Liberia is ranked 30th in the Index, scoring marginally better than the continental average for criminality.

Unlike many African countries, the criminal markets in Liberia are more pervasive than criminal actors are influential. Indeed, many criminal markets in the country have a significant influence, none more so than the environmental-crime markets, with both illicit flora and non-renewables scoring 7, owing largely to illegal deforestation, and rampant diamond and gold smuggling. The high levels of cannabis production and consumption are also a worrying sign for Liberia, as is the arms trafficking market. Criminal networks, armed and violent, and state-embedded actors were judged as the most established and pervasive criminal actors, scoring 5.5 and 6, respectively.

With regard to resilience, while Liberia’s score is level with the continental average, most of the indicators score between just 2.5 and 4.5. This is because, although civil-society organisations play an active and positive role in the country, and there are high levels of international cooperation, significant issues remain in the fight against organised crime. Notably, high levels of corruption and insufficient funding have limited the effectiveness of Liberian institutions in combating organised crime, while support provided to victims and witnesses is non-existent.
Criminal Markets

The discrepancy between Liberia's score for criminal markets and criminal actors is the greatest of all the African countries; it is driven by the large number of criminal markets that occur in the country. Indeed, only two criminal markets in Liberia record scores of lower than 5. Some of the most pervasive illicit economies in the country are those involving environmental crime. Deforestation in Liberia is currently a major problem. Liberia’s forests are under serious threat due to massive illegal logging activities occurring throughout its rainforests. A report released by Global Witness in 2018 alleges that Liberia's forestry laws are being hijacked by logging companies.

Furthermore, Liberia is a gold-producing country, and gold is known to be smuggled out of the country. The industry provides a livelihood for many and involves both low-level criminals and the country’s elite. While a
large portion of the country is impacted by the industry, violence does not seem to be a defining feature of this illicit market. The volumes involved in the illegal gold industry are not very large in absolute terms compared to other countries, but are still fairly significant given the size of the country. The country’s diamond industry shares similar features. At present, most mineral extraction in Liberia is artisanal, often conducted by ex-combatants in remote areas. In some cases, command structures from the civil war are maintained in mining regions. The financial structures and relationships in the Mano River artisanal and small-scale mining sector mean that any gangs in the hinterland, like the miners themselves, are paid and controlled by the buyers, often foreign nationals, in the major cities.

Liberia is one of the primary origin countries in the illegal pangolin trade, but the country is also implicated in the illegal trade of a number of other wildlife species. For many years, Liberia’s primates have been pushed to the verge of extinction as a result of the illegal bushmeat trade and in 2017, commercial bushmeat traders have resurfaced in the Sapo National Park, the country’s largest protected area of rainforest. Moreover, Liberia is acutely vulnerable to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Sharks and rays are threatened by both industrial and small-scale traditional fishing fleets, and illegal fishing practices are particularly damaging to their populations.

Various drugs markets are also well established in Liberia, with the country acting primarily as a transit state for heroin and cocaine, meanwhile, the country a significant consumer market for cannabis. While Liberia has a limited domestic market for heroin, the country continues to be an important hub for heroin coming from Latin American and Asian producer countries destined for European markets. The Liberian Drugs Enforcement Agency has indicated that Liberia has been a trans-shipment point for narcotics headed from the Americas to Europe for almost two decades. Although the country has a comparatively limited domestic market, it is an important hub for West African cocaine trafficking, and the trade has had a significant impact on regional drug-consumption habits, driving a rise in crack cocaine consumption. Liberia is also major producer and consumer of cannabis, with consumption increasing since the country’s civil conflict. Most of the cannabis consumed in Liberia is produced domestically, and the larger operations are most likely linked to, or part of, established gangs.

**Criminal Actors**

Compared to other African states, the organised-crime landscape in Liberia is not dominated by any of the four criminal actor types. However, those with the most negative influence with regard to organised crime in the country are state-embedded actors, due to the high level of corruption that is deeply entrenched in the state apparatus.

**Criminal networks.** On the other hand, are the actors responsible for the majority of the criminal operations in the country. Criminal gangs and organised crime in Liberia appear to be composed largely of loosely organised youths, connected through ethnic, familial or conflict-era ties. The typical operational structure of Liberian gangs is unclear, though they are likely to be influenced both by traditional West African criminal networks and through command structures developed by militant groups during the civil war era, which may explain the violent and armed nature of these groups.

**Foreign actors** also play a role in organised crime in Liberia, predominantly in the drugs markets. Established Nigerian criminal networks operate in Liberia, some of which are involved in drug trafficking, and local authorities are aware of the threat and are working with the US to prevent these illicit criminal networks from gaining a stronger foothold. Additionally, there are indications that foreign actors are also involved in illicit trade in diamonds in Sierra Leone and Liberia, money laundering and the drugs trade.
Ranking 27th in Africa, Liberia has average levels of resilience to organised crime compared to the rest of the countries on the continent. While there are only a couple of resilience indicators that are sufficiently effective, most scores for Liberia range between 3 and 4, suggesting significant scope for improvement. Liberia’s president inherits significant challenges from the Sirleaf administration, including the continuing after-effects of a devastating 2014–2016 outbreak of ebola virus disease, which undermined the country’s weak public-health system and economy. This has diverted attention and funding away from organised-crime issues. To compound the issue, corruption remains a big problem in every sphere of the Liberian society, particularly in many sectors of government and within the private sector.

One of the most robust indicators for Liberia’s resilience to organised crime is the country’s levels of international cooperation. Overall, there has been an ongoing effort to reforms laws in order to comply with provisions of some international conventions relevant to the control of organised crime. Liberia has ratified the three main international conventions that aim to control illicit drugs by reducing their supply, in particular through criminal sanctions. Liberia is also a signatory to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

In 2018, Liberia began implementing the Arms Trade Treaty and the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Liberia is a member of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the country’s laws are consistent with UN conventions and ECOWAS protocols on narcotics and psychotropic substances, to which Liberia is a signatory. The Liberia National Commission on Small Arms is currently working with international partners, including the UK, US and ECOWAS, to ensure that they assist with the formulation of policies and appropriate programmes aimed at combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons across the country.

However, the domestic legislative framework, as well as the justice system as a whole, are in need of major improvements in the fight against organised crime. Liberia’s justice system contains severe capacity shortfalls in the form of insufficient prosecutors, public defenders...
and judges, and overloaded court dockets, which all 
contribute to the very slow progression of court cases 
through the formal justice system. The justice system 
is also considered highly vulnerable to corruption and 
many cases are dropped either by police or at the 
magisterial court level through the bribing of officials by 
alleged perpetrators. Liberia’s National Police, its Drug 
Enforcement Agency and its National Security Agency 
have the authority to investigate financial crimes but 
have not been effective in pursuing investigations and 
subsequent prosecutions, due to limited institutional 
capacity and inter-agency cooperation.

Like the majority of African states, Liberia’s victim and 
_witness support_ provision is extremely poor and was 
assessed to be non-existent. Due to a lack of awareness 
of trafficking among authorities and communities, 
as well as insufficient government resources to 
identify trafficking victims, most trafficking victims 
remain unidentified. Despite these shortcomings, the 
government continues to provide no training on human 
trafficking. A draft national referral mechanism to direct 
victims towards services did not receive final approval. 
As a result, the government remains without a formal 
process to refer victims to care, and agencies responsible 
rarely coordinate such efforts.