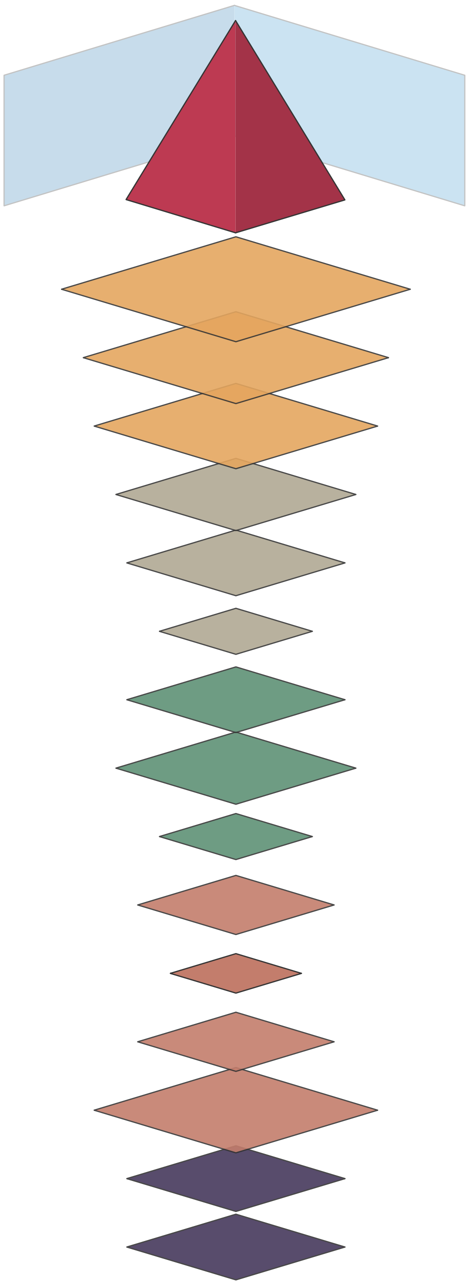
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

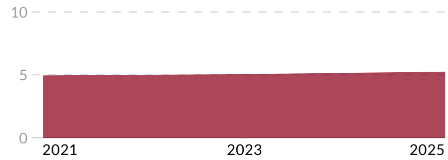
BANGLADESH



5.30 ↗0.18

CRIMINALITY SCORE

83rd of 193 countries ↗6
24th of 46 Asian countries ↗2
5th of 8 Southern Asian countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.20	↗0.17
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.00	↗0.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	6.50	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	5.50	↗0.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.00	↗0.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	3.50	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	5.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	5.50	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3.50	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	4.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	3.00	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50	↗0.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.50	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	5.00	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	5.00	↗0.50

CRIMINAL ACTORS	5.40	↗0.20
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	6.00	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	4.00	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	4.00	↗1.00

This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.

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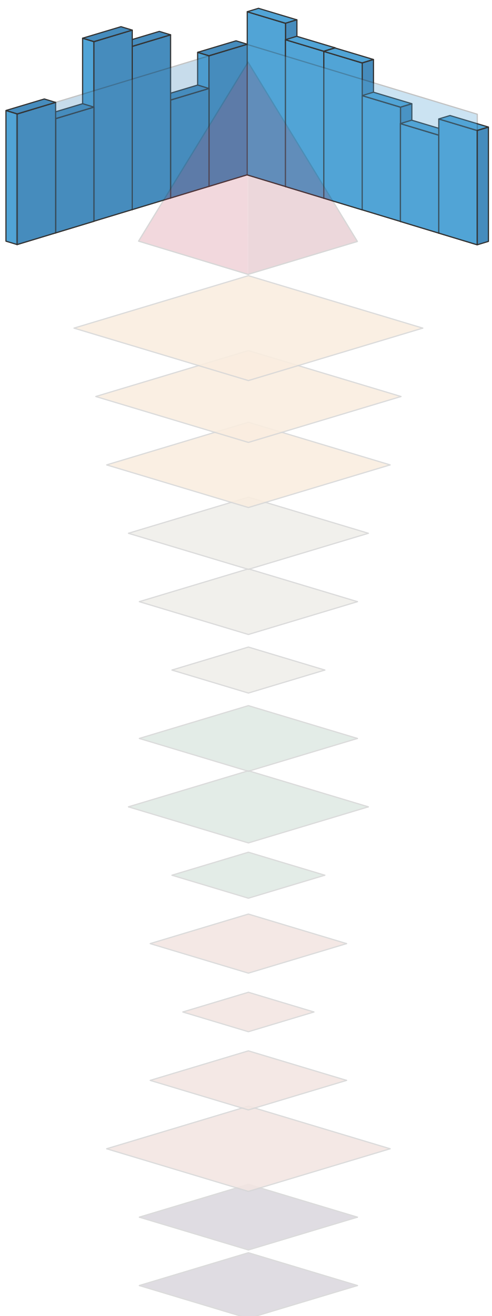
Funded by the European Union

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.

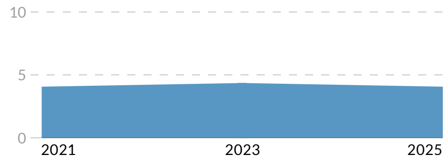
BANGLADESH



4.08 ↘0.33

RESILIENCE SCORE

126th of 193 countries ↘8
24th of 46 Asian countries ↘2
3rd of 8 Southern Asian countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	**4.00**	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	**3.50**	↘0.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	**5.50**	↘0.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	**5.00**	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	**3.00**	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	**4.00**	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	**5.00**	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	**4.50**	↘1.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	**4.50**	↘0.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	**3.50**	0.00
PREVENTION	**3.00**	↘1.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	**3.50**	↘0.50

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Bangladesh is both a source and transit country for human trafficking, with victims exploited for forced labour, sex work and organ trafficking both domestically and abroad. The true scale of trafficking is believed to far exceed official figures due to underreporting and limited data collection. Women and children from impoverished backgrounds are especially vulnerable, as traffickers exploit inadequate regulatory enforcement. Forced labour is common in the garment, brick kiln and seafood processing industries. Social media is increasingly used to lure victims into the sex trade. In response, law enforcement has dismantled trafficking rings engaged in cross-border exploitation. Trafficking networks are closely tied to Bangladesh's migration corridors and the Rohingya refugee population in Cox's Bazar is particularly at risk. Armed groups within the camps, often in collusion with corrupt officials, are actively involved in trafficking.

The human smuggling market in Bangladesh is highly structured, with organized networks profiting from irregular migration to the Gulf, Europe and South East Asia. In recent years, Bangladeshis were reported to be the third-most common nationality crossing the Mediterranean from Libya to Europe. Corrupt officials facilitate these operations, with smugglers offering fraudulent job opportunities and charging exorbitant fees. The cost of migration remains disproportionately high compared to potential earnings, trapping many in a cycle of debt and exploitation. Rohingya refugees are frequently smuggled by sea to Malaysia and Indonesia, often facing life-threatening journeys. Climate-related disasters displace large populations, increasing their vulnerability to traffickers who promise economic opportunities abroad.

Extortion and protection racketeering are common, with criminal networks extracting illicit payments from a range of victims. Small businesses, shop owners, and rickshaw drivers are frequently targeted by local groups, while business owners in industrial areas often face demands for protection money, sometimes enforced through violence or coercion. Vulnerable communities in refugee camps, including Rohingya people, are also subjected to systematic financial exploitation.

TRADE

The arms trafficking market in Bangladesh is expanding, facilitated by criminal networks, extremist groups and state-embedded actors. Weapons are smuggled into the country via maritime routes and overland, with key entry points along the borders with Myanmar and India. Rohingya refugee camps have become hubs for trafficking, where armed groups operate with relative impunity. Locally manufactured firearms supplement the illicit supply, and transnational networks link Bangladeshi traffickers to international arms markets.

The counterfeit goods market is also growing, affecting sectors such as textiles, pharmaceuticals and consumer electronics. The country has emerged as a major source of counterfeit clothing, with international brands frequently targeted. Online platforms play a key role in distributing these goods, while weak enforcement of intellectual property laws allows the market to flourish. The production of fake medicine and adulterated food products poses a serious public health risk. Although sporadic enforcement efforts exist, these markets remain resilient due to high consumer demand and limited regulatory oversight.

Illicit trade in excisable goods – particularly tobacco and alcohol – remains active, though relatively small in scale. Smuggling routes exploit the country's porous borders with India and Myanmar to facilitate the inflow of untaxed products. Some domestic manufacturers are believed to understate production to evade taxes, and diplomatic channels are used for illegal imports.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crime in Bangladesh is driven by illegal logging and deforestation. Forests in regions such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Khulna have been extensively degraded due to timber smuggling, often facilitated by corrupt officials. Logs are also brought across the Naf River from Myanmar. The demand for illegally harvested wood extends beyond domestic use, with smuggled timber reaching international markets.

Fauna crime is also a persistent concern, with Bangladesh serving as both a source and transit country for the illegal wildlife trade. Trafficking networks operate nationwide, taking advantage of weak border controls with Myanmar and India to move protected species such as pangolin, wild cats, turtles and various bird species, many destined for markets in China and South East Asia. Bangladesh also participates in the trade of felids, star tortoises and marine species, contributing to biodiversity loss both domestically and regionally. Limited enforcement capacity and corruption among officials continue to hamper efforts to curb this trade.

Non-renewable resource crime, particularly illegal sand mining, is also widespread. Unregulated extraction of sand and minerals, especially near the Dhaleshwari and Meghna rivers, leads to environmental degradation and soil erosion, with significant consequences for agriculture and infrastructure. Local political and business elites often control these operations, complicating enforcement. Smuggling of natural resources to neighbouring countries further fuels the market.

DRUGS

The heroin trade in Bangladesh is driven by transnational trafficking networks. Although the country is not a producer, its strategic location between major drug-producing regions – including the Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Laos and Thailand) and the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan) – makes it a key transit hub for international trafficking. Weak border controls and maritime routes are exploited to smuggle heroin and evade law enforcement. Corruption within border security agencies further enables the trade, with reports of traffickers bypassing oversight to move shipments undetected. Local consumption remains relatively limited and is mostly confined to wealthier users.

Bangladesh is also increasingly used as a transit point for cocaine shipments moving from South America to South Asia and beyond, though the scale of this activity remains limited. Heightened scrutiny on traditional routes has contributed to this shift, making Bangladesh a more attractive alternative for traffickers. Recent seizures suggest that both domestic and foreign actors are involved.

The cannabis trade is a persistent illicit market, sustained by both domestic cultivation and cross-border smuggling. Cannabis is grown in remote regions, particularly in the hill tracts, and is widely consumed across the country. The market is largely tolerated within certain communities, although sporadic enforcement actions target high-profile distributors.

Bangladesh serves as both a transit and destination market for synthetic drugs due to its strategic location near drug-producing countries. The trade in Yaba – a combination of methamphetamine and caffeine – is particularly lucrative. Significant volumes are smuggled into the country from Myanmar, especially through border areas in Teknaf and Ukhia Upazilas. The involvement of Rohingya refugees has been widely documented, further complicating enforcement efforts.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crime is a growing concern in Bangladesh, with ransomware attacks, data breaches and hacking among the most pervasive threats. Cyberattacks targeting both public and private institutions have become more common, leading to the exposure of personal data belonging to millions of citizens. Criminal networks, including international actors, have been implicated, using sophisticated techniques to bypass security systems. The government has introduced various cybersecurity initiatives; however, enforcement is inconsistent, and gaps in digital literacy leave many people vulnerable to cyber exploitation.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crime, including cyber-enabled fraud, identity theft and phishing, are prevalent in Bangladesh. The rapid expansion of digital banking and adoption of financial technology has created new opportunities for illicit financial activity. Corruption within regulatory agencies undermines enforcement efforts, allowing these crimes to persist.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Prominent organized mafia-style groups, known as mastans, exert influence across Bangladesh, particularly in Dhaka and surrounding areas. They are involved in extortion, land grabbing, contract killings, drug trafficking and other illicit activities. Despite their criminality, mastans often provide services to impoverished communities, such as facilitating access to utilities, which helps build local support. Some exert control over vulnerable populations, including street children, who are also drawn into criminal activity. These groups maintain close ties with corrupt politicians, offering financial and logistical support during elections in exchange for protection from law enforcement. Police complicity is well documented, with officers reportedly accepting payments to overlook mastan operations. Their influence extends beyond street-level crime, with certain factions controlling entire districts. Extortion rackets are reportedly run from inside prisons, where incarcerated leaders continue to operate remotely, even while maintaining links with foreign-based criminal actors.

Criminal networks in Bangladesh engage in a wide range of illicit activity, including drug trafficking, extortion, political violence and land grabbing, particularly in and around Dhaka. These networks tend to be organized, with some led by notorious criminals operating through intermediaries to avoid scrutiny from law enforcement. They maintain ties with political figures and prison officials, enabling them to conduct their operations with relative impunity. Youth gangs are also gaining prominence in Bangladesh, often referred to as 'teen gangs' despite many members being older. Estimates suggest their numbers have grown rapidly in recent years, particularly in Dhaka, where they have displaced older factions. These groups often comprise students from the same educational institutions and typically engage in offences ranging from delinquency to more serious crime. Some subcontract work from more established networks or collaborate with extremist groups, further complicating enforcement.

Corruption within state institutions is a major enabler of organized crime in the country. Corrupt officials facilitate drug trafficking, extortion and the smuggling of non-renewable resources, with reports suggesting they benefit financially from these markets. This activity has a direct impact on vulnerable populations, including Rohingya refugees, who face barriers in accessing justice. Their complaints are frequently ignored, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation. Mastans and other criminal actors have been mobilized by politicians to enforce loyalty or intimidate the opposition, underscoring the relationship between crime and politics.

Foreign criminal groups influence several illicit markets in Bangladesh, including drug trafficking, human smuggling and wildlife crime. Smuggling routes linked to Myanmar, India and certain African countries facilitate the cross-border movement of illicit goods. Rohingya refugee camps have become hotspots for organized crime, with rising levels of violence and illegal activity reported in recent years. There are groups within the camps reportedly involved in crime, with some factions linked to transnational networks. Based in Myanmar, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization, have established a presence in the camps, engaging in drug trafficking and extortion as they compete for territorial control. Gang rivalry has led to violent clashes, further destabilizing the region.

Although research on private-sector involvement in organized crime is limited, reports suggest increasing collaboration between business and criminal networks. Some wealthy businesspeople have been linked to criminal activity, using illicit actors to intimidate competitors and consolidate market dominance. Criminal networks have also been implicated in political financing, with businesses allegedly funding them to manipulate election outcomes. With limited regulatory oversight and ongoing corruption concerns, private-sector actors have reportedly exploited legal loopholes to conduct illicit financial transactions. The blurred line between political and economic power has created an environment in which organized crime can thrive, entrenching the influence of criminal actors across public and private sectors.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Although the government of Bangladesh has declared a 'zero tolerance' stance, enforcement remains inconsistent due to limited resources, digital illiteracy and systemic corruption. Political actors have frequently collaborated with criminal groups, particularly during elections, eroding public trust. In August 2024, mass protests over civil service job quotas escalated into broader political unrest, prompting a military intervention and a change of leadership. The military, a traditionally powerful force in national politics, assumed a more direct role, further destabilizing the political climate. An interim government – comprising election experts, human rights activists and former military officials – was appointed to restore order and address governance challenges. However, balancing reform with political stability remains a significant challenge in the country's evolving political environment.

Transparency and accountability are major governance challenges, with widespread corruption creating conditions in which crime can flourish. Anti-corruption efforts have suffered setbacks, as political interference continues to undermine the independence of oversight bodies. Investigations into corrupt officials have produced limited results, with high-profile figures often evading accountability. Although laws exist to promote transparency, enforcement is weak, enabling continued corruption across multiple sectors, including public services and environmental initiatives.

Bangladesh demonstrates a relatively strong commitment to international cooperation in the fight against organized crime. As a signatory to key international instruments, including the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and an active participant in regional initiatives and intelligence-sharing efforts – particularly in addressing human trafficking and drug smuggling – the country has laid a solid foundation for cross-border collaboration. This includes efforts to strengthen justice mechanisms, enhance law enforcement capacity and make better use of frameworks such as Mutual Legal Assistance. However, some challenges remain, especially in operational cooperation with foreign law enforcement agencies, where bureaucratic inefficiencies and coordination gaps hinder effectiveness. Bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries, including India, support cooperation but concerns persist over Bangladesh's overall compliance with international crime prevention standards.

Bangladesh has implemented laws and policies aimed at tackling organized crime, yet enforcement is inconsistent.

Legal frameworks addressing corruption, drug trafficking and human smuggling are in place, but implementation has been hindered by limited resources and entrenched political interference. While recent reforms seek to strengthen anti-corruption efforts, concerns persist over their effectiveness due to continued political influence on law enforcement. Furthermore, while the country has taken steps to address cybersecurity vulnerabilities through the enactment of the Cyber Security Act 2023, growing concerns have emerged over its controversial provisions. Critics argue that the law continues a pattern of repressive legislation in Bangladesh, enabling state crackdowns on civic space and human rights under the guise of digital security.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Bangladesh's judicial system faces significant structural weaknesses, including corruption and political interference, which have eroded public confidence. Case backlogs are common, resulting in prolonged legal proceedings and delays access to justice. Corruption within the judiciary further undermines efforts to combat organized crime, as high-profile offenders often evade prosecution through bribery or political protection. While a dedicated judicial body – the Cyber Tribunal – was established to address cybercrime, it currently records a relatively low conviction rate, partly due to the resolution of many cases outside the formal judicial process. Despite efforts to improve the training of investigating officers, substantial challenges persist in effectively combating cybercrime. Prison conditions are substandard, with reports highlighting overcrowding, poor sanitation, and limited access to rehabilitation programmes. Moreover, prison staff are often undertrained and ill-equipped to support reform. As a result, it is likely that people leaving prison – who are frequently stigmatized and unable to find legal employment – will reoffend.

Law enforcement agencies face widespread corruption, which undermines efforts to dismantle organized crime networks. Political influence over police institutions leads to selective enforcement, allowing groups with political ties to operate with impunity. Extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances by security forces have drawn international scrutiny, with such actions often justified under the guise of anti-crime operations. Despite these challenges, some initiatives have been introduced to strengthen capacity, including specialized cybercrime units and training programmes aimed at improving investigative skills. However, these remain limited in impact due to systemic corruption and a lack of accountability.

Bangladesh faces ongoing challenges in maintaining territorial integrity, particularly along its borders with Myanmar and India. These areas are vulnerable to illicit activities such as human smuggling, drug trafficking and the illegal trade in wildlife and other contraband. Efforts to strengthen border security have been undermined by corruption among officials, allowing criminal networks to exploit weak points. Although international cooperation has brought some improvements in border management, current measures remain insufficient in effectively curbing transnational organized crime.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Money laundering remains a major concern in Bangladesh, with weak enforcement of existing regulations enabling persistent illicit financial activity. Although the country has established legal frameworks to combat financial crime, enforcement agencies lack the resources and political independence needed to investigate and prosecute effectively. Reports highlight the widespread use of alternative remittance systems and illicit currency exchanges, exposing key vulnerabilities. Corrupt officials and financial institutions have been implicated in laundering schemes, further complicating efforts to stem illicit financial flows. Despite some gains in transparency, implementation of anti-money laundering measures remains limited. In fact, compliance with Financial Action Task Force recommendations also remains partial, with various agencies responsible for investigating different offences under the Money Laundering Prevention Act of 2012.

Bangladesh's broader regulatory environment also poses challenges for preventing financial crime. Corruption within business and oversight sectors enables criminal networks to exploit gaps in supervision. The informal economy is substantial, with illicit transactions often going undetected due to weak monitoring and enforcement. While international financial institutions have urged regulatory reform, progress has been slow, partly due to resistance from influential economic actors with links to organized crime.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support services in Bangladesh are inadequate, leaving many people without access to justice or protection. NGOs play a key role in assisting victims, particularly in cases of human trafficking and labour exploitation, but their efforts are constrained by limited state support. Corruption within law enforcement further discourages victims from seeking legal recourse. Recent government initiatives include a rapid victim-identification app and virtual police reporting for trafficking cases. Oversight of recruitment agents has been strengthened, and a victim compensation fund established. However, challenges persist, including insufficient protection for victims, official complicity and weak prosecution of internal trafficking cases and crimes involving Rohingya refugees. Shelters often lack specialized services, migrant workers remain vulnerable to recruitment fees, and courts frequently impose fines rather than custodial sentences, reducing both deterrence and victim safety. The absence of a formal witness protection programme further exposes people testifying against organized crime groups to significant risks.

Crime prevention efforts are hindered by a lack of reliable data and strategic planning. While some community-led initiatives address issues such as youth involvement in crime, formal prevention mechanisms have not been developed. Limited government investment in public awareness campaigns has contributed to low levels of understanding of the risks associated with organized crime. Efforts to combat trafficking and drug-related offences have been inconsistent, with resource constraints and corruption continuing to limit their effectiveness.

Non-state actors face growing restrictions in their efforts to address organized crime. Government crackdowns on press freedom and NGO activity have restricted civil society groups and media organizations from exposing corruption and advocating for reform. Journalists reporting on organized crime often face threats and intimidation, further limiting access to information. Some civil society groups continue their work despite these obstacles, but their ability to influence policy and hold criminal actors to account has been severely diminished by state repression and legal constraints.

This summary was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.