Southern Africa, comprising 13 countries, was found to be the lowest-scoring region in Africa for criminality, with the regional averages for criminality (4.44), criminal markets (4.05) and criminal actors (4.82) the lowest of the five regions.

Just as the region is the best-performing region with regards to criminality, Southern Africa also has the highest average resilience score on the continent.
In terms of **criminal markets**, the illicit trade in **fauna** scores the highest (5.69), indicating that to be the most pervasive illicit market in the region. This is understandable: the region is home to large concentrations of sought-after mega-fauna and is known for its biodiversity. Following trade in fauna, the **heroin** market was identified as the most pervasive illicit economy in the region (with an average of 4.88). The volume of heroin shipped from Central Asia to this region has increased in recent years, reshaping criminal governance systems and transforming the region into both a significant transit zone and consumption market.1

The illicit trade in **non-renewable resources** (4.46), **flora** (4.19) and the **cannabis** market (4.19) also average relatively high in this region. The region is a source market for a

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number of precious stones (including diamonds, rubies and garnets, among others) and is known for a substantial illicit economy surrounding artisanal gold mining. With destination markets in Asia, experts highlighted the illegal non-renewables market as both resulting in major economic loss for states in the region and as being significantly detrimental to the natural environment, as seen in Mozambique, for example. The region was also identified as a global producer of high-value timber bound for Asia, with illicit logging significantly contributing to deforestation. While cannabis is regularly highlighted as the standout illicit market throughout Africa, the legalisation of the drug in countries in the region, including South Africa and Zimbabwe, drives the regional average down for this market.

Unlike those in the North and East Africa regions, Southern African countries fare comparatively low in terms of exploitative markets: human trafficking averages 4.08; human smuggling 3.12; and arms trafficking 3.88. While experts acknowledged the region’s increasingly important markets for drugs like cocaine (2.50) and synthetic drugs (3.54), these are eclipsed by the heroin and cannabis markets, which average 4.88 and 4.19, respectively.

Criminal Actors

In terms of criminal actors, the region differs from other parts of the continent, with foreign criminal actors assessed as the most influential among criminal groups in the region (5.88), followed by state-embedded actors (5.65) and criminal networks (5.12). The prevalence and ubiquity of foreign criminal actors was regularly described by experts, with varying degrees of control in specific illicit activities, most notably the environmental markets. In this region, mafia-style groups are the least influential of such actors, with a score of 2.62.
Southern African countries were also identified as the highest scoring of all regions in terms of resilience to organised crime, with an average of 4.27 (compared to the continental average of 3.86). Overall, the region was deemed to be relatively strong in a number of legal and criminal-justice areas. Indicators such as judicial system and detention (with a score of 4.27) average the highest on the continent owing to higher levels of independence in regional judiciaries, though capacity limitations were identified. A notable trend in the region is the importance placed on non-state actors, with civil society and the media in the region being well funded and among the most active across Africa, particularly in Mauritius, South Africa and Botswana. Consistent with continental trends, however, both prevention (2.88) and victim and witness support (2.77) score the lowest, compared to continental averages 2.69 and 2.44, respectively.