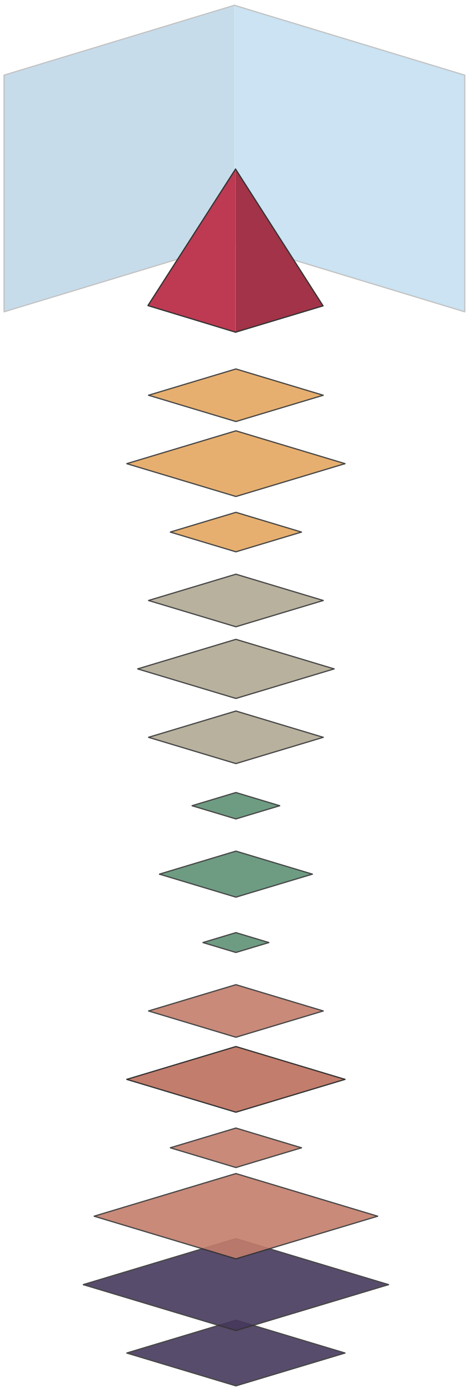
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

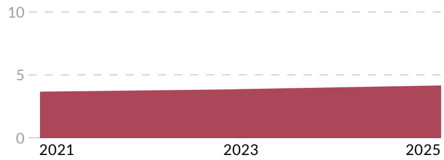
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

CANADA



4.17 ↗0.28 CRIMINALITY SCORE

144th of 193 countries ↗16
25th of 35 American countries -
2nd of 2 North American countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS 4.13 ↗0.27

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	4.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	5.00	↗1.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	3.00	↗0.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.00	↗0.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	4.50	↗0.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	4.00	↗0.50
FLORA CRIMES	2.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	3.50	↗0.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	1.50	↘1.50
HEROIN TRADE	4.00	↘1.00
COCAINE TRADE	5.00	↗1.50
CANNABIS TRADE	3.00	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.50	↗1.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.00	↗0.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	5.00	0.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS 4.20 ↗0.30

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.00	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.00	↗1.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	2.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	4.50	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	4.50	↗0.50

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

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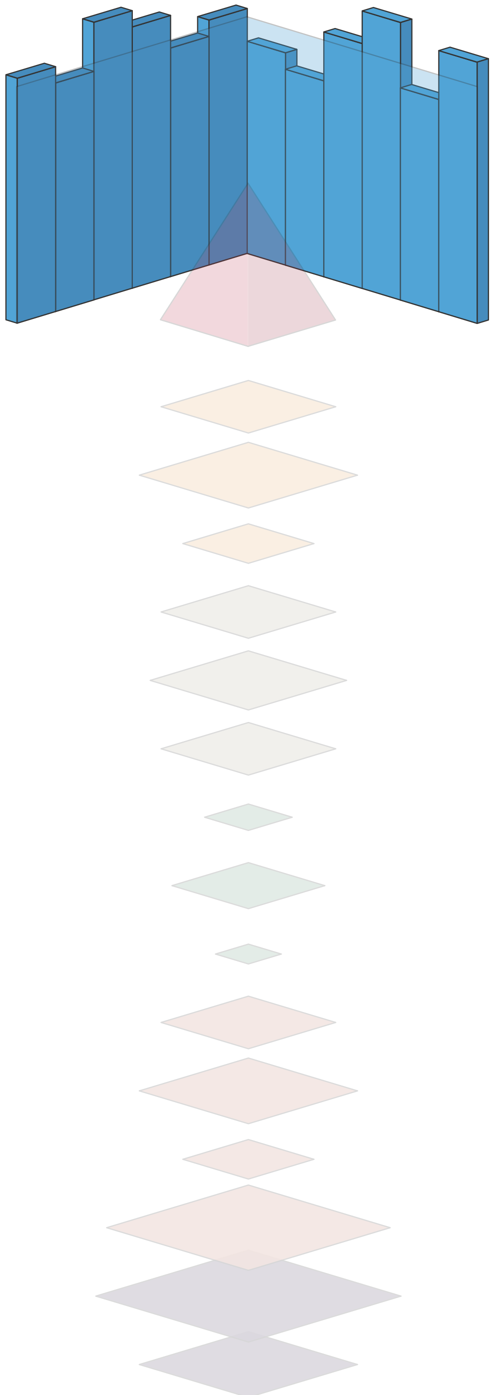
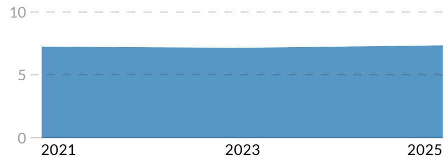
CANADA



7.38 ↗0.17

RESILIENCE SCORE

21st of 193 countries ↗2
2nd of 35 American countries -
1st of 2 North American countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	**7.50**	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	**7.00**	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	**8.50**	↗0.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	**8.00**	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	**7.00**	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	**7.50**	↗0.50
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	**6.50**	↗0.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	**6.00**	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	**7.50**	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	**8.50**	0.00
PREVENTION	**6.50**	↗0.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	**8.00**	0.00

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Canada remains a notable destination and transit country for human trafficking, with victims subjected to forced labour and sexual exploitation. Nova Scotia and Ontario serve as hubs, with traffickers leveraging social media and shopping malls to recruit victims. Vulnerable populations, including migrants, indigenous women and girls, and individuals facing economic hardship, are particularly at risk. Although the demographic composition of victims varies, the vast majority of trafficked individuals are Canadian citizens, with sexual exploitation disproportionately affecting women and girls. Forced labour is prevalent in agriculture, construction, food processing and domestic service, with employers exploiting workers' immigration status. It primarily impacts foreign nationals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. Human trafficking networks increasingly rely on digital financial tools and shell companies to launder proceeds. The market remains concentrated in urban centres like Toronto and Ottawa. It is largely dominated by criminal networks and foreign actors, with a significant proportion of victims personally acquainted with their traffickers.

Canada has become an important transit and destination country for human smuggling, particularly facilitating irregular migration to the US. Smuggling operations have expanded, particularly along the Ontario–Quebec border, where criminal networks use subcontracted drivers and social media platforms to advertise illicit crossings. Although Mexican cartels are involved, there are also indications of Asian criminal networks facilitating the movement of Indian migrants. Payment structures include direct cash transactions and sophisticated laundering schemes, largely occurring abroad. Although Canadian law enforcement has apprehended smugglers, legal limitations hinder pre-emptive interventions, contributing to persistent vulnerabilities.

Extortion and protection racketeering have surged, particularly in Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia. South Asian foreign nationals, particularly from India, are frequently targeted by criminal groups of the same nationality, with threats often delivered through WhatsApp. Perpetrators have used arson and firearm attacks to enforce demands. Traditional extortion remains linked to organized crime groups such as the Montreal Mafia, the 'Ndrangheta, Chinese criminal networks and outlaw motorcycle gangs, particularly the Hells Angels. These groups have increasingly integrated private protection schemes, particularly in illicit drug markets, levying fees from independent dealers. The lack of stringent legal deterrents has potentially contributed to the rise in such crimes.

TRADE

Arms trafficking is a growing criminal market in Canada, fuelled largely by smuggling from the US. Firearms originating from states such as Texas have been linked to violent crime rates, including robberies, homicides and extortion. Outlaw motorcycle gangs play a significant role in distribution, alongside other organized crime groups. Drones and online marketplaces are increasingly used to move illicit weapons, including untraceable 'ghost guns'. Seizures of illicit firearms have surged; however, challenges persist in disrupting well-established supply chains. Despite a potential plateau in gun-related violence in 2024, arms trafficking remains a priority for law enforcement.

Canada is a source, transit and destination country for counterfeit goods. The illicit market is extensive, encompassing counterfeit medicines, electronics, clothing and luxury items. Counterfeit tobacco is particularly prevalent, with illicit manufacturing operations concentrated in Quebec's First Nations territories. Many of these facilities are run by criminal networks rather than Indigenous actors. Organized crime groups leverage pre-existing smuggling networks to distribute counterfeit products. The Pacific Mall in Ontario remains a notable hub for counterfeit distribution, while Canada's intellectual property enforcement is weak, leading to sustained economic losses.

The illicit trade in excisable goods, particularly alcohol and tobacco, is a significant issue. Tobacco smuggling is facilitated by organized criminal groups, with substantial seizures in recent years. Although domestic demand fuels this market, a considerable portion of smuggled excise goods is destined for the US First Nations communities. The illicit tobacco industry is estimated to cost the government CA$2 billion annually in lost tax revenue. Contraband alcohol, often adulterated with additives, is smuggled across the US–Canada border. The market is also exploited for money laundering, with illicit earnings funnelled into legal enterprises.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes are relatively limited in Canada. Stringent forest governance and regulatory frameworks effectively restrict illegal timber harvesting, although the country remains a small-scale destination market for this type of product. Despite enforcement measures, seizures of smuggled flora products, including endangered plant species, indicate the presence of a niche illicit market. Indigenous communities sometimes act as intermediaries in flora-related transactions. Recent seizures have included illicit wood carvings and flora-based medicinal products. Despite these incidents, the domestic market for illegal flora remains underdeveloped and the local demand for illicit timber continues to be low.

Conversely, fauna crimes are more pronounced, with Canada serving as a source, transit and destination market for illegal wildlife products. Bears are poached for their fur, bile and claws, which are in high demand in China. Other endangered species, including narwhals, lynx and turtles, are trafficked both within Canada and internationally. The black market for baby eels (elvers) has surged, driven by demand in Asia, where they are cultivated for consumption. Wildlife smuggling networks often operate within legitimate businesses, making detection difficult. Indigenous communities, foreign actors and some state-embedded individuals facilitate this trade.

Non-renewable resource crimes are limited domestically, though Canadian mining corporations have faced allegations of environmental and human rights violations abroad. Although not a major illicit market within Canada, the sector warrants scrutiny for international regulatory concerns.

DRUGS

Canada is primarily a destination and transit country for heroin, largely sourced from South Asia via East Africa and Europe. Organized crime groups, including outlaw motorcycle gangs, play a crucial role in distribution, often alongside arms trafficking. Border seizures have fluctuated, but domestic heroin demand remains relatively stable.

The cocaine market remains consolidated, with Canada serving as both a destination and transit point. However, given the established legal framework of the country, the overall impact of the market remains limited. Even so, in some provinces, cocaine is the leading drug involved in toxicity-related deaths, resulting in significant harm. Mexican cartels, supported by Iranian and Chinese criminal networks, supply the Canadian market. Outlaw motorcycle gangs manage local distribution, sourcing cocaine from Mexico, the Caribbean and South America. Rising supply from Mexican networks has expanded market availability, particularly along the east coast, with Toronto and Ontario serving as key hubs.

Despite cannabis legalization, the illicit market remains robust, driven by lower prices and the perceived higher quality of black-market products. Organized crime groups continue to engage in illegal cultivation and smuggling operations. Asian organized crime groups control much of the illegal supply, with smuggling routes into the US via the Great Lakes. Outlaw motorcycle gangs have attempted to infiltrate the legal market through licensing schemes.

Synthetic drug trafficking is expanding, with fentanyl and methamphetamine at the forefront. Canada is a major producer and exporter of synthetic drugs, particularly fentanyl, which has fuelled an opioid crisis. The Big Circle Boys, a Chinese-based criminal network, control much of the trade. Canadian laboratories have been linked to large-scale fentanyl production, with record seizures in 2024. Mexican cartels, in collaboration with Chinese and Iranian actors, are also involved in methamphetamine distribution. The synthetic drug trade is intrinsically linked to financial crime and money laundering.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes are an escalating threat, with ransomware attacks and other cyber threats becoming increasingly sophisticated. This type of attack often targets hospitals and essential services in Canada. Cybercriminals usually operate from Russia, China and Iran, leveraging cryptocurrencies for financial transactions and exploiting Canada's cyber vulnerabilities. Ransomware payments have surged, reflecting the growing impact of cybercrime on businesses and public institutions.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in Canada are well-established, with a rise in suspected digital fraud attempts in recent years. Fraudulent schemes, including phishing, Ponzi schemes and identity theft, are prevalent, along with tax evasion. The retail and financial services sectors are particularly vulnerable to fraudulent activities, with reported substantial economic losses. Organized crime groups leverage shell companies and Canada's weak corporate transparency laws to facilitate illicit transactions.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mafia-style groups in Canada, though relatively few, exert significant control over various criminal markets. The most prominent among them are outlaw motorcycle gangs, such as the Hells Angels. OMCGs maintain a strong presence across Canada, with 44 chapters nationwide and 16 in Ontario alone. These groups dominate the drug trade and are deeply involved in extortion and protection racketeering. Some chapters of the Hells Angels engage in mafia-inspired protection schemes, while others are embroiled in violent turf wars, particularly in Ontario. Canadian prisons have witnessed an increase in gang-related violence, with a reported rise in gang-affiliated inmates over the past years, further entrenching the influence of these groups.

Criminal networks constitute an influential and flexible form of organized crime in Canada. The Criminal Intelligence Service Canada has identified 668 organized crime groups, with estimates suggesting that over 70 000 individuals are involved in illicit activities. These networks operate across multiple criminal markets, including drug trafficking (particularly fentanyl and cocaine) human trafficking, arms smuggling and cybercrime. Fentanyl-related activities as well as human trafficking have surged since 2019, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. Criminal groups leverage Canada's ports and transportation hubs, particularly in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia, to facilitate transnational operations. Recent law enforcement actions, including a joint RCMP–FBI operation in 2024, dismantled a major Mexican cartel-linked network trafficking drugs and committing violent crimes across the Americas. However, professional money laundering networks remain critical enablers of criminal enterprises, with illicit financial flows supporting both domestic and international organized crime operations.

The Hells Angels and Nigerian criminal groups have been known to embed operatives within provincial government agencies to obtain confidential information. However, direct involvement of state officials in criminal enterprises remains rare. Despite some isolated incidents, the overall influence of state-embedded actors in Canada's organized crime landscape remains limited. Foreign actors play a notable role in Canada's organized crime ecosystem, either through transnational partnerships or direct operations. The most influential groups include the Chinese Triads, the Italian 'Ndrangheta, Mexican cartels and various Indian and Eastern European criminal organizations. The Chinese Triads are heavily involved in drug trafficking, wildlife smuggling and illicit trade on indigenous reserves, particularly in counterfeit tobacco production. Mexican cartels, including the Sinaloa Cartel, have expanded their presence in Canada, primarily for cocaine trafficking and money laundering. The 'Ndrangheta's Siderno Group remains one of the most entrenched Italian criminal syndicates in the country, engaging in drug trafficking, gambling and financial crimes. Additionally, Russian and Iranian cybercriminals continue to exploit Canada's cyber vulnerabilities, contributing to the rise in ransomware attacks and financial fraud.

Private-sector actors play a notable role in facilitating organized crime, primarily through money laundering and financial fraud. Key industries exploited for illicit financial transactions include real estate, hospitality, transportation and warehousing. Money service businesses are particularly vulnerable to criminal exploitation, often serving as intermediaries for laundering proceeds from drug trafficking and cybercrime. A significant financial scheme uncovered by the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre involved domestic financial planners and investment firms purchasing guaranteed investment certificates with unknown funds from Chinese sources, subsequently liquidating them and transferring the proceeds to clients. Luxury car dealerships have also been used as laundering vehicles, with illicit funds often funnelled through high-value purchases. Beyond money laundering, private-sector entities are implicated in fraud, counterfeiting and smuggling, further entrenching their role in Canada's organized crime framework.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Canada maintains strong political leadership and governance, ranking among the top liberal democracies globally. Its institutional stability ensures a high level of resilience against organized crime, with no evidence suggesting political penetration by criminal groups. Although Canada lacks an updated national strategy to combat organized crime, various sector-specific priorities, such as addressing synthetic opioids and arms trafficking, have been implemented. However, the National Agenda to Combat Organized Crime, originally endorsed in 2000, is outdated and has not evolved into a comprehensive strategy. This remains a challenge in countering the evolving threats posed by organized crime.

Government transparency and accountability mechanisms are robust. The country enforces strict anti-corruption laws, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) engages in awareness campaigns. Although Transparency International Canada monitors government integrity, access to information laws have faced criticism for broad exceptions and lack of reform.

Internationally, Canada demonstrates strong cooperation in combating organized crime, having ratified key international treaties such as the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Arms Trade Treaty. The country maintains extradition agreements with 49 nations and is a founding member of the Financial Action Task Force. Canada actively engages in cybersecurity efforts, aligning with the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, yet cross-border law enforcement collaboration remains an area for improvement, particularly in combating illicit trade.

Canada has a strong legal framework that criminalizes involvement in organized crime and provides the RCMP with broad investigative powers. The country also implements national strategies to combat organized crime. In 2024, the Canadian government also introduced several legislative reforms aimed at addressing financial crimes and money laundering, even though privacy laws restrict financial regulators' access to additional data from banks, posing challenges for effective implementation of the said regulatory changes. Overall, although Canada has policies, strategic frameworks and legislation in place, challenges remain. In particular, a lack of funding and resources hinders the full implementation of these measures.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Canada's judicial system is highly competent and independent, with no evidence of systemic corruption. However, the country faces a severe shortage of judges, leading to significant delays in case processing. Due to resource constraints, some organized crime-related cases have been dismissed, highlighting the judiciary's struggle to keep pace with the complexity of criminal networks. Despite efforts to modernize correctional institutions, Canadian prisons continue to experience gang-related violence, and inmate control within the system remains a concern. Overcrowding and staffing shortages further strain the correctional system.

Law enforcement agencies in Canada are well-established and coordinate effectively to combat organized crime. The RCMP leads national efforts, while provincial agencies such as the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit focus on regional crime suppression. Despite strong intelligence-sharing mechanisms, financial resources allocated to law enforcement, particularly in tackling financial crimes, remain insufficient. Budget cuts to the RCMP have affected its ability to pursue complex investigations. The lack of a dedicated organized crime prevention strategy further complicates enforcement efforts.

Border security remains a challenge due to Canada's vast geographical size. The Canada Border Services Agency has implemented advanced monitoring technologies, but the porous nature of the US–Canada border continues to facilitate drug and human smuggling. The country has engaged in cross-border initiatives with the US, such as the Integrated Border Enforcement Teams, yet gaps in enforcement remain, particularly at unofficial entry points. Canada's cybersecurity infrastructure has seen significant investment, improving resilience against cyber threats.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Canada has a well-developed anti-money laundering framework aligned with international standards, yet weaknesses persist in beneficial ownership transparency and financial crime enforcement. Although recent legislative amendments aim to enhance information-sharing and regulatory oversight, the Financial Action Task Force has identified areas requiring improvement, including more stringent risk assessments. The limited investigative capacity of financial intelligence agencies remains a concern.

The economic regulatory environment in Canada supports legitimate business operations, with strong governance mechanisms ensuring market stability. Fiscal policy has been expansionary but with moderate deficits and debt, while government priorities have shifted towards income redistribution through tax and other measures. Although organized crime does not exert control over entire industries, illicit activities such as counterfeit tobacco production on indigenous reserves highlight regulatory gaps. The introduction of a public beneficial ownership register is a significant step towards improving financial transparency within the private sector. However, low labour productivity remains a persistent challenge despite the economy's overall resilience.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness protection mechanisms in Canada are well-established but face operational challenges. Although national and provincial victim support services exist, gaps in funding and service accessibility persist. The RCMP's Federal Witness Protection Program remains effective, yet witness participation in trials remains low due to safety concerns. NGOs play a crucial role in providing victim services, particularly for human trafficking survivors, yet greater state support is needed.

Prevention efforts in Canada focus on targeted crime reduction strategies rather than a comprehensive organized crime prevention framework. Although national strategies to combat human trafficking and cybercrime exist, broader initiatives addressing the root causes of organized crime remain limited. Calls for a public health-based approach to crime prevention have gained traction, yet funding remains concentrated on law enforcement rather than proactive intervention.

Non-state actors, including civil society organizations and media outlets, contribute to crime prevention and public awareness. Canada is generally considered to have strong press freedom, yet reporting on indigenous issues and land conflicts remains a challenge. Although no direct attacks on journalists by organized crime groups have been reported, concerns over access to information persist. NGOs play a critical role in addressing human trafficking, drug abuse prevention and community reintegration for offenders, yet funding constraints limit their effectiveness.

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.