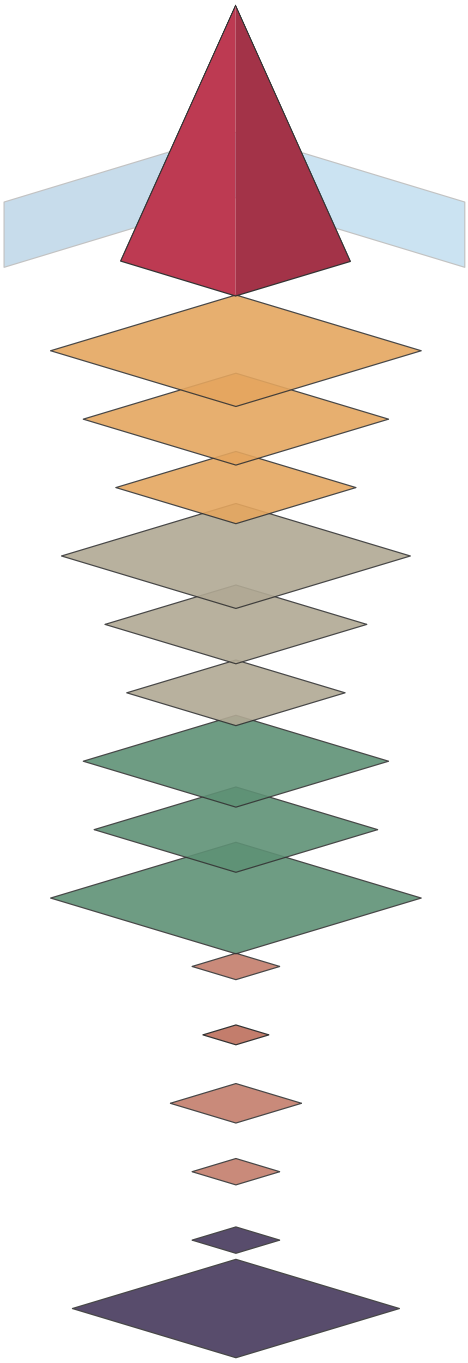
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

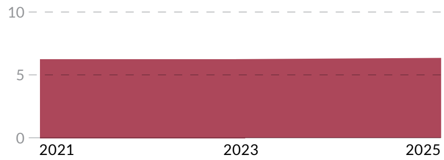
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

# SOUTH SUDAN



## 6.42 ↗0.10 CRIMINALITY SCORE

38th of 193 countries ↘2
11th of 54 African countries ↘2
5th of 9 East African countries ↘1




## CRIMINAL MARKETS 5.33 ↗0.20

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| HUMAN TRAFFICKING | 8.50 | 0.00 |
| HUMAN SMUGGLING | 7.00 | ↗1.50 |
| EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING | 5.50 | ↗0.50 |
| ARMS TRAFFICKING | 8.00 | 0.00 |
| TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS | 6.00 | 0.00 |
| ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS | 5.00 | 0.00 |
| FLORA CRIMES | 7.00 | 0.00 |
| FAUNA CRIMES | 6.50 | 0.00 |
| NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES | 8.50 | 0.00 |
| HEROIN TRADE | 2.00 | 0.00 |
| COCAINE TRADE | 1.50 | 0.00 |
| CANNABIS TRADE | 3.00 | ↘1.00 |
| SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE | 2.00 | ↗1.00 |
| CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES | 2.00 | ↗1.00 |
| FINANCIAL CRIMES | 7.50 | 0.00 |

## CRIMINAL ACTORS 7.50 0.00

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS | 5.50 | ↗0.50 |
| CRIMINAL NETWORKS | 7.50 | 0.00 |
| STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS | 9.00 | 0.00 |
| FOREIGN ACTORS | 8.00 | 0.00 |
| PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS | 7.50 | ↘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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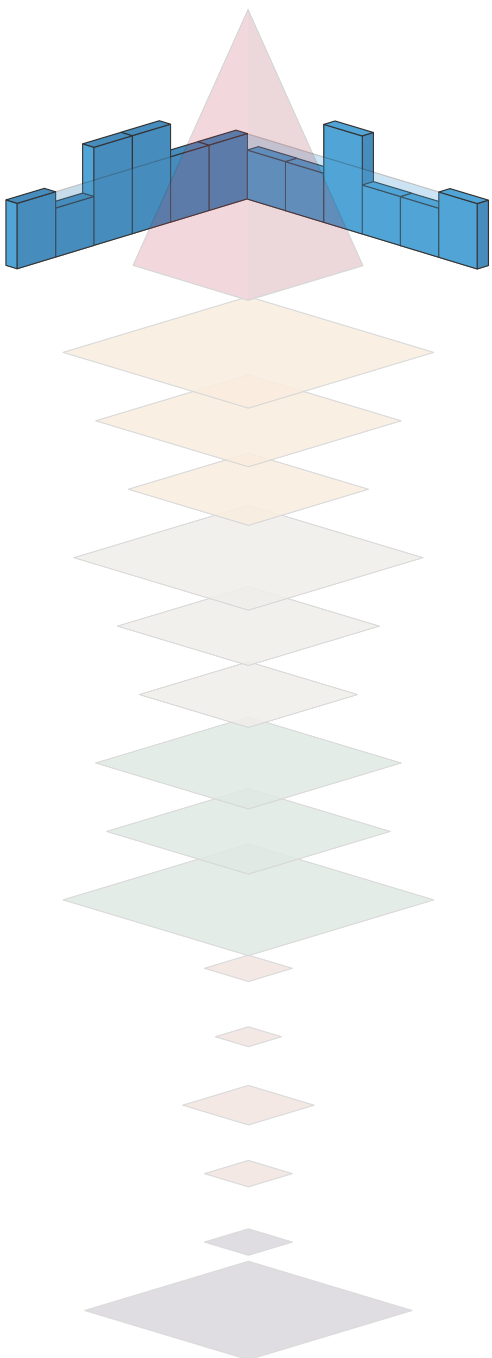
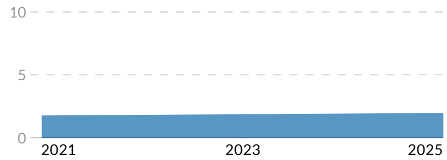


2.04 ↗0.17

## RESILIENCE SCORE

**184th** of 193 countries ↗1
**52nd** of 54 African countries ↘1
**8th** of 9 East African countries -




| | | |
|---|---|---|
| POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE | **2.00** | 0.00 |
| GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY | **1.50** | 0.00 |
| INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION | **3.00** | ↗1.00 |
| NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS | **3.00** | 0.00 |
| JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION | **2.00** | 0.00 |
| LAW ENFORCEMENT | **2.00** | 0.00 |
| TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY | **1.50** | 0.00 |
| ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING | **1.50** | 0.00 |
| ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY | **3.00** | ↗0.50 |
| VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT | **1.50** | ↗0.50 |
| PREVENTION | **1.50** | 0.00 |
| NON-STATE ACTORS | **2.00** | 0.00 |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# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Human trafficking is a significant issue in South Sudan, with the country serving as a source, transit and destination hub. Victims, including women, girls and displaced individuals, are exploited for sex work and forced labour, often across borders with neighbouring countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Republic of the Congo and Uganda. Persistent violent conflict and weak state institutions exacerbate the problem, with abductions tied to cattle raids and cultural practices. Migrants travelling through South Sudan are vulnerable to trafficking, while children face risks of recruitment as soldiers. Severe flooding in October 2024, which the government declared a national disaster, led to hundreds of thousands of people being displaced and infrastructure being damaged, exacerbating vulnerability to trafficking. Domestic demand for trafficked individuals is significant, driving much of the criminal activity.

Human smuggling is also an issue with moderate influence in South Sudan, with individuals from neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda and Burundi smuggled into the country under false employment promises. An estimated 1 million migrant workers reside in South Sudan, mostly undocumented. Furthermore, the country has increasingly become both a destination and transit hub for Sudanese migrants. The escalating crisis in Sudan has led to unprecedented migration flows into South Sudan in recent years, contributing to a worsening humanitarian and displacement crisis. The market is driven by criminal networks and foreign actors, with smuggling linked to other illicit activities in the region. The market is transnational, with demand for smuggled labour in sectors such as construction, domestic work and healthcare. Profits are shared between domestic and foreign criminals.

The extortion and racketeering market in South Sudan has remained largely unchanged since 2022. Armed groups manage illegal checkpoints where they tax movement and trade, and these activities are linked to corruption. The impact on legal markets is significant, disrupting trade, economic growth and humanitarian access. The market is largely domestic, with profits going to local armed actors. In addition, kidnappings and abductions, particularly in Jonglei, Lakes and Unity states, contribute to ongoing inter-communal violence and are often driven by ransom demands.

### TRADE

Despite arms embargoes, South Sudan's criminal market remains consolidated, with weapons supplied to local groups and fuelling cattle rustling and intercommunal violence. Criminal networks, state-embedded actors and mafia-style groups are involved, with the market also linked to checkpoint extortion, wildlife crimes and illicit gold trafficking. Arms smuggling persists owing to transnational networks, with demand for weapons driven by ongoing conflict, particularly in Sudan. Both the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces distribute weapons to civilians in Sudan, exacerbating the illicit arms trade in South Sudan.

South Sudan's criminal market for counterfeit goods, primarily smuggled from Uganda, is entrenched owing to weak law enforcement, corruption and ineffective state monitoring institutions. These goods, often repackaged in Uganda, are originally imported from countries such as Brazil, India, the UAE and Vietnam; border seizures have highlighted the transnational nature of the trade. Criminal networks and weaknesses in border controls fuel this illicit market, which undermines legitimate trade in South Sudan. Despite efforts to address this trend, local demand for counterfeit goods further sustains the trade. South Sudan's reliance on Kenya and Uganda for imports has also led to the illicit trade of excisable goods, fuelled by ongoing conflict and weak enforcement. Smuggling networks exploit regulatory gaps, harming public health and depriving the government of revenue. Smuggled products, including cigarettes and illicit alcohol, often cross borders with the involvement of actors from neighbouring countries. These foreign entities collaborate with local networks to facilitate the cross-border movement of illicit goods. Corruption among customs officials and local law enforcement further supports the illicit trade. Some businesses, facing economic challenges, engage in smuggling to remain competitive, perpetuating the black market cycle.

### ENVIRONMENT

Illegal logging in South Sudan, especially in Central Equatoria State, is depleting natural forests. It is driven by unregulated tree cutting for fuelwood and charcoal, particularly in Yei and Morobo counties. Criminal and state-embedded networks exploit this market, with some licensed loggers operating unlawfully. Despite government efforts, state involvement in the trade hampers enforcement. Charcoal production is linked to wildlife crimes, reflecting broader regional criminal connections. Charcoal is smuggled to Uganda, where demand is high owing to the country's ban on production. The environmental impact includes soil erosion, land degradation and loss of agricultural productivity, which threatens South

Sudan's long-term economic stability. Domestic demand for fuelwood also sustains illegal logging, which undermines community sustainability.

Wildlife trafficking is a significant issue in South Sudan, with the country acting as both a source and a transit point for illegal activities. Commonly trafficked items include ivory, pangolin, bushmeat and hippo teeth, which contribute to the decline of wildlife populations. The market is fuelled by criminal networks and state-embedded actors, including soldiers and civil servants. Despite some efforts to curb wildlife crimes, they continue across national parks and reserves. South Sudan's role as a hub for trafficking, with exports through Juba and across the country's borders, exacerbates the impact on the environment and biodiversity, while local demand sustains the illicit market. Locally, the bushmeat trade is socially accepted and often seen as a way to address hunger and poverty, with trade openly continuing in some areas, such as Western Equatoria.

The illicit gold trade in South Sudan is a consolidated criminal market involving local and foreign actors, including Chinese nationals, political elites and regional players from Uganda and Kenya. Corruption enables the smuggling of gold, often facilitated by bribes from security and customs officials. This illegal market undermines the legitimate gold trade, contributing to environmental harm and intercommunal violence. Illegally extracted gold is smuggled to neighbouring countries, with demand also from within South Sudan. Overall, South Sudan's non-renewable resources sector – especially oil and gold – has been a longstanding driver of conflict, with corruption and competition over revenues contributing to instability and obstructing peace efforts. Although oil is the dominant resource, the gold sector is expanding and indications are emerging of illicit gold flows potentially linked to arms trafficking in neighbouring Darfur, Sudan.

## DRUGS

The heroin trade in South Sudan is underreported and appears to have little influence on the country's criminal landscape; however, some notable cases have been exposed by the media in recent years. The trade highlights South Sudan's role as a minor transit point in the transnational drug trafficking network. Despite some efforts to curb this market, challenges persist owing to limited data and the ongoing involvement of foreign actors. The cocaine trade in South Sudan is also limited. Seizures reported in the country mainly involved foreign actors. The limited criminal market operates through air transport and is linked to other regional criminal activities.

The cannabis trade in South Sudan has moderate influence on the country's criminal landscape. However, it is clear that cannabis is smuggled into the country primarily through the Nadapal and Nimule border points. This illicit trade is notable for its profitability and prevalence within South Sudan, indicating non-negligible local demand. There is limited data on the synthetic drug trade in South Sudan, but anecdotal evidence highlights the trafficking of synthetic captagon, a form of amphetamine produced in Sudan and smuggled into South Sudan. The movement of synthetic cathinones from Kenya is a growing concern. Although there is no concrete data on domestic synthetic drug use, South Sudan's involvement in regional drug trafficking networks suggests that the market is indeed present in the country.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cybercrime has risen sharply in South Sudan since 2023, marked by incidents such as the central bank's website and official social media pages of members of the government being hacked. Perpetrators demonstrate a high level of professional expertise in executing cyber-dependent crimes, including hacking, denial of service and deceptive tactics. Organized groups seem capable of carrying out these crimes independently, without external financial mediators.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes, including tax evasion and fraud, are entrenched in South Sudan's economy, with powerful individuals linked to the ruling class involved in illicit practices. Investigations have uncovered widespread tax evasion and corruption practices, particularly in businesses connected to high-ranking officials, leading to significant financial losses and inefficiencies in the economic regulatory system. These crimes undermine the stability of South Sudan's financial system and legal markets, and transnational elements further complicate efforts to curb these illicit activities.

# CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mafia-style organized criminal groups, often armed, thrive in South Sudan, engaging in illegal activities such as logging, gold mining and other extractive industries. These groups, which include armed factions and communal militias, have been implicated in human rights abuses, corruption and war crimes. They maintain control over key resources and levy taxes at checkpoints, undermining the government's authority. The groups operate across multiple illicit markets, benefiting from easy access to weapons owing to porous borders and regional instability.

South Sudan also faces significant challenges from looser criminal networks engaged in human trafficking, people smuggling, arms trafficking and illegal mining. These networks, which include armed groups, use violence to protect their operations, ranging from petty crimes to more severe organized crime threats. Political and business elites are often implicated in recruiting criminal networks for illicit activities. Although specific networks are not named, these groups show transnational links to foreign criminal enterprises.

The South Sudanese government exhibits weak control over criminal markets, with state actors frequently complicit in illicit activities through corruption or direct involvement. Evidence suggests widespread complicity across all levels of government, from local government to high-level elites, fostering a kleptocratic system. Political factions operate like organized crime groups, exploiting controlled territories for illegal enterprises, including logging, mining and trafficking of people, arms, and goods. In addition, state-embedded actors are implicated in transnational crimes such as human trafficking, arms trafficking and the illicit gold trade. Government officials often extort businesses for illicit payments, while security forces impose additional fees and logistical demands.

Foreign criminal actors, including Eritrean, Ethiopian, Kenyan and Ugandan nationals, play a significant role in various illicit activities. These actors recruit and exploit fellow nationals for forced labour and sex trafficking, often taking advantage of valid visas. Ugandans are also implicated in the illegal trafficking of gold. The interactions between foreign and local criminal groups are especially prominent in human trafficking and the illegal gold trade, with foreign actors contributing to and benefiting from these activities.

The private sector is embedded in organized crime markets in the country. It is heavily intertwined with state-embedded actors, particularly political elites who control a significant portion of the banking sector. South Sudan's economy is largely unregulated and cash intensive, creating an environment conducive to criminal activity, with the country becoming a significant hub for the laundering of illicit funds and private-sector actors being key participants in facilitating these activities. Widespread corruption, weak rule of law and expanding predatory networks further enable the influence of these private-sector actors.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

South Sudan's political leadership faces significant challenges in addressing organized crime, with corruption among political elites and armed commanders eroding public trust. The government's inability to combat crime is exacerbated by this corruption. Despite a peace agreement, political instability persists, marked by ethnic rivalries and sporadic violence. The country remains highly fragile, ranking poorly in global governance indices. Delays in national elections in 2024 and criticism from international peace guarantors further underscore the government's failure to implement key reforms. Human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and forced military recruitment, are widespread.

The country struggles with systemic corruption, exacerbated by a lack of political will, weak enforcement mechanisms and limited resources for anti-corruption bodies. Even so, some incremental progress has been carried out to manage the situation, especially with the amendment to the Anti-Corruption Commission Act aiming to enhance investigative and prosecutorial powers. Despite legislative reforms, challenges persist, including the concentration of state resources among elites and opaque government practices. South Sudan's failure to ratify key international anti-corruption conventions, coupled with delayed political reforms, has hindered progress. Public demands for transparency and accountability are high, as corruption continues to undermine economic and governance stability.

South Sudan has made some progress in aligning with international standards on organized crime, having ratified key conventions, including those addressing corruption and illicit trafficking. In 2023, it acceded to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), yet it has not joined other crucial instruments, such as the Arms Trade Treaty and the UN Protocol on Firearms Trafficking, nor has it fully ratified and domesticated the UNTOC and its supplementary protocol. The country continues to collaborate with the International Organization for Migration to establish a humane and orderly migration system, while the UN Security Council maintains sanctions over ongoing human rights violations. Extradition practices and transborder cooperation remain unclear, with no reported cases in recent years. Despite some improvements, South Sudan's international cooperation on organized crime remains limited, with concerns about corruption impacting its relationships with foreign law enforcement.

Internally, South Sudan's legal framework for organized crime includes laws addressing financial crimes, fauna crimes, labour exploitation, child trafficking and border security. However, these provisions remain fragmented and lack comprehensive measures to combat organized crime effectively. A cabinet-approved bill aims to regulate cybercrimes, reflecting awareness of evolving threats. In addition, the government has initiated efforts to draft legislation targeting human trafficking and smuggling. Despite these developments, gaps persist, particularly in the criminalization, investigation and prosecution of organized crime offenses. Limited legal provisions hinder the state's ability to address complex criminal networks, leaving significant areas of organized crime unregulated.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

South Sudan's judiciary remains weak and lacks independence, with a shortage of judges because of poor working conditions. The judicial system has been accused of favouring the ruling government, while opposition leaders have called for reforms. Specialized courts exist for juvenile cases, while military authorities investigate child soldiering allegations. Existing laws criminalize certain forms of trafficking, but no cases have been prosecuted or convicted in over a decade. Prison conditions are harsh, with reports of overcrowding, abuse and lack of basic services. Widespread arbitrary arrests have been detailed, including detention of women for rejecting arranged marriages. South Sudanese law enforcement is underfunded, dysfunctional and affected by corruption, with officials operating with impunity and laws not being enforced consistently. Government entities have made minimal efforts to strengthen law enforcement mechanisms.

South Sudan's borders are poorly managed owing to weak law enforcement, facilitating cross-border smuggling of goods, people and arms. Conflicts in neighbouring countries contribute to crime along these borders. Government control is limited, with armed groups and militias contesting state authority, further weakened by the fragmentation of opposition forces since the peace agreement. Poor infrastructure, particularly during the rainy season, hinders state access to large areas. These challenges limit state authority and effective law enforcement and threaten territorial integrity.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

South Sudan remains on the Financial Action Task Force's grey list owing to deficiencies in its anti-money laundering (AML) measures. The country has yet to align its legislation with international standards, implement key conventions and establish a legal framework for tracking beneficial ownership. Authorities lack the capacity to conduct risk-based supervision of financial institutions and non-profit organizations vulnerable to terrorist financing. Although an AML law allowed for a financial intelligence unit to be created, it is not yet fully operational or independent. Despite these challenges, South Sudan has implemented measures to regulate foreign exchange markets, aiming to curb money laundering and informal financial activities. Broader financial-sector reforms, influenced by international financial institutions, seek to address corruption, improve governance and restore investor confidence. The national currency is significantly depreciated, which has prompted further restructuring of the foreign exchange system. Concerns persist regarding organized crime's influence in economic sectors, including private security and illicit financial services. Ongoing conflict, economic instability and governance challenges hinder anti-corruption efforts, while political and military power structures are involved in the private sector and limit prospects for sustainable economic prospects.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Non-state actors provide most support for victims of organized crime, with little involvement from the government. There are no formal procedures for identifying or referring trafficking victims, and witness protection measures are ineffective. Civil society involvement in drug treatment and victim support is unclear. The government has collaborated with international organizations on child protection in armed conflict, including training officials. Law enforcement often misinterprets trafficking as migrant smuggling.

South Sudan's efforts in preventing organized crime have seen little progress, with ongoing challenges in addressing human trafficking. The government does not comply with international anti-trafficking standards and has not prosecuted or convicted traffickers for over a decade. While an anti-trafficking task force was convened, child soldier recruitment and employment continued without accountability for military personnel involved.

Civil society organizations and other non-state actors play a key role in addressing organized crime in South Sudan, compensating for state limitations in resources and initiatives. However, government tolerance for independent civil society, including the media, is unclear; journalists investigating corruption reportedly face censorship and harassment. Although some cooperation exists between the government and non-state actors in crime prevention, obstacles such as restricted access and intimidation limit effectiveness. The media is a crucial platform for crime-related reporting, but journalists face threats from both organized crime groups and state actors. Incidents of press restrictions further constrain media freedom and investigative efforts.

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*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.*