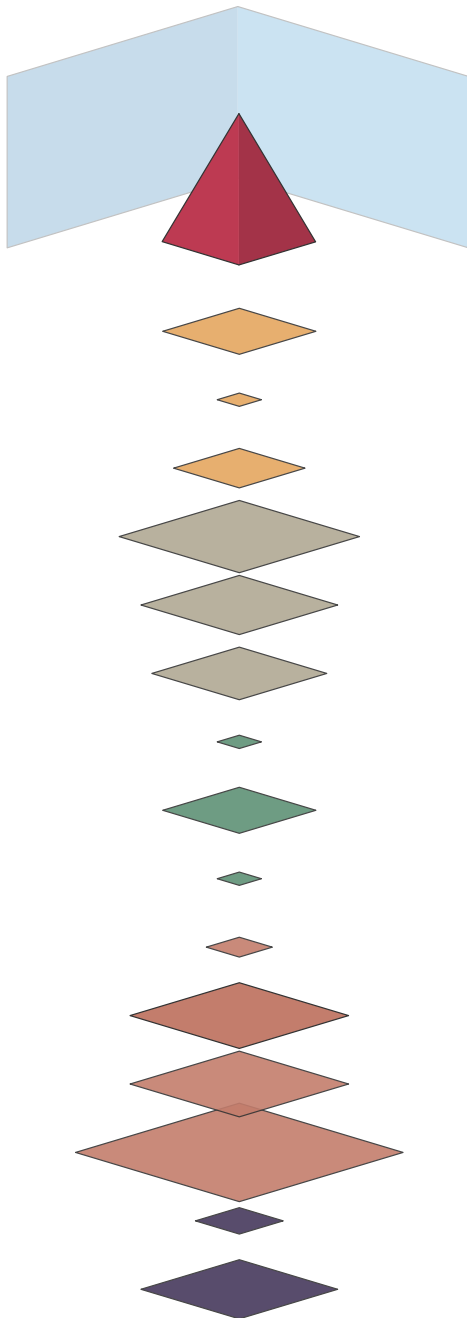


 **TONGA**



 **3.70**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

**163<sup>rd</sup>** of 193 countries  
**6<sup>th</sup>** of 14 Oceanian countries  
**1<sup>st</sup>** of 3 Polynesian countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **3.50**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	<b>3.50</b>
HUMAN SMUGGLING	<b>1.00</b>
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	<b>3.00</b>
ARMS TRAFFICKING	<b>5.50</b>
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	<b>4.50</b>
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	<b>4.00</b>
FLORA CRIMES	<b>1.00</b>
FAUNA CRIMES	<b>3.50</b>
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	<b>1.00</b>
HEROIN TRADE	<b>1.50</b>
COCAINE TRADE	<b>5.00</b>
CANNABIS TRADE	<b>5.00</b>
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	<b>7.50</b>
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	<b>2.00</b>
FINANCIAL CRIMES	<b>4.50</b>

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **3.90**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	<b>1.00</b>
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	<b>4.50</b>
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	<b>5.50</b>
FOREIGN ACTORS	<b>7.00</b>
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	<b>1.50</b>

 **5.29**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**



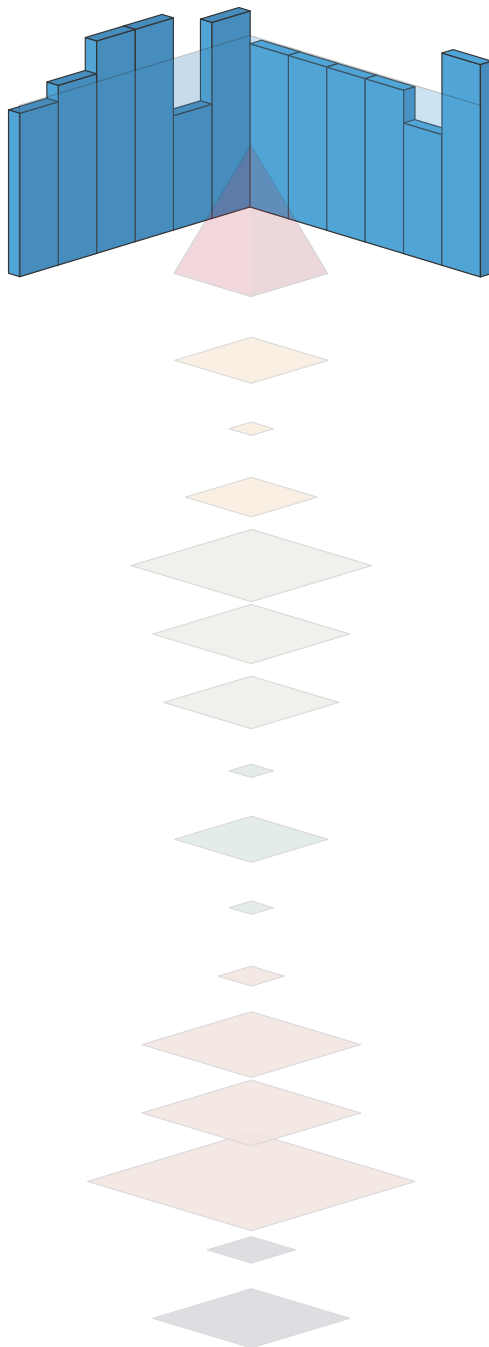
Funding provided by the United States Government.



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.

 **TONGA**





 **5.29**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**

73<sup>rd</sup> of 193 countries  
9<sup>th</sup> of 14 Oceanian countries  
3<sup>rd</sup> of 3 Polynesian countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	<b>5.00</b>
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	<b>5.50</b>
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	<b>6.50</b>
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	<b>6.50</b>
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	<b>3.50</b>
LAW ENFORCEMENT	<b>6.00</b>
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	<b>5.00</b>
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	<b>5.00</b>
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	<b>5.00</b>
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	<b>5.00</b>
PREVENTION	<b>4.00</b>
NON-STATE ACTORS	<b>6.50</b>

 **3.70**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

 <b>CRIMINAL MARKETS</b>	<b>3.50</b>
 <b>CRIMINAL ACTORS</b>	<b>3.90</b>



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# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Tonga is still a destination and source country for human trafficking, with much of the demand for labour exploitation coming from outside the country, primarily Australian and New Zealand markets. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to domestic servitude locally and abroad. Internally, Asian women who are recruited for seemingly legitimate positions in Tonga are susceptible to sex trafficking by clandestine establishments operating under the guise of legal businesses. Vulnerability to labour exploitation has also been identified among Chinese construction workers and Fijians in the domestic service industry. While COVID-19 restrictions may have resulted in fewer victims of trafficking, the potential for foreign victims to enter Tonga still exists.

There is no evidence to suggest human smuggling exists in Tonga. Conversely, extortion and protection racketeering are not uncommon in the country with local Tongans being employed for such criminal activities predominantly between Asian business rivals involved in illicit and legitimate trading.

### TRADE

Tonga is a transit country for arms trafficking, with an increasing volume of firearms being smuggled through its borders. Shipments of arms have been identified as coming from the US, China, and ports in Latin America. Arms trafficking is also suspected to be linked to drug trafficking, with firearms and illegal ammunition being transported in the same shipments. There are concerns that the rising frequency of arms trafficking in Tonga may negatively affect community safety as firearms have been found in the possession of criminal groups. Customs officials and governmental inspection services have been identified as receiving payments to facilitate the arms trade, with some bribes reaching higher authorities.

There is no substantial indication of a pervasive market for counterfeit goods within the country, nor any evidence of organized crime involvement in such trade. However, there has been a recent increase in the trade of counterfeited goods in the Oceania region, with growing demand. Counterfeited items, such as clothes, pharmaceutical products, pesticides and electronic gadgets, mostly originating from China, are becoming more prevalent in commercial and e-commerce trade in Tonga. Similar to the counterfeit market, the illicit trade in excise goods, specifically tobacco products, have been also on the rise in the region and hence in the country. Even though there is no evidence to suggest a

widespread illicit excise goods market in Tonga, recent seizures of tobacco products being smuggled into New Zealand indicate that Tonga has become a source country within the region.

### ENVIRONMENT

Due to the limited forest in the country, there is no evidence of flora crimes in Tonga. On the other hand, the country is making progress in controlling illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing through the permanent bilateral ship rider agreement with the US Coast Guard. This enables law enforcement to expand monitoring and control of the Exclusive Economic Zone for a limited number of days each year. Additionally, the country has been trying to promote domestic squid production to reduce the dependence on IUU fishing trawlers.

There is no evidence of illegal trade in non-renewable resources in Tonga. However, sand mining for construction purposes is a growing environmental concern for the country's beaches. There is currently no indication that this practice involves any criminal activity.

### DRUGS

Though there is some evidence of heroin consumption in Tonga, there is little indication of a consolidated market for this drug in the country. In contrast, Tonga is predominantly a transit point for cocaine, with some domestic consumption facilitated by corruption. Situated along the Pacific cocaine trafficking route, the country has become a storage and refuelling station for drugs en route to destinations in Oceania and Southeast Asia. The increase in cocaine consumption in Australia and New Zealand is expanding the cocaine trade in the Pacific region, and since the mid/late 2010s, Tonga's importance as a trans-shipment point has increased, along with the quantities of cocaine.

The cannabis trade in Tonga is primarily local, with production taking place on remote islands and some importation from the US. Although people are arrested for cannabis possession every year, the market is mostly local and does not involve organized crime. Domestic cannabis use has increased in recent years.

The synthetic drug trade is arguably the largest criminal market in Tonga, which serves as a point of transit for transferring primarily methamphetamines, locally known as 'tutu', from Asia to New Zealand and Australia. The transport of methamphetamines through the country has led to an increase in domestic use as well. There is a methamphetamine epidemic in Tonga, with consumption believed to have reached all levels of Tongan society, including church

ministers, civil servants, politicians, traditional leaders, and the police. The trade has led to the establishment of small, domestic methamphetamine laboratories, which produce poorer quality methamphetamines, potentially endangering users. Despite its remoteness and low purchasing power, Tonga is becoming an attractive destination market for synthetic drugs.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

The criminal market of cyber-dependent crimes is limited in Tonga with sporadic instances of cyberattacks, including ransomware, being reported.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in the Kingdom of Tonga are mainly opportunistic and domestic in nature, and there is little evidence of organized crime involvement. In the first half of 2021, the National Reserve Bank of Tonga reported seven suspicious transaction reports of those, only one which was connected to an illegal pyramid scheme was escalated to the police. Nepotism and a strong sense of kinship in Tonga raise concerns about widespread corruption and consequential financial criminal activities. Although there are mechanisms in place to trace and confiscate proceeds of crime, limited convictions have been made.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Tonga's government is facing challenges with political leadership, corruption, and organized crime. Despite efforts to combat the influence of organized crime, corruption among elected officials undermines progress. Transparency and accountability at state level remain limited, with exceptions such as a former prime minister found guilty of drug trafficking and high-level authorities convicted of bribery.

Tonga is engaging in regional and international mechanisms to counter the influence of organized crime and has signed several conventions. It receives significant foreign aid, particularly from New Zealand, which it will need to deal with the challenges of the post-COVID period. However, given its debts to other countries, this aid also leaves Tonga susceptible to foreign influence and corruption. Law enforcement officials in Tonga have expressed frustration over inadequate intelligence-sharing between agencies and a lack of reciprocity between national and international transnational crime units. Tonga has committed to countering various forms of organized crime through national policies and laws, focusing on drug trafficking, arms trafficking,

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Although there is no evidence of mafia-style organized crime groups in Tonga, there are at least five criminal syndicates operating in the drug and arms trafficking markets. These groups have strong links to expatriate communities in the US, Australia and New Zealand. Corruption within Tonga's public institutions continues to undermine efforts to suppress organized crime. Customs officials have reported feeling powerless to address corruption at the border because of the involvement of extended family members and criminals using intimidation tactics.

The drug markets, particularly those involving cocaine and synthetic drugs, are partly controlled by foreign groups. North and South American cartels typically use locals to move cocaine and methamphetamine through Tonga and on to Australia and New Zealand. The long-standing relationship between local criminals and foreign criminal actors has allowed the consolidation of the transpacific drug route. Asian criminals are also involved in the organization of trafficking operations in the country. Private sector actors have not been identified as being involved in organized crime in Tonga, however, the country's informal economy is often not properly regulated.

terrorism and IUU fishing. Currently, the most pressing threat to the country is the so-called methamphetamine epidemic.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Tonga faces challenges in dealing with deportees who commit crimes abroad because of the lack of support for them on their return to Tonga. Prisons and juvenile detention centres are now hotspots for the drug trade, specifically for methamphetamines, and Tongan prisons have become overcrowded, with rooms that were built for one person now housing four, and a lack of medical provision, specifically mental health units, for inmates. The increase in the prison population is attributed to more people being arrested for drug offences, an increase in the juvenile population in prison, and people jailed for breaking COVID-19 rules.

Tonga has an Interpol National Central Bureau and a Drug Enforcement Taskforce to combat the transnational trade of drugs. However, the country relies on neighbouring countries for infrastructure resources and training. Even

though the police department's budget was increased almost tenfold to address the methamphetamine epidemic, the military force continues to be more prominent and efficient compared to law enforcement in the country due to the international support it receives. Tonga maintains its territorial integrity but islands further from the central Tongan islands might be more vulnerable to criminal markets due to the lack of support and resources. Effective border controls are difficult because of the country's geography and size. Tonga faces challenges in protecting its fishing zones but not to the same extent as other nations in the southwestern Pacific. Tonga is also a side to the ongoing territorial dispute of Minerva Reef with Fiji.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Tonga has not yet experienced issues with money laundering, but there are concerns about possible links between local Tongans and drug cartels, which could make the country vulnerable to the practice. Tonga's legal and regulatory regime for anti-money laundering is relatively robust and similar to that of other Pacific Islands. Still, local authorities are aware of the country's vulnerability to money laundering and attribute this to inadequate and under-resourced border control. In addition, Tonga's reliance on inbound remittances makes it susceptible to money laundering and terrorism financing.

Tonga's economy depends on public sector employment and inbound remittances from family members abroad, resulting in a lack of economic dynamism. Corruption has been identified in the country's police force, customs, and public sector, including among higher officials in the past. This poses additional concerns for Tonga's economic regulatory environment.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Tonga maintains victim support services mainly for domestic violence survivors, which are provided by NGOs and charitable groups. However, a lack of essential equipment, especially on outlying islands, restricts the local police's ability to assist victims of crime. Despite efforts by NGOs, the government has not identified any victims of trafficking since 2015, and no trafficker has been prosecuted or convicted since 2011. The main reasons are the lack of systematic procedures for victim identification and protection among at-risk groups, language barriers, and resource limitations faced by law enforcement.

Even though not many other forms of organized crime have been identified, Tonga has implemented a programme to support young people who want to start their own businesses to support their families rather than turn to crime. There has been an increase in women seeking drug addiction counselling, as there is a strong link between drug use and gender-based violence. The Tongan government has not made any efforts to prevent human trafficking in the country, and there is no action plan or awareness campaign in place. Nevertheless, authorities provide briefings to Tongans in seasonal worker programmes overseas, including information on workers' rights.

Community structures and non-state actors are strong in Tonga due to its homogenous and religious make-up. However, there have been issues with freedom of speech, including the suspension of three radio workers for inciting distrust in the government. Recently passed counter cyber-bullying regulations have been criticized for being used by senior members of the government and the royal family to prevent criticism of policies, which threatens the freedom and independence of the media in Tonga.

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