities. Rather than controlling specific markets, these foreign actors play roles as 'interfaces', exerting moderate to substantial degrees of economic and financial power. South Africa is also considered a haven for criminal mafias and bosses to launder money and establish companies for money laundering activities. The largest foreign groups present in the country are involved in various criminal activities such as fraud, drug trafficking, firearm smuggling, extortion, kidnapping, money laundering, prostitution, illegal gambling and tax evasion. Private sector actors have also been involved in various illicit activities, including money laundering, bribery and misappropriation of state funds. Politicians have used their positions to form corrupt relationships with both local and international private sector entities. Through the appointment of supporters to critical criminal justice, revenue service and intelligence institutions, private entities have been allowed to exert illegitimate influence over the government and use public resources for personal gain. Former executives and senior managers have been involved in complex fraud schemes for decades before being detected by authorities.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

South Africa's overall trend over the last years is one of worsening instability. The country's economic crisis has shaken the foundations of its system of governance, with fewer public contracts available and less money for social programmes. In addition, the main political party has experienced a decline in popularity, leading to a political stalemate in the country. Moreover, scandals that have recently come to light have resulted in decreasing the credibility and reputation of President Cyril Ramaphosa. South Africa has a high level of corruption in its public sector, with maladministration, procurement corruption and abuse of authority being the most common forms. The sectors that account for the most corruption reports are the police, schools and health-related corruption. While the country has comprehensive anti-corruption laws and agencies, enforcement has historically been inadequate, with many current and former government officials avoiding prosecution. Government contracts have been awarded without transparency and competitive bidding, leading to frustration among some circles of government and

the broader community about the government's lack of commitment and coordination in tackling corruption. The ruling party has used its majority in parliament to block crucial legislative oversight investigations, protecting its representatives from corruption inquiries.

South Africa has ratified all relevant international instruments and standards for combatting organized crime, and extradition treaties are in place with several countries. While the country has strong anti-organized crime legislation and legal frameworks, the implementation is hindered by a lack of political will and state capacities. There is no clear national strategy against organized crime, despite strategies in place against environmental trafficking and criminal gangs. The Prevention of Organized Crime Act, the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act and the Cybercrimes Act were introduced in recent years to combat organized crime, money laundering, cybercrimes and corrupt activities. However, their effective implementation has been hindered by the weakening of state institutions forming part of the criminal justice system.





## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

South Africa's judicial system is generally independent and free from corruption although, due to shortages of judicial staff and lack of financial resources, defendants' due process rights, such as the right to a timely trial and state-funded legal counsel, are being undermined. While the establishment of an investigative directorate is seen as a positive move, the prosecuting authority has been undermined in recent years. The country's prisons are plagued by overcrowding and inhumane conditions. Overcrowding has led to an increase in gang violence, making life difficult for non-gang members. The inhumane conditions in prisons are characterized by humiliation, beatings, electric shocks and even torture. Prisoners often face abuse, and staff members are not safe either, with several cases of staff members being accosted, assaulted, raped or killed by inmates.

The national police service has faced issues related to management, internal fighting, corruption and police brutality. Senior police officials have been arrested for fraud, corruption, theft and money laundering, and some Metropolitan Police departments have faced allegations of corruption. The police have limited capacity to bring high-level organized crime figures to trial, and torture and use of excessive force during arrest, interrogation and detention are commonly reported. Law enforcement officials are also reported to be involved in certain criminal markets, especially in trafficking activities.

South Africa's extensive coastline, multiple ports of entry and several land border control points make it an attractive route for illicit trafficking. Criminal networks often use illegal crossings along the wide borders with Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Eswatini to smuggle people or send shipments of drugs, people and illegal poaching destined for Europe, Asia and Australia. In response to rising xenophobic sentiment caused by the inflow of foreign nationals looking for opportunities in South Africa, the government has created the Border Management Authority to control migration. Recent cyber-attacks on the country's critical infrastructure demonstrate the need for better cyber threat detection and prevention.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Overall, South Africa has weak resilience to money laundering and terrorist financing. Law enforcement agencies lack the skills and resources to investigate and prosecute money laundering or terrorist financing proactively. Illicit money from the rest of Africa finds its way into South Africa, and the country's advanced

economy and sophisticated financial infrastructure make it a prime spot for foreign proceeds of crime on the continent. The use of hard cash and gold in the illicit market is also a concern, with gold being laundered through second-hand scrap metal dealers and jewellers, and then exported or smuggled out of the country.

South Africa has a well-regulated formal market, although there is a significant informal economy, and some sectors show evidence of mafia-style control and violence. However, the country's economy is the most advanced and broad-based on the African continent, with stable institutions, a mature financial and services sector, and good infrastructure. Nonetheless, the country faces several economic challenges, including creating policy certainty, reinforcing regulatory oversight, reducing corruption and violent crime, improving infrastructure and government service delivery, and reducing unemployment. Despite these challenges, South Africa remains one of the preferred destinations in Africa for investment. It has a dynamic business community that is highly market-oriented and serves as a driver of economic growth.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Accessing effective state services for victims of modern slavery and drug users in South Africa is challenging due to corruption within the criminal justice sector, fear of witness reprisals and insufficient government support. While the government has implemented a more robust framework to provide support for victims of modern slavery, victim identification and protection efforts are mixed. NGOs report that official statistics do not reflect the scope of trafficking, and most victim support services are run by NGOs that face the threat of closure due to inadequate funding.

The implementation of prevention strategies across various sectors in South Africa lacks resources and effectiveness. However, the government has had success in preventing the spread of HIV through education and awareness campaigns. Some crime prevention programmes have shown progress in promoting collaboration between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and elevating the urban safety agenda. Although there have been some positive steps taken, these have not been sufficient to keep up with the challenges and many sectors continue to be under-resourced and lack effective leadership. Low trust in the police and weak protection measures for whistleblowers, especially in high-profile corruption cases, have also led to a decrease in denunciation rates throughout the country.



South Africa has a well-funded civil society, but NGOs face challenges such as sectoral fragmentation and government mistrust, while activists encounter threats of violence and even physical attacks. The country has a free and active media, but journalists are subjected to harassment, intimidation and surveillance by the state security agency. The government has also limited coverage of certain subjects involving the ruling party and government finances. Some journalists have been fired upon while covering lockdown measures and a community newspaper editor fled abroad after being threatened by the police for covering a lockdown story – a situation unprecedented for South African journalists since the end of apartheid. Despite these issues, the country has an established investigative journalism culture, with lawmakers accepting input from NGOs on pending legislation. Overall, South Africa is considered a free state.

