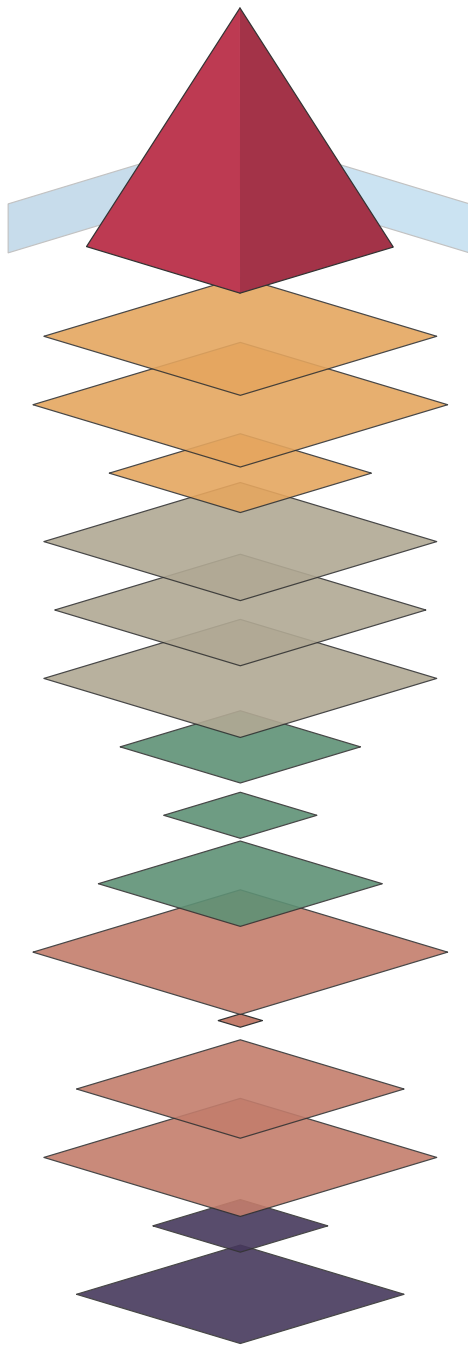


 **AFGHANISTAN**



 **7.10**
CRIMINALITY SCORE

9th of 193 countries
3rd of 46 Asian countries
1st of 8 Southern Asian countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **7.00**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	9.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	9.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	6.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	9.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	8.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	9.00
FLORA CRIMES	5.50
FAUNA CRIMES	3.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	6.50
HEROIN TRADE	9.50
COCAINE TRADE	1.00
CANNABIS TRADE	7.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	9.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	4.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.50

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **7.20**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	8.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	9.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	8.00

 **1.50**
RESILIENCE SCORE



Funding provided by the United States Government.

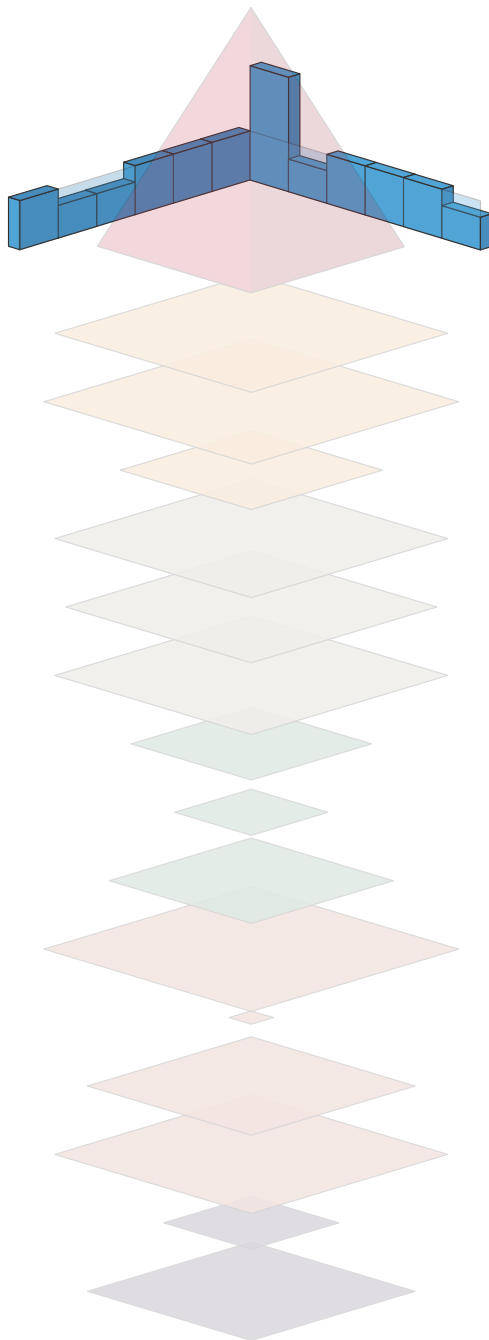


Funded by the European Union

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.



AFGHANISTAN



1.50

RESILIENCE SCORE

193rd of 193 countries

46th of 46 Asian countries

8th of 8 Southern Asian countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	1.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	1.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	1.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	1.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	1.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	1.50
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	1.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	1.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	1.50
PREVENTION	1.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	1.00



7.10

CRIMINALITY SCORE



CRIMINAL MARKETS 7.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS 7.20



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Afghanistan serves as a source of and transit point and destination for human trafficking. Most of the trafficking happens within the country's borders, although some does cross international borders. Men, women and children are exploited for forced labour in a variety of sectors, including carpet weaving, brick making, domestic servitude, drug cultivation and harvesting, mining and smuggling. The socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, a reduction in international aid and financial sanctions against the Taliban regime have all contributed to an increase in economic hardship and the risk of bonded labour. Boys and men are often trafficked for forced labour in agriculture and construction, particularly to Iran, Pakistan and the Gulf. Boys are also at risk of forced recruitment as child soldiers and of sexual exploitation through *Bacha Bazi*, a practice in which young boys are sexually exploited by men for entertainment. Forced marriage remains a threat to Afghan women and girls, particularly since the Taliban's takeover. Even those who have fled the country are at risk of exploitation in forced labour markets.

The human smuggling market in Afghanistan is a lucrative industry for criminals and has a negative impact on society. Many Afghans, including professionals and former government employees, are seeking to leave, leading to expanded security measures at neighbouring country borders, in Turkey and in the EU. Opportunities for legal migration have decreased due to the closure of consular services across the country. This has made the human smuggling market in Afghanistan more expansive, lucrative and dangerous. Since the Taliban takeover smuggled individuals are at an increased risk of detention, physical abuse and robbery, crimes mostly perpetrated by smugglers, border guards, police/military and criminal gangs, making it more dangerous for them to attempt to leave the country. There is also a high risk of human trafficking among smuggled individuals. Corrupt officials and politicians have facilitated the human smuggling market through the sale of visas and by other means.

Extortion and protection racketeering are major sources of income, with well-known businessmen and investors being frequent targets. Many business owners reportedly pay protection money to local gangs and strongmen to avoid trouble. Moreover, factions of the Taliban, which are active in other parts of the country independently from the ruling Taliban, are also reported to increasingly carry out extortion schemes and kidnappings.

TRADE

Since the Taliban takeover arms trafficking in and out of Afghanistan has grown, making the country a source of and a destination for weapons. The Taliban has acquired a substantial number of weapons since the US military withdrawal, including over half a million small arms. The weapons are being sold by Taliban fighters to gun dealers in the country, who report that most customers are local entrepreneurs and ordinary citizens buying them for self-defence, resale or to settle feuds. Arms dealers in Pakistan have also been eager to acquire American arms. Despite the Taliban's efforts to patrol the border and arrest arms traffickers, seize weapons and temporarily ban the trade in weapons, regional intelligence agencies, corrupt politicians and insurgent commanders are believed to be involved in arms trafficking.

Afghanistan has long had a problem with counterfeit goods, with reports suggesting that almost half the medicines and medical products that enter the country are counterfeit or sub-standard. Smuggling and the illegal trade in other counterfeit goods, including toiletries and technological products, are also pervasive in the country. The prevalence of these products is linked to corruption, ineffective governance and poor quality control. Illicit trade in excise goods is also on the rise, driven by a faltering economy and high unemployment rates. Smuggling of goods, especially cigarettes, through the Torkham border is rampant, with small children transporting bags of goods known as 'gandey'.

ENVIRONMENT

Despite the Taliban's ban on the timber trade, illicit logging continues to be a concern. The Taliban is known to have strong ties with timber barons in the timber-rich provinces of Kunar and Nuristan, which has historically exacerbated this issue. The Taliban has provided protection for the safe passage of wood in exchange for a cut of the profits, and profits from illicit logging fund criminal and terrorist groups as well as corrupt officials. The illicit trade in valuable Afghan cedar is associated with moderate levels of violence and there is also significant domestic demand for firewood. Violent groups other than the Taliban have also been involved in the illicit logging market and corrupt officials have levied taxes on the practice.

Afghanistan is home to more than a hundred at-risk species, including the critically endangered Asiatic cheetah and snow leopard. The latter is often poached for its skin, which is highly valued in Asian markets. Rare birds, such as certain species of falcon, are also smuggled out of the country to Pakistan or the Gulf states and wildlife fur is sold on the black market, mostly to foreign buyers. While local pastoralists

are responsible for most snow leopard poaching, organized criminal groups are also probably involved.

Afghanistan is believed to have vast mineral reserves, estimated to be worth trillions of dollars. However, due to the lack of effective mining regulation, artisanal mining is common and illicit mining is controlled by various actors, including the Taliban, corrupt officials and terrorist and insurgent groups. The proceeds of these activities allegedly fuel violence and conflict across the country. Most minerals are transported out of the country through Pakistan, with some destined for China and the Western cosmetics industry.

DRUGS

The opium trade has long been a crucial element of Afghanistan's economy, with poppy cultivation providing a significant source of income for many Afghans living in impoverished regions. Although opium production was curtailed during the Taliban's rule in the 1990s, it has rebounded and now reaches record highs, with the drug being exported to nearly every region of the world. It is estimated that Afghanistan supplies more than three-quarters of the world's opiate demand, generating billions of dollars in profits annually. While the Taliban has announced a ban on poppy cultivation following the (re)takeover of the country, it is unclear whether it will be able to curb the trade effectively. If it cracks down too harshly on the drug trade it may risk losing support from key rural areas. Its own involvement in the trade could also prove to be a considerable obstacle.

While there is no notable evidence of cocaine trafficking in the country, cannabis production is also a major source of income for Afghan farmers, alongside poppy cultivation, but large organized criminal networks are not believed to be involved in this trade. Although the drug is mostly consumed domestically, it has been found in neighbouring countries and regions beyond South West Asia. The Taliban's control over the country and global debates about the legalization of cannabis may increase cultivation in the future.

Afghanistan is both a source of and destination for the synthetic drug trade, with decentralized organized crime networks involved in both production and distribution. Corrupt government officials facilitate the market. The increasing number of drug addicts in the country makes domestic synthetic drug consumption a pressing issue. New street drugs, such as the K-tablet, have emerged in recent years and become popular among the Afghan middle and upper classes. The tablet mainly consists of methylenedioxymethamphetamine, methamphetamine and heroin. Afghanistan has also become a substantial source of methamphetamine, with ephedra, a common wild herb, being a key component in its production. Reports suggest that meth labs continue to operate despite a Taliban ban on ephedra cultivation, and the increase in methamphetamine production has led to a lower domestic price.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cybercriminals and hackers have exploited the Taliban's return to power to carry out their activities. In the first few weeks of the new regime ransomware attacks in the country increased and there has been a rise in cyber espionage attacks targeting government computer networks. Asian hacker groups have also carried out significant attacks. Despite the increase in incidents, the cyber-dependent crime market in the country remains relatively small, especially due to the relatively low rates of internet use among Afghan citizens.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes have long been a pervasive problem in Afghanistan, with government officials and contractors accused of embezzlement, fraud and misuse of public funds. This has led to the rise of a wealthy class comprising politicians, warlords and contractors. While the Taliban has expressed its intention to tackle financial crimes, reports suggest that some of its leaders are involved in embezzlement and the misappropriation of public funds. Although the group has managed to reduce some instances of corruption in the public sector, financial fraud is on the rise, with scammers posing as chief economic officers of banks, using the current crisis as a pretext for phishing and advance-fee scams. The Taliban itself generates nearly a billion dollars annually through financial crimes.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

The downfall of the former Afghan government has been attributed to high levels of crime and corruption. The Taliban has presented itself as an anti-corruption force, but it still relies heavily on criminal markets for financing. Officials linked to it, especially in the drug industry, still operate in the country. Continued internal conflict within the Taliban, and breakaway groups, may increase the amount of crime perpetrated by state-embedded actors.

Despite reports that harsh enforcement of the law has reduced crime in Kabul, criminal networks are still operating, working across multiple criminal markets, including human and drug smuggling. These networks often base their activities on contracts with Taliban foot soldiers. The economic and financial power of foreign actors in Afghanistan is substantial in specific provinces and districts. Under the previous Taliban regime Afghanistan served as a popular safe haven for foreign fighters, most notably Al-Qaeda. Conversely, the current regime has expressed a commitment to keeping international terrorist groups out of the country. However, recent operations as well as terrorist attacks across Afghanistan indicate that foreign actors still exercise considerable influence in the country.

Private sector activities mainly involve agriculture, transport, storage, communications, construction and the production

of food, beverages and tobacco. Illicit activities in these businesses are reported to be widespread. The formal Afghan private sector contributes only one-tenth of the country's official gross domestic product (GDP), and most of its activities have now been disrupted by a series of crises affecting the economic landscape, forcing legal businesses into illegality.

Factions of the Taliban as well as other non-Taliban criminal structures, such as Islamic State-Khorasan (ISK) and

warlords, continue to operate in a variety of criminal markets in the country. The heroin and illicit mining markets are still dominated by mafia-style groups, many of which are founded through familial and/or tribal ties and finance themselves through taxation. These groups are believed to control the illicit arms trafficking and human trafficking markets and are typically well connected, with ties to Central Asia, Iran and Pakistan.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan from the US-backed government, while US troops were being withdrawn from the country, has been met with uncertainty and fear in some regions, while others have welcomed it, hoping it will put an end to the corruption and violence associated with the previous government. The Taliban has publicly announced its opposition to criminal markets. However, it remains unclear whether it will, in fact, act against them since both the group and large segments of the population depend on organized crime for their financial needs. Since its takeover the group has struggled to form a government amid internal tensions, seeking foreign recognition and avoiding economic collapse and the threat of non-state actors like the ISK. The Taliban's leadership has also been challenged by the growing factionalism caused by ethnic and political differences as well as by internal power struggles. There is concern about the government's lack of transparency and accountability and Afghanistan is considered to be one of the most corrupt countries in the world. There are no formal oversight mechanisms in place to prevent corruption and provide for transparency. The de facto rulers have dismissed those institutions that are critical to accountable and transparent government and the decision making of the Taliban cabinet has been opaque and inconsistent.

The takeover has led many countries and international organizations to suspend or reduce aid. No foreign country or international organization has officially recognized the Taliban government, although some countries have engaged in official diplomatic talks with the group and have maintained embassies or consulates in Kabul. Humanitarian aid has resumed through an arrangement that allows aid money to enter the country without going through the Taliban-controlled central bank. The group has not officially annulled or endorsed any laws enacted by the previous government but has stated that it will govern in accordance with Islamic law. A committee has been formed within the Afghanistan National Academy to review the compliance

of all the country's laws with Sharia. However, the Taliban has not introduced any legislation or legal framework to address organized crime.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

While the previous government's judicial system was weak, inefficient and corrupt, it still adhered to international standards. However, since taking over the Taliban has dissolved the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association, persecuted judges, removed prosecutors and other staff from the Attorney General's office and banned women from practising law at all. In addition it has replaced employees in the former government's justice institutions with its own fighters, most of whom lack legal education or experience. Many of these fighters have been accused of human rights violations and are on the UN terrorism sanction list.

Since the takeover the Taliban forces have taken steps to increase their control. The pre-Taliban police force has been disbanded and the group has taken over all law-enforcement roles. Fighters undergo a training programme and the Interior Ministry has established a military unit under the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock to address the issue of wood smuggling.

Afghanistan's territorial integrity remains weak. International militant groups still use the country for recruitment and training, while anti-Taliban forces in the Panjshir province have taken refuge in Tajikistan. The country is also attractive to cyber-criminal groups and the fall of US equipment into the hands of these gangs poses a cybersecurity risk. The situation threatens Afghanistan's territorial integrity and makes it vulnerable to regional interference, mainly through intelligence activities.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The national Financial Intelligence Unit has halted its operations since the Taliban takeover, leaving the country vulnerable to money laundering and terrorist financing. This institution, which had been established in 2006 to gather intelligence about suspicious transactions, played a crucial role in the conviction of smugglers and financiers of terrorist groups. International concerns about money laundering are further complicating the country's economic regulatory environment.

Afghanistan's economy is in free fall, as international aid, which constituted almost half of the country's GDP, was withdrawn following the Taliban takeover. Private-sector development and expansion have been limited by insecurity, political instability, weak institutions, inadequate infrastructure, widespread corruption and a difficult business environment. Hundreds of thousands of jobs were lost after the takeover and millions of people face high and critical levels of food insecurity.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Taliban has decreased efforts to protect victims of crime. There have been no reports identifying trafficking victims and protection services are mostly obsolete. By the end of 2021 most of the shelters for victims of crime, which were closed by the Taliban following the takeover, remained closed. The Taliban has increased the frequency

of raids in areas favoured by drug users, forcing them into government-run rehabilitation centres with limited resources. There is no witness protection scheme and there has been no attempt to create a body to counter organized crime. The country has historically focused more on reaction than on prevention.

NGOs with links to foreign countries have been forced to halt their operations. The Taliban has announced 'clearance operations' to search for criminals and weapons, which human rights groups worry may target individuals with ties to foreign NGOs or the former government. NGOs are non-operational in most provinces due to a lack of funding, fear of repercussions and Taliban-imposed restrictions, and some civil society actors have faced violence and detention. Women NGO workers have been specifically targeted and threatened, and women journalists have faced harassment, violence and the loss of their jobs. Taliban authorities have also implemented widespread censorship and violence against Afghan media, resulting in limited critical reporting in the country. Afghanistan's press freedom has declined dramatically since the takeover, with almost half of the country's media outlets disappearing.

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