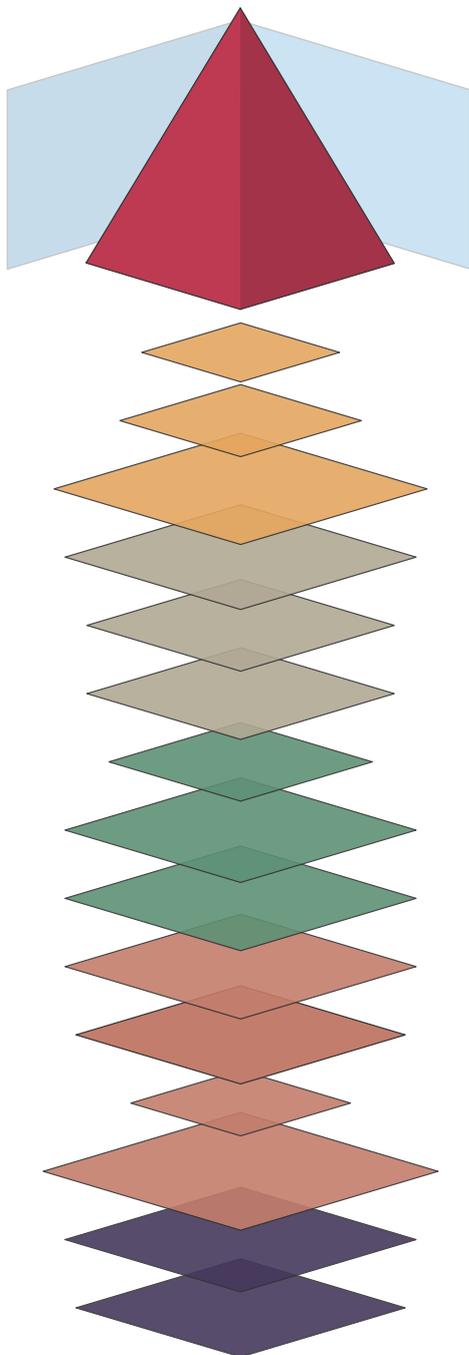


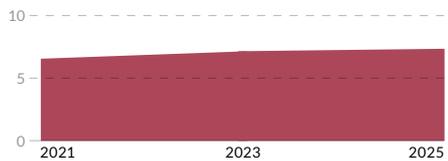
SOUTH AFRICA



7.43 ↗0.25

CRIMINALITY SCORE

7th of 193 countries -
2nd of 54 African countries ↗1
1st of 13 Southern African countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS

7.17 ↗0.30

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	4.50	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	5.50	↗0.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	8.50	↗0.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	8.00	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7.00	0.00
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	7.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	6.00	↗1.00
FAUNA CRIMES	8.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	8.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	8.00	↗0.50
COCAINE TRADE	7.50	↗0.50
CANNABIS TRADE	5.00	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	9.00	↗0.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	8.00	↗1.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.50	0.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS

7.70 ↗0.20

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	8.00	↗0.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	8.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.50	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.00	↗0.50



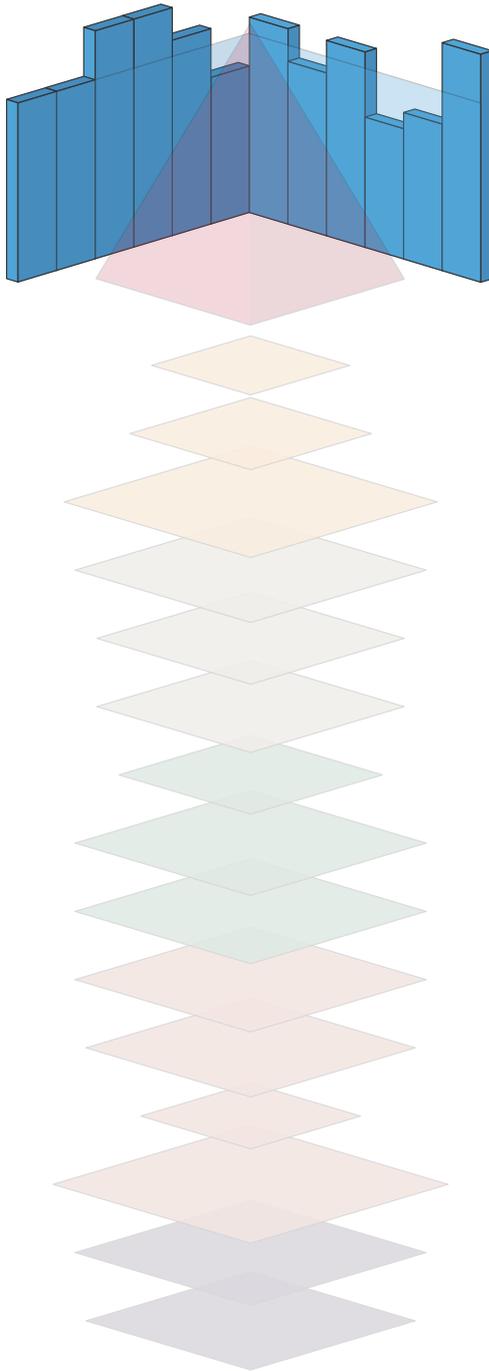
This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.



Funded by the European Union

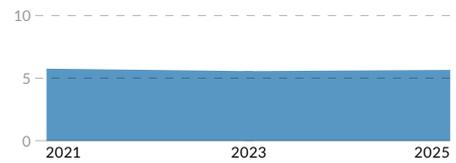
ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

SOUTH AFRICA



5.67 $\nearrow 0.04$
RESILIENCE SCORE

44th of 193 countries $\nearrow 6$
3rd of 54 African countries $\nearrow 1$
1st of 13 Southern African countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.50	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	5.50	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	7.00	$\nearrow 1.00$
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	7.00	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	6.00	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.50	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	6.00	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	5.00	$\searrow 0.50$
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	6.00	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.00	0.00
PREVENTION	4.50	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	7.00	0.00



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

South Africa is a source, transit point and destination country for human trafficking. The scale of the market is moderate but a range of trafficking forms persist, including sex trafficking, child labour, domestic servitude and debt bondage. Labour exploitation, particularly in the agricultural and mining sectors, is a significant concern. Vulnerable groups, including young girls, LGBTQI+ individuals and migrants, are particularly at risk, often lured with false offers of employment or personal opportunities. Law enforcement and immigration officials have been implicated in facilitating trafficking operations, either through direct involvement or by turning a blind eye.

Human smuggling is prevalent, criminal networks facilitating the movement of migrants from the Horn of Africa and east Africa through major transit points such as Dar es Salaam and Maputo. South Africa is a key destination, Gauteng emerging as a primary hub for smuggled individuals. Reports have emerged of violence against migrants in areas such as Johannesburg and Beitbridge, including incidents of aggression and even fatalities at the hands of local residents. The primary drivers behind irregular migration and involvement in this illicit market are the pursuit of better economic opportunities and family-related motivations, underscoring the desperate circumstances that fuel this trade. Despite efforts to address this issue, including police training initiatives, the market remains active.

Extortion and protection racketeering have become one of the fastest-growing forms of organized crime in South Africa, expanding beyond metropolitan areas into smaller towns and rural regions. This criminal market affects a wide range of sectors, including construction, mining, transport, retail, and even public services such as water and waste management. It has also become more entrenched and violent, often involving heavily armed groups and ties to other crimes such as drug trafficking, kidnappings, cybercrime and assassinations. Organized criminal groups, mainly domestic but sometimes supported by foreign actors, are at the centre of this market. These groups operate in mafia-like structures and have diversified income sources, forming sub-gangs and building connections with public officials and private sector individuals. The practice has become normalized to the point where many businesses now consider extortion payments a regular operating expense. Victims, including local and foreign business owners, are often reluctant to report incidents due to intimidation and fear of retaliation.

TRADE

Arms trafficking in South Africa is fuelled by a combination of domestic and international sources. Firearms are smuggled into the country from neighbouring states, including Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Lesotho. However, a significant portion of illicit firearms originates from legal domestic markets as weapons are stolen from civilians, private security firms and law enforcement agencies. Corrupt elements in law enforcement have also been implicated in supplying firearms to criminal groups. The widespread availability of illicit firearms contributes to high levels of violent crime, including targeted assassinations, gang warfare and cash-in-transit robberies.

The counterfeit goods market is pervasive, driven by weak border enforcement and the involvement of criminal networks operating across the Mozambique-South Africa border. Seizures of counterfeit clothing, footwear, electronics and pharmaceuticals indicate the scale of the market, which has strong transnational ties to suppliers in southeast Asia, Latin America and eastern Europe. Corruption at ports and bonded warehouses facilitates the entry of illicit goods, and Johannesburg is a major distribution hub. Despite occasional large seizures, the market is resilient and continues to thrive, particularly among informal vendors. Counterfeit pharmaceutical products pose significant health risks, with substandard or fake medicines circulating in urban and rural areas. Illicit trade in excise goods, particularly tobacco and alcohol, is significant. Corruption among border control officials, especially at ports, enables the continued flow of contraband. A notable trend involves roundtripping, where goods are ostensibly destined for neighbouring states but end up in the South African market. Despite government efforts to combat this market, including the deployment of the Border Management Authority, illicit trade networks remain well established.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes are a concern, particularly the illegal trade of succulents and cycads, which are highly sought after in international markets. Despite efforts to curb this trade, including adding plant species to Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species listings, poaching continues to threaten biodiversity. Reports indicate that several species have been severely depleted due to poaching and authorities have seized millions of plants in recent years. Economically disadvantaged local communities are often recruited by traffickers to collect rare species. South Africa has a domestic market for these plants but international demand is the primary driver of illegal trade. Smuggling networks link South Africa's flora trade to collectors and buyers in Europe, north America and east Asia, where demand for rare plants is rising.

Fauna crimes, including poaching and trafficking of rhino horns, elephant tusks, spiny lizards (*Chordylus* species) and lion skeletons, generate substantial profits for local and foreign actors. Organized crime syndicates, particularly those from southeast Asia, collaborate with domestic poachers to traffic high-value wildlife products. Many poachers become involved in the illegal wildlife trade due to a lack of viable income alternatives, while foreign actors are primarily profit-driven, working to supply the lucrative east Asian market. State-embedded actors, including corrupt provincial and municipal officials, and private sector actors such as game rangers, are reported to facilitate trafficking activities. This market is also interconnected with other criminal enterprises, including illegal mining, cash-in-transit heists, money laundering and racketeering. As the region's largest economy with a sophisticated banking system, South Africa remains a prime target for financial crimes associated with the trafficking of high-value wildlife species. Mafia-style groups have reportedly used violence to control abalone prices, while the broader illegal wildlife trade has been marked by violent incidents, including the targeted assassinations of rangers and conservationists. Despite law enforcement successes, such as the arrest of Vietnamese traffickers involved in lion bone sales, the illicit wildlife trade remains deeply entrenched.

The illegal exploitation of non-renewable resources is a major criminal enterprise in South Africa, and illicit mining of gold, coal and diamonds contributes to environmental degradation and community conflict. Criminal syndicates control these operations, providing protection and weaponry to illegal zama zama miners, many of whom are undocumented migrants. Zama zama syndicates increasingly target major conglomerates involved in platinum extraction. Corrupt officials and private sector actors facilitate this trade, entrenching its presence. Government responses, including military deployments, have had limited success, as criminal networks adapt. The trafficking of explosives and chemicals, notably mercury, occurs alongside illegal mining, exacerbating regulatory challenges. Violence frequently accompanies these activities, clashes occurring between rival groups and in communities affected by mining operations. Fuel theft is a persistent issue, recent measures curbing direct pipeline theft but potentially driving an increase in tanker robberies. Copper theft from public infrastructure causes service disruptions, affecting power supply, freight transport and essential services.

DRUGS

The heroin trade is a key component of drug markets in South Africa, which is a transit point and a destination hub. Heroin enters through Mozambique and Tanzania, originating from Afghanistan, and is distributed through violent street-level networks. Durban and Cape Town are significant heroin trafficking and consumption hubs, and associated gang violence has worsened in recent years. Several hundred thousand users consume heroin in

powdered form, as well as in combined formulations such as 'nyaope' or 'whoonga'. The crisis, which disproportionately affects the most disadvantaged communities, affects a significant share of the adult population, making South Africa's heroin market one of the largest on the continent. Cocaine trafficking is prevalent, South Africa acting as a key transit point for shipments moving from South America to international markets in Europe, Asia and Australia. Domestic consumption, while stable, is overshadowed by synthetic stimulant use. Large-scale cocaine seizures at major ports, such as Durban, highlight the country's role in transnational drug trafficking. Cannabis trade is widespread despite the decriminalization of personal possession. The recently enacted legal framework provided clarity but an illicit market persists and organized crime actors profit from unauthorized sales. Traditional cannabis-growing communities are economically dependent on this trade, raising concerns over potential criminal displacement due to market legalization.

The synthetic drug market has grown, particularly with methamphetamine (locally referred to as 'tik') dominating the landscape. Local production is significant, primarily concentrated in clandestine laboratories, especially in the Western Cape, using smuggled precursors such as ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. However, locally produced drugs are supplemented by high-purity meth from international sources, with reports of trafficking into the country from southeast Asia through west Africa. The involvement of transnational actors, including those from west Africa and Australia, underscores the globalized nature of a market in which South Africa is a central player. Law enforcement operations have uncovered large-scale meth laboratories, reinforcing evidence of South Africa's role as a manufacturer and distributor of synthetic drugs. In 2024, South Africa witnessed one of its largest drug busts when police uncovered an industrial-scale meth lab on a farm in Groblersdal, Limpopo, arresting four suspects, including two Mexican nationals. The market for new psychoactive substances is also expanding, with synthetic cannabinoids and cathinones (e.g. bath salts) being the most common. These are often manufactured abroad, particularly in China, and trafficked into South Africa through postal and courier services. Notably, South Africa has been identified by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission as a key embarkation point for amphetamine-type stimulants. Fentanyl, a highly potent synthetic opioid, has recently entered the drug trafficking network in South Africa, raising concerns among law enforcement.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

South Africa has become a hotspot for cyber-dependent crime. Malware, ransomware attacks and data breaches are increasing, either originating from or targeting the country. Local and international actors exploit weak cybersecurity frameworks, targeting financial institutions, private businesses and government infrastructure, leading

to service disruptions. Reports indicate a surge in such attacks, with threat actors increasingly leveraging artificial intelligence tools to enhance the sophistication and precision of their operations. The number of incidents rose sharply in 2024 compared with 2023, organizations and government entities experiencing several attacks each week. South Africa remains one of the most targeted countries in Africa, with ransomware alone accounting for over 40 per cent of reported incidents across the continent.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes are prevalent in South Africa, where fraud is deeply embedded in the economy. Cryptocurrency scams and Ponzi schemes target vulnerable populations, while international crime syndicates use the country as a base for large-scale financial fraud operations. Credit card fraud was once widespread but the introduction of chip-enabled cards has significantly reduced such incidents. However, online fraud is increasing and the population is highly vulnerable to these digital scams. Fraudulent online transactions and identity theft have risen, exacerbated by increasing reliance on digital banking. Cyber-enabled financial crimes are a growing concern, particularly as the digitization of the financial sector expands. South Africa's vulnerability to cyber-enabled financial crime, including online scams, is underscored by the presence of transnational syndicates such as Black Axe, and reports suggest the country may host similar groups. Corrupt officials and private sector actors also exploit regulatory loopholes, enabling tax evasion and the misuse of shell companies.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mafia-style groups in South Africa have a longstanding presence in the organized crime landscape, particularly through entrenched street gangs, prison gangs and extortion networks, which operate across illicit markets. Long-established gangs in the Western Cape, including the Americans, Hard Livings, Sexy Boys and Terrible Josters, dominate drug distribution and extortion rackets. These groups have expanded their activities beyond traditional strongholds, increasingly infiltrating legal businesses and the construction sector. The Numbers gangs, historically rooted in the prison system, maintain significant control over criminal operations from inside correctional facilities, coordinating with external networks to sustain illicit enterprises. Extortion has become a primary source of revenue for these groups, spreading beyond nightlife establishments to retail, hospitality and infrastructure projects. The influence of these actors extends to the taxi industry, where powerful associations control routes and engage in violence to maintain dominance. In recent years, South Africa has seen a rise in the so-called 'construction mafia' – organized groups that infiltrate the construction sector through intimidation, violence and extortion to secure a share of lucrative projects. Their activities have caused

significant project delays, escalated costs, and deterred investment in the property and infrastructure sectors. Reports indicate collusion between mafia-style actors and law enforcement, some officials allegedly facilitating criminal activities, providing protection or supplying state-owned firearms to gang members. The rise in gun-related violence, particularly in Cape Town and Durban, reflects the growing power of these groups and their ability to circumvent law enforcement measures.

Criminal networks are deeply entrenched in a range of illicit markets, often overlapping with mafia-style groups. These networks are instrumental in the trafficking of drugs, arms and counterfeit goods, as well as engaging in cybercrime and environmental crimes. Their adaptability allows them to exploit regulatory weaknesses, enabling a high level of operational flexibility. Extortion is a core activity of these groups, particularly in townships, where street gangs extort formal and informal businesses. Many of these gangs also diversify into vehicle hijacking and armed robberies, reflecting the fluid nature of their operations. In the Western Cape, there has been a trend towards the consolidation of smaller networks into larger, more structured entities, potentially leading to increased competition and violence as groups vie for control of lucrative criminal markets. South Africa's criminal networks maintain strong transnational ties, particularly in the trafficking of narcotics, firearms and contraband goods. These networks collaborate with foreign actors, facilitating the smuggling of illicit commodities across borders and reinforcing their influence in global criminal enterprises.

State-embedded criminal actors pose a significant challenge in South Africa, where corruption permeates various levels of governance. The legacy of state capture and systemic graft has left many state institutions vulnerable to criminal infiltration. Political corruption is particularly pronounced at municipal level, where criminal actors have embedded themselves in local government structures to influence state contracts and financial flows. Politically motivated assassinations have become a persistent feature of the criminal landscape and targeted killings are often used to secure political and economic interests. Law enforcement agencies have also been implicated in criminal activity. There have been reports of police officers engaging in extortion, facilitating illicit trade and participating in corrupt dealings in the taxi industry. The involvement of security forces in the supply of illegal firearms exacerbates violent crime, highlighting the extent to which state institutions have been compromised by criminal elements. The 2024 general election and subsequent shifts in political leadership may disrupt entrenched networks of corruption, but the long-term impact is uncertain.

South Africa's organized crime landscape features significant foreign actor involvement and transnational networks play key roles in illicit markets. Nigerian, eastern European and Chinese criminal groups have established operations in the country, engaging in activities such as drug trafficking,

financial crimes and environmental exploitation. Zimbabwean criminal actors have a notable presence in the illicit trade of excisable goods, particularly tobacco, and criminal networks facilitate large-scale smuggling operations. Chinese nationals have been implicated in financial crimes, wildlife trafficking and the illicit trade of non-renewable resources, particularly copper. Mozambican groups are active in high-profile kidnapping-for-ransom cases, while Ethiopian and Bangladeshi syndicates have been linked to human smuggling and trafficking operations. Serbians, Montenegrins and Kosovars are re-emerging, while notable arrests of Mexican and Colombian nationals have also been reported. Foreign actors frequently collaborate with local networks, leveraging their resources to expand criminal enterprises, particularly in the drug trade, financial crimes and illicit goods smuggling.

Private sector actors are implicated in facilitating organized crime, particularly through the illicit trade of precious metals and copper, and financial fraud schemes. Businesses involved in the gold and copper industries have been linked to illegal export schemes and scrap dealers manipulate supply chains to legitimize illicitly acquired resources. Financial crimes involving private sector actors are a major concern, and corporate fraud and large-scale Ponzi schemes continue to defraud investors. High-profile scandals, such as those involving major consulting firms and state capture allegations, underscore the extent to which private enterprises have been complicit in illicit financial flows. Tax evasion in the tobacco industry is widespread and companies are implicated in circumventing excise duties to maximize profits.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Political leadership in South Africa has increasingly recognized the severity of organized crime, yet government responses are largely reactionary. Rhetoric against organized crime is common but effective implementation of long-term strategies has been inconsistent. The general elections in May 2024 marked a political shift, with the formation of a government of national unity. Some key cabinet positions, including the Ministry of Home Affairs, which oversees migration issues, were allocated to politicians from coalition partners of the largest party, the African National Congress (ANC). Allegations of corruption among high-ranking officials persist despite the restructuring. The state addresses organized crime in sectors such as illegal mining but there are gaps in execution. Public sentiment toward the new government appears more positive than in previous years.

Government transparency is a challenge despite an extensive legal framework for accountability. The ANC has been accused of shielding corrupt officials, undermining state institutions and engaging in procurement-related corruption. South Africa has robust access to information laws but enforcement is inconsistent. The establishment of the Investigative Directorate Against Corruption is a notable step toward political accountability. Recent improvements include increased transparency in government spending and efforts to clear backlogs in identity document processing. However, challenges such as maladministration and financial mismanagement erode public trust.

Internationally, South Africa engages in multilateral cooperation and has ratified key instruments against organized crime. The country maintains extradition

agreements with various nations and has responded effectively to requests, notably in cases related to cyber fraud and financial crimes. INTERPOL South Africa has handled numerous extradition cases, including some involving individuals linked to international financial crime syndicates.

South Africa has a robust legal framework to combat organized crime, including laws targeting corruption, money laundering, gang activity and cybercrime. Key legislation includes the Prevention of Organised Crime Act and the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act. Recent legal reforms, such as the 2024 National Prosecuting Authority Amendment Act, demonstrate the country's continued efforts to strengthen its anti-corruption and anti-terror financing measures, partly in response to international recommendations. However, the main challenge lies in implementation. Despite comprehensive laws and policies, such as the National Development Plan 2030 and the White Paper on Safety and Security, enforcement remains weak. The delayed rollout of strategies, such as the 2022 Integrated Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy, highlights the gap between policy and practice. South Africa has also taken steps to address cybercrime, enacting the Cybercrimes Act in 2020, which defines and criminalizes various cyber offences. In 2023–2024, a new strategy was developed to improve the investigation and prosecution of organized crime, reflecting growing awareness of its societal threat. Overall, while South Africa has the legislative tools needed to address organized crime, inconsistent implementation continues to undermine their effectiveness.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judiciary in South Africa operates independently but faces significant capacity constraints. Courts have historically held public officials accountable but resource shortages, gaps in prosecutorial expertise and delays in processing cases weaken the system. Conviction rates for serious crimes, including organized crime, have improved but backlogs persist. Infrastructure limitations further disrupt judicial proceedings. The detention system is a concern, with overcrowding, human rights violations and gang-related violence entrenched in the prison environment. The country has the largest prison population on the continent, a large portion of which is awaiting trial.

Law enforcement agencies, including the South African Police Service, are under significant strain due to corruption, mismanagement and inefficiency. Senior officers have been implicated in organized crime, undermining public trust. Efforts to combat corruption have resulted in high-profile arrests, including corporate executives linked to financial misconduct. The Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation plays a central role in tackling organized crime, but jurisdictional overlaps with the police organized crime division create operational inefficiencies. Financial constraints hinder law enforcement and a significant funding shortfall affects investigative capacity.

In 2024, South Africa's Border Management Authority (BMA) prioritized enhancing border integrity and operational efficiency through digital transformation initiatives, including the deployment of drones and body cameras. Since then, the BMA has successfully managed a high volume of cross-border movement and recorded a notable increase in the prevention of illegal crossings. These outcomes were driven by a more integrated, coordinated strategy and the effective use of advanced technologies. However, South Africa's borders remain vulnerable, facilitating the movement of illicit goods and people. Despite the establishment of the BMA, enforcement is weak, particularly along the borders with Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Lesotho. Ports such as Durban are key entry points for drug trafficking and counterfeit goods. Cyber threats pose emerging challenges to territorial integrity and law enforcement lacks the capacity to effectively counter cyber-enabled financial crimes.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

South Africa's resilience to financial crime is weak, as evidenced by its placement on the Financial Action Task Force grey list in 2023. The legal framework for anti-money laundering is strong but enforcement is inconsistent due to capacity constraints. Corruption under previous administrations weakened regulatory bodies, exacerbating financial crime risks. The illicit gold trade is a major concern and criminal networks exploit weak oversight mechanisms to launder proceeds. The Financial Intelligence Centre has increased its recovery of illicit funds through strategic

partnerships, but institutional weaknesses mean many financial criminals are not held accountable.

The economic regulatory environment is a complex mix of formal and informal economic activity. The informal sector, particularly the taxi industry, operates largely outside regulatory oversight and has been linked to organized crime. Despite governance improvements, challenges such as corruption, weak rule of law and economic inequality hinder resilience. Business Against Crime South Africa is a key intermediary between government and private sector actors in combating organized crime. However, violent crime, infrastructure decay and regulatory uncertainty undermine business confidence and investment.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support systems in South Africa are inadequate, and corruption and threats of violence discourage individuals from testifying. While the government has trained social workers and healthcare professionals to identify and assist child trafficking victims, service providers remain understaffed, causing delays in support delivery. In response to the rising incidence of drug abuse, the Central Drug Authority has shifted its focus toward empowering communities to address substance abuse holistically and support the rehabilitation of drug users. The government also operates 65 Thuthuzela Care Centres nationwide, offering integrated forensic, medical, psychosocial and legal support for victims of gender-based violence, including trafficking survivors. These centres aim to reduce trauma and encourage cooperation with law enforcement. Despite the effectiveness of the Office for Witness Protection in safeguarding enrolled individuals, its limited reach remains a concern – particularly as the murder of whistle-blowers underscores serious deficiencies in protection mechanisms. The Department of Justice's Witness Protection Programme provides risk assessments, relocation, identity protection and psychological support, but many organized crime victims still lack access to justice. Non-government organizations (NGOs) play a critical role in filling these gaps, though their capacity is constrained by limited funding. The Department of Social Development supports civil society organizations through the Victim Empowerment Programme and the Criminal Asset Recovery Account, funding essential services such as counselling, shelters and legal aid. However, persistent structural and operational challenges have limited the effectiveness of this collaboration.

Prevention efforts against organized crime are underfunded and inconsistently implemented. Prosecution rates for human trafficking have improved but structural issues such as corruption, lack of training and poor coordination hinder overall effectiveness. The government has a 2023–2026 National Policy Framework on the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons, which it developed in consultation with civil society and survivor experts. It continues to provide anti-trafficking training to labour

inspectors, including in collaboration with international organizations and foreign donors. Nevertheless, the impact of these initiatives remains limited. Recent policy revisions indicate a shift toward more proactive measures, including enhanced public awareness campaigns. However, community policing initiatives have struggled due to poor integration with law enforcement and limited community engagement. The National Prosecuting Authority has been working with the private sector to increase the number of prosecutors with cyber forensic capabilities.

Non-state actors, including NGOs and the media, play a crucial role in promoting accountability. South Africa has a vibrant civil society with a history of legislative influence. However, threats against journalists and activists have increased, particularly in response to investigative reporting on corruption. Press freedom is constitutionally protected but political interference and online harassment create a challenging environment for independent media. Proposed legislative amendments raising concerns over state surveillance of NGOs may further strain relations between civil society and the government.

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