SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa ranks 10th in the Index for criminality, with high scores for both criminal markets and criminal actors.

Five of the ten illegal markets score poorly, with 7 or above, suggesting a significant negative influence on society. Illicit narcotics markets are pervasive and growing, with local consumption of heroin and synthetic drugs a concern. Experts view illicit mining and the illicit trade in gold (non-renewable-resource crimes), as well as poaching of rhino and abalone (fauna crimes), as areas of major concern that contribute to high scores for the environmental markets. Arms trafficking scores 7, largely because of the significant number of cases of armed violence that take place in South Africa. South Africa also scores poorly for all categories of criminal actors, all of which experts deem to be established and too exert a significant negative influence on society.

In terms of resilience, South Africa scores well, ranking 9th in Africa, with nine of the 12 indicators scoring 6 or above. South Africa’s high resilience score reflects the country’s strong legal and institutional frameworks that are able to effectively respond to the organised-crime threat, despite their erosion in recent years. This suggests a potential capacity for the country to respond to organised crime. The standout feature of South Africa’s resilience to organised crime is the strength of the country’s civil society and non-state actors, which is a key factor in the country’s commendable resilience score. Nevertheless, social protection measures, including support for victims and witnesses of organised crime, are very weak in South Africa, indicating a significant scope for improvement.
Criminal Markets

The most pervasive criminal market in South Africa is in non-renewable-resource crimes, scoring 8 in the Index. This is primarily because of extensive illegal gold mining, which has expanded significantly. A clear distinction has emerged between gangs of miners who work in dangerous conditions and are subject to exploitation, and criminal networks involved in purchasing and trafficking the gold. Many actors are involved in the industry and levels of violence linked to the criminal economy are relatively high.

The poaching and trafficking of rhino horn is the most widely reported and prominent of fauna crimes in South Africa. But there are a wide and growing range of other wildlife trafficking markets, including the illicit trade in ivory and lion bones. Also, poachers have reportedly taken at least 96 million abalone in the past 17 years, leaving the molluscs in danger of extinction. Abalone poaching has a major impact on society. The illegal trade provokes high levels of violence, because of gang activity surrounding the trade, and has led to ‘turf wars’ in the country.
Levels of corruption surrounding the wildlife markets are extremely high. Although many forms of wildlife trafficking are concentrated in specific areas of the country – for example, abalone poaching, which is limited to coastal areas – the effects are felt nationwide. This is due predominantly to the ripple effect these criminal markets have, in addition to extended supply chains and exchanges of goods – for example, the exchange of abalones for drugs.

Arms trafficking in the country is highly prevalent, scoring 7 in the index, which reflects the significant influence of this criminal market. Small and light weapons used by criminal actors in South Africa are usually acquired by diverting state stocks. The country is prone to armed robberies, armed domestic violence and cross-border smuggling of arms to and from neighbouring countries. South Africa is an arms producer, but regulation of the arms trade is implemented effectively.

While some drugs markets, such as the cocaine trade and cannabis trade, have a limited influence on society, the heroin trade and synthetic drugs trade in South Africa have a negative influence on large parts of society. This influence is spreading.

South Africa is both a destination market and transshipment country for heroin from Afghanistan, which arrives by sea and air routes, and indirectly by overland routes through East Africa. The heroin trade has a damaging effect in all major cities, particularly in Cape Town, where gangs use violence to control the market. The physical and IT infrastructure in the country make South Africa an attractive nation for heroin traffickers.

Methamphetamines, notably ‘tik’, to use the local term, are widespread, most prominently in Western Cape province. Social and other costs in affected communities are very high. Gangs use violence to control the distribution of tik where the drug is prevalent, in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay.

Criminal Actors

South Africa is one of only five countries in Africa to score above 6 for all four criminal actor types. Corrupt state-embedded actors at lower and middle levels of the state apparatus are prevalent in nearly all criminal markets, ensuring the protection of criminal actors. Pervasive corruption, even in the most senior positions in the police, prosecution and prison services, hampers the country’s fight against organised crime.

The prevalence and ubiquity of foreign actors in South African criminal markets are among the highest of any country in Africa. South Africa is a prominent settlement destination for foreign criminal actors from across the region and beyond, including European and Asian countries. These criminal actors are concentrated in major cities. None have complete control over specific markets, playing roles more akin to ‘interfaces’. They exert moderate to substantial degrees of economic and financial power in domestic criminal markets, including the environmental crimes and drugs markets.

Quasi-criminal networks – locally termed ‘syndicates’– with significant transnational linkages are pervasive in South Africa. Their activities are associated with moderate to high levels of violence and cover a variety of criminal activities, including drugs, robbery, car hijacking, stock theft, fraud and other white-collar crimes. Criminal networks exert a significant influence over the human smuggling market. They tend to be organised, transactional cash-based networks, but are not violent.

Mafia-style groups in South Africa are among the most influential in Africa. A number of well-armed, highly organised gangs have members concentrated in major cities. High levels of violence are associated with the activities of these gangs.
Despite its poor performance on criminality, South Africa has some of the highest levels of resilience to organised crime in Africa, ranking 9th on the continent. Leadership has been poor on issues relating to organised crime, with the deliberate subversion of entities within the criminal justice system. However, more recent changes suggest a stronger political response to organised crime.

Although corruption is a problem in South Africa, parliament is increasingly holding law enforcement and the judicial system to account. Furthermore, the government has a strong anti-organised crime legislative framework and has introduced specialised strategies to deal with environmental trafficking and gangs.

A sophisticated banking sector, coupled with established systems of reporting through a financial intelligence unit, have been effective in blocking illicit financial flows in South Africa. The formal economy in the country is well regulated.

South Africa has one of the most active civil societies on the continent, which is relatively well funded and resourced at policy and community levels. There is a free and active media, and despite threats being made against journalists and civil society actors, they have significant legal and political space for their work.

Where South Africa has notable deficiencies is with regards to the social protection elements of resilience to organised crime. Prevention measures against organised crime across a number of categories – in particular, environmental crime and gangs – are not well resourced or effectively implemented in many cases. Also, despite the scale of the drug challenge in South Africa, drug users have difficulty accessing effective state services. Most treatment and victim support services are run by civil society, with some also supported by municipal and provincial government bodies.