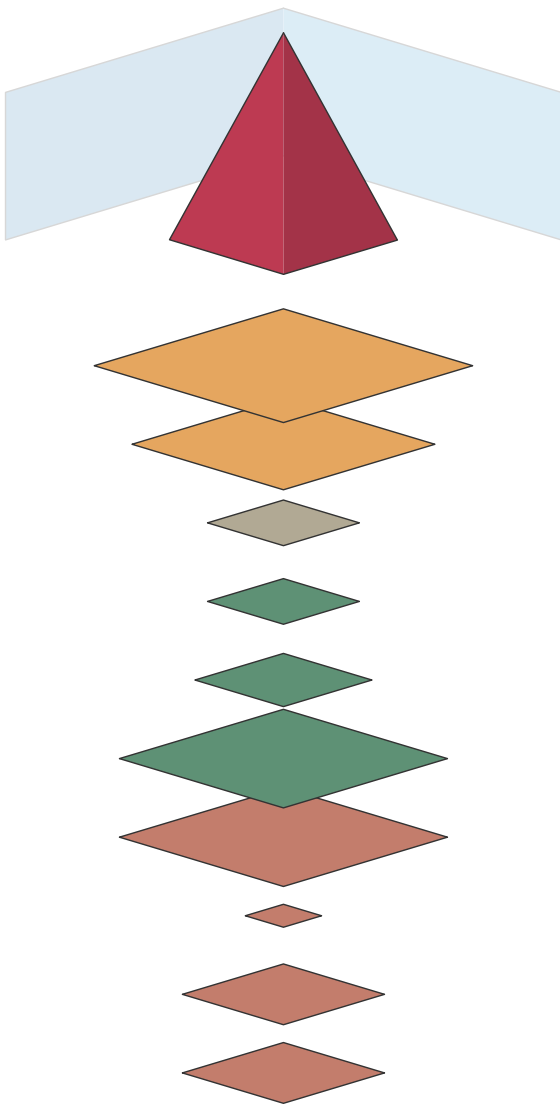


 **UZBEKISTAN**



 **4.96**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

90<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  
28<sup>th</sup> of 46 Asian countries  
4<sup>th</sup> of 8 Central Asian and Caucasian countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **4.55**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	3.00
FLORA CRIMES	3.00
FAUNA CRIMES	3.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	6.50
HEROIN TRADE	6.50
COCAINE TRADE	1.50
CANNABIS TRADE	4.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	4.00

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **5.38**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	4.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.00

 **3.79**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**

142<sup>nd</sup> of 193 countries  
33<sup>rd</sup> of 46 Asian countries  
6<sup>th</sup> of 8 Central Asian and Caucasian countries

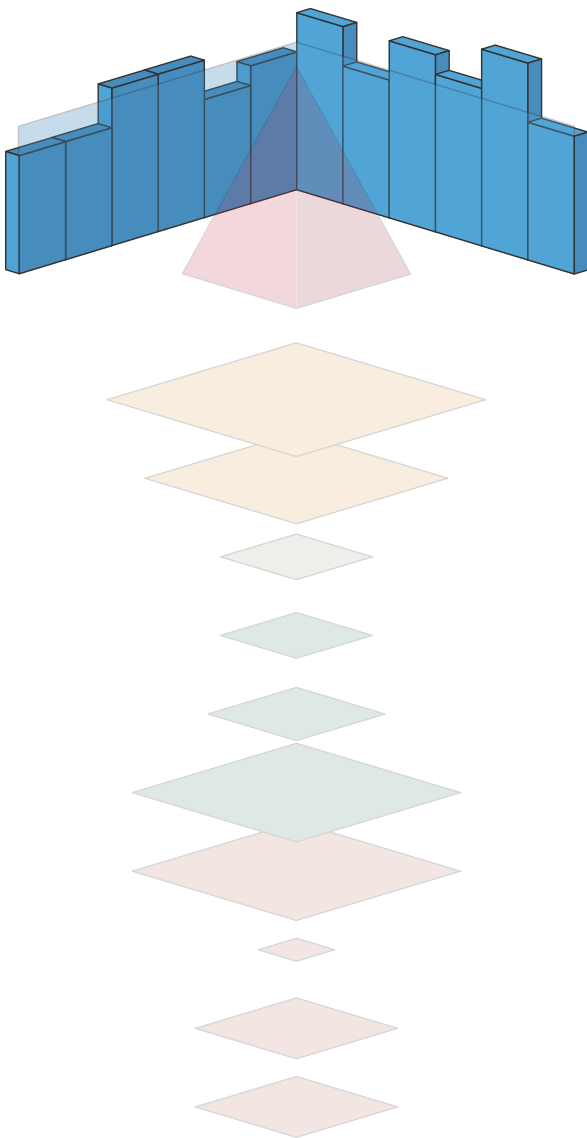


Funding provided by the United States Government.



ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

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<u>POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE</u>	<b>3.00</b>
<u>GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY</u>	<b>3.00</b>
<u>INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION</u>	<b>4.00</b>
<u>NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS</u>	<b>4.00</b>
<u>JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION</u>	<b>3.00</b>
<u>LAW ENFORCEMENT</u>	<b>3.50</b>
<u>TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY</u>	<b>4.50</b>
<u>ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING</u>	<b>3.50</b>
<u>ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY</u>	<b>4.50</b>
<u>VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT</u>	<b>4.00</b>
<u>PREVENTION</u>	<b>5.00</b>
<u>NON-STATE ACTORS</u>	<b>3.50</b>

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<u>CRIMINAL ACTORS</u>	<b>5.38</b>



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# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

As with Uzbekistan's neighbouring countries, the cotton harvest is vital for the country's economy and forced labour is a key feature of the success of the sector, which is facilitated and encouraged by the government, despite the end to the widespread mobilization of students, teachers and health-care workers. Aside from the agricultural sector, Uzbek men are most commonly trafficked into forced labour in the construction and oil and gas markets in Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkey and other surrounding countries. In recent years, the labour market in Russia has become less attractive to Uzbeks, and they are increasingly being trafficked into Turkey as an alternative. Allegedly, law enforcement agencies in the country are complicit in recruiting potential victims and facilitating trafficking. The human smuggling market is less pervasive, largely due to the existence of visa-free travel among the majority of Central Asian states, thus rendering the services of smugglers unnecessary. However, some Uzbek nationals seek the services of smugglers in order to obtain the necessary work visas. Indeed, Uzbek labour migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation as most do not possess the necessary documents required to work in Russia.

### TRADE

While the illicit arms trade exists in the Central Asia region and within Uzbekistan, it is a small market due to the inherited cultural attitudes from the Soviet Union, where guns were only owned by registered hunters and state officials. Arms are reportedly seized from people crossing Uzbek borders, but gun possession by civilians has been in decline in recent years, decreasing approximately tenfold over the past decade.

### ENVIRONMENT

The flora crimes market is dominated by illicit logging, typically during the autumn and winter months, when natural gas supplies are cut off to many households and businesses, creating a need for fuelwood for cooking and heating. Corrupt local authorities are complicit in allowing organized crime groups and business interests to facilitate and manage illicit logging. The fauna crimes market is similarly small, with around 300 cases reported each year, usually consisting of poaching and possession of protected species, alongside illegal fishing. There are cases of endangered species being kept for display, such as falcons and lions, and the trade is domestic as well as international. Corruption payments are made to low-level

officials to ensure the trade can continue unpunished. As Uzbekistan is a large producer of gold, the illegal extraction, mining and smuggling of the metal is the most common natural-resource crime. The market is driven by both domestic and international demand and is facilitated by bribes. However, following the legalization of mining for precious metals by private individuals and companies, levels of illicit gold mining have declined. Nevertheless, the oil and gas sector that is controlled by the state is opaque and prone to corruption.

### DRUGS

Due to Uzbekistan's proximity to Afghanistan, it is an important transit country for heroin originating in Afghanistan headed for Western Europe and Russia. This trade is mainly run by foreign criminal actors, particularly from Turkey. However, since Uzbekistan introduced counterterrorism measures to tighten its borders with Afghanistan and Tajikistan, the volume of opiates transiting through the country has reduced, diverted instead to other neighbouring countries.

The consumption, distribution and sale of synthetic drugs, especially Tramadol, are on the rise in Uzbekistan and there have been a number of large seizures of various psychoactive substances in recent years. The demand driving the synthetic drug market is both domestic and international. There have also been large seizures of marijuana in recent years, where prevailing demand comes from abroad. There appears to be a negligible market for cocaine.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

A remnant of the Soviet period, the 'thieves-in-law' are the primary mafia-style group operating in Uzbekistan. The group exhibits strong characteristics of traditional mafia-style groups, such as the requirement on the part of all members to take an oath, uphold a code and live exclusively off criminal profits. These criminals participate in extortion, illustrating the extent to which they have integrated into the business community, where they combine legal and illegal activities and benefit from protection by representatives of the government. The group had grown into a vast criminal network globally, and spread through the former Soviet Union, Europe and the US, but is slowly losing its influence. Furthermore, there are several loose criminal networks, with links to foreign criminal groups, operating in the most prevalent markets across the country, such as human trafficking, gold mining and the drug trade.

The criminal activity of state-embedded actors, and the intertwining of criminal groups and the government, has meant that the state has effectively co-opted organized

criminal activity. Corruption is rampant in the Uzbek government, and two of Uzbekistan's alleged top criminal leaders hold government positions, demonstrating the embeddedness of criminal groups in the state apparatus. Law enforcement officials are also vital to the functioning of organized crime and sometimes take up very active roles exploiting their position to assist in crimes, as most transnational criminal flows occur under the protection of border control officials, low- and mid-level officials and likely - certain ministers. The Uzbekistani state is also involved in drug trafficking; and in other legitimate

areas of the economy, such as cotton production, the government remains enmeshed with criminal actors.

There are no foreign diasporas controlling any of the organized criminal markets in Uzbekistan, and only minimal to moderate interactions with foreign criminal actors occurs within the country. However, due to Uzbekistan's roots in the Soviet Union and the continuation of the 'thieves-in-law' style of criminal organization, criminal networks are closely linked to Russia, as well as their neighbouring Central Asian nations.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Since 2016, when Shavkat Mirziyoyev succeeded Islam Karimov as president of Uzbekistan, there have been small signs of limited liberalization of the ruling regime. However, these have not been significant enough to restore faith in the government and the democratic process. The democratic process is not independently protected and has been widely corrupted and penetrated by organized crime, with many senior government officials accused of criminal activity. Public resources are misused in the country to sustain power and wealth for those in, or close to, the ruling elite. Despite Uzbekistan's governmental operations being largely opaque, it did introduce an online mechanism allowing citizens to file complaints and report problems with the government, which has been expanded to all ministries and local government offices. The government also publishes its budget online, but in a country that needs wide institutional reform and the introduction of a meaningful separation of powers, the changes are piecemeal and do little to improve Uzbekistan's statute as one of the world's most corrupt states.

There have been small signs of improvement in Uzbekistan's international cooperation framework. The current administration has made an effort to improve relations with neighbouring countries, settling many border disputes and laying the groundwork for future collaboration in combatting transnational crime. The country has ratified several, but not all, relevant international treaties pertaining to organized crime, and generally cooperates in extradition cases. Uzbekistan is also a member of INTERPOL and speaks with intent about combating illicit drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, although significant tangible results have yet to be identified. While Uzbekistan's national legal framework is well-crafted and criminalizes almost all organized crime activities, the levels of corruption and widespread evasion of justice undermine the importance of the legal structure.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Despite constitutional provisions, the judiciary in Uzbekistan is not independent, with judges merely rubber-stamping verdicts passed down by law enforcement agencies and the prosecutor general's office. Corruption is rampant in the judicial system, with many businesses needing to pay bribes to continue operating and judicial positions obtained through bribes. The judiciary is effectively controlled by the executive and, despite recent judicial reform aimed at creating a more independent judiciary, the courts are entirely ineffective at combating organized crime and are usually used as a way for elites to shore up power and evade justice. With regard to the detention system in the country, Uzbekistan's prisons, which are shrouded in secrecy, are notorious for the physical abuse and torture of inmates. However, in 2020, the government took steps to increase transparency surrounding the country's penitentiaries, releasing, for the first time, data on the prison system and its detainees.

Corruption is rife throughout all levels of law enforcement. Police are known to frequently extort bribes, cover up corruption and intimidate whistle-blowers to ensure the interests of the ruling elite are preserved. Trust among the public for law enforcement is extremely low, and many victims of crime are unwilling to self-identify and cooperate with the police out of fear. Uzbekistan's border is extremely difficult to manage as a result of its long, difficult terrain and its proximity to countries with thriving international criminal markets, such as Afghanistan's opium trade. The capacity for border control is hampered by disputes around demarcation of boundaries with both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Alongside these strategic difficulties, border control officials are involved in corruption and criminal activity themselves. Uzbekistan has made strides in reinforcing the dangerous border it shares with Afghanistan due to the fear of an over-spill of radical Islamic insurgencies, and this has also led to a restriction in the flow of opium.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Uzbekistan's banking sector operates in a non-transparent environment, lacks effective oversight and is therefore vulnerable to money laundering. The banks are usually small and under close state control. Despite a few attempts to limit money laundering through legislation and the creation of commissions, the government has created only mild obstacles to the misuse of banks and financial institutions by well-connected people.

The capacity of the government to ensure that legitimate businesses are able to operate free from the influence of criminal groups has improved over the past two decades, especially after the new president's economic modernization reforms. The procedure for business registration has been simplified, interference by regulatory bodies has been reduced and currency controls have been abolished. Uzbekistan is satisfactorily conducive to business and allows for business expansion, but there are many bureaucratic processes to deal with, in addition to poorly enforced land and property rights, and widespread corruption.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Uzbekistan provides some assistance to victims of organized crime, but care is mainly provided by civil society organizations. The government has opened 130 centres to assist vulnerable people and trafficking victims and provides some funding, but they are generally under-resourced and the staff inadequately trained. The lack of trust in government and law enforcement also means many victims are reluctant to report crimes committed against them, and when they do, their identities are rarely kept confidential in court proceedings. Furthermore, the government does not provide legal representation for victims who are unable to pay for it. The government has modified its agricultural policies and run public awareness campaigns concerning the prohibition of child labour in the cotton harvest and to educate citizens about their labour rights. Another positive step has been the adoption of a law aimed at strengthening the protections of human trafficking victims and aiding their rehabilitation. Nevertheless, it is still early to assess the effectiveness of the latter law.

Although civil society organizations and human rights activists have played vital roles in drawing attention to forced labour during the cotton harvest, the government is hostile towards any perceived criticism from these groups and only cooperates in limited ways. Media freedoms are severely limited in Uzbekistan and no criticism of the government is tolerated. Despite this, small improvements have been made under the new president, with the freeing of imprisoned journalists, access to censored websites being granted and media registration being simplified. Despite this surveillance, censorship, threats and arrests are still very much present in the media sphere.

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