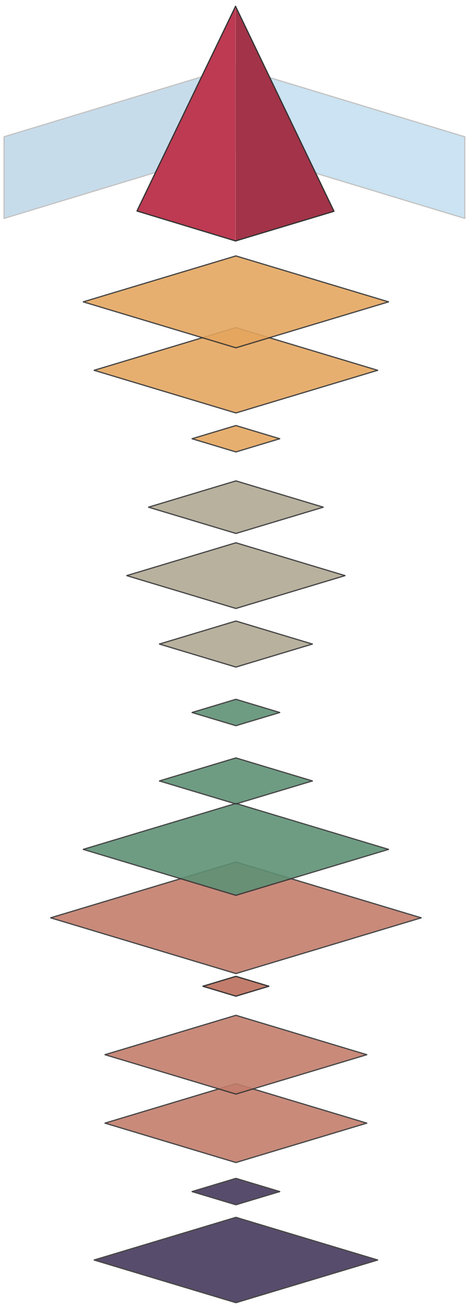
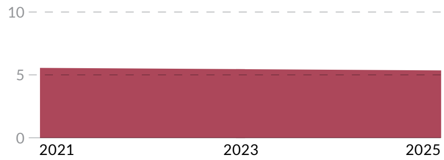
TAJIKISTAN



5.37 ↘0.08 CRIMINALITY SCORE

79th of 193 countries ↘1
22nd of 46 Asian countries ↗1
1st of 8 Central Asian and Caucasian countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS 4.73 ↘0.07

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.50	0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	2.00	↘1.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.00	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.00	↘0.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	3.50	↗0.50
FLORA CRIMES	2.00	↘0.50
FAUNA CRIMES	3.50	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	8.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	1.50	↘0.50
CANNABIS TRADE	6.00	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.00	↗0.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	2.00	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.50	↗0.50

CRIMINAL ACTORS 6.00 ↘0.10

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	6.00	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.00	↘0.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	9.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.00	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5.00	0.00

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

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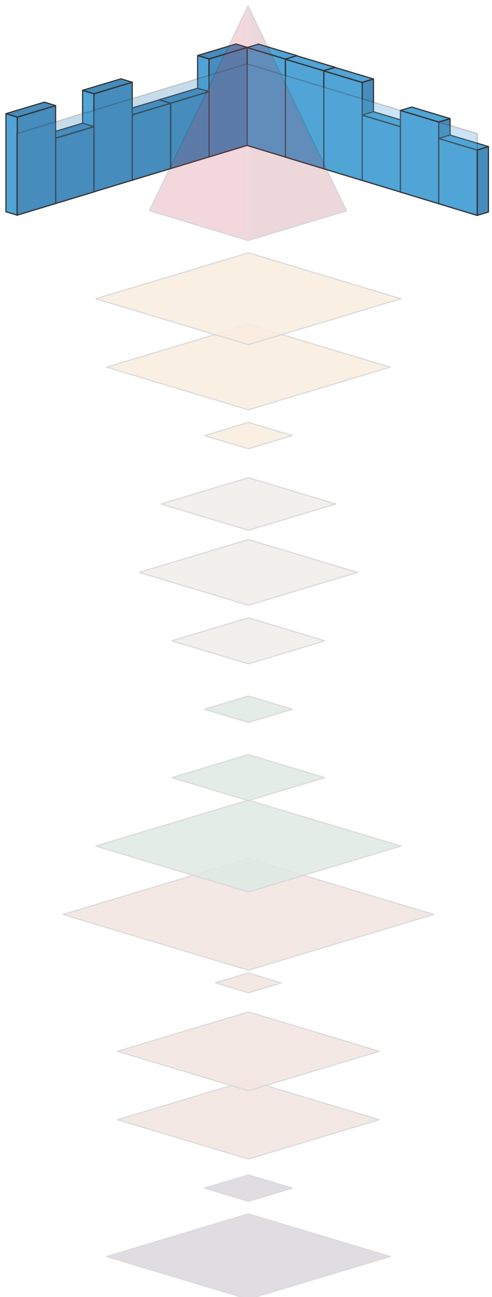
Funded by the European Union

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.

GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

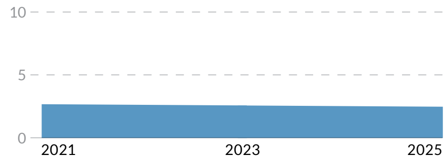
TAJIKISTAN



2.54 ↘0.04

RESILIENCE SCORE

173rd of 193 countries ↘1
40th of 46 Asian countries -
7th of 8 Central Asian and Caucasian countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	**3.00**	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	**2.00**	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	**3.00**	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	**2.00**	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	**2.00**	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	**3.00**	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	**3.00**	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	**3.00**	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	**3.00**	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	**2.00**	0.00
PREVENTION	**2.50**	↘0.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	**2.00**	0.00

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Tajikistan is both a source and a destination country for human trafficking. Its high unemployment rate and dependence on remittances create a vulnerable labour force susceptible to trafficking. Many Tajik nationals seeking work migrate to Russia and Kazakhstan, where they are frequently exploited. Within Tajikistan, forced labour persists in agriculture, particularly in cotton harvesting and dried fruit production, with reports of state-mandated labour. In addition, some Tajik children are forcibly conscripted into military service through 'oblava' sweeps, despite such practices being illegal. There have also been instances of LGBTQI+ individuals being blackmailed into sex trafficking or forced marriages, with indicators of forced labour.

Human smuggling in Tajikistan primarily involves transit migration. The country's visa-free regime with Russia and Kazakhstan facilitates legal entry, but many labour migrants later fall into irregular status, facing exploitation. Recruitment for irregular migration often involves unregulated private employment agencies, mainly in the Sughd region, while criminal networks – including Russian groups and complicit Tajik officials – facilitate document forgery and smuggling. Afghan nationals fleeing Taliban rule have also sought to enter Tajikistan, increasing smuggling activities along the border. Reports indicate that Tajik migrants, facing rising xenophobia in Russia, are increasingly seeking irregular routes to the US, Europe and the UAE. Organized crime groups engage in some racketeering, but it does not appear to be widespread or deeply entrenched. Limited extortion of legal businesses by criminal entities occurs in the country.

TRADE

Arms trafficking occurs along the Tajik–Afghan border, with weapons flowing in both directions. Weapons (likely remnants from the 1992–1997 civil war) are trafficked from Tajikistan to Afghanistan in exchange for narcotics, while Afghan-based militants are believed to transport arms into Tajikistan. Local arms sales do occur, but appear limited. The border region has experienced persistent arms trafficking and unauthorized weapons possession for over 25 years, with the situation remaining a significant concern. In addition, Tajikistan serves as a transit country for illicit trafficking networks extending from south-west Asia to Russia and beyond.

Counterfeit goods are widespread, with weak intellectual property enforcement allowing fake luxury items and counterfeit consumer goods – mainly from China – to flood domestic markets. In addition to it being a domestic market, Tajikistan also serves as a transit point for counterfeit goods en route to Russia. Corruption facilitates this trade and despite nominal legal protections, enforcement remains ineffective. The illicit trade in excise goods, particularly cigarettes, is prevalent. Tajikistan's low taxation rates make it a source country for illicit tobacco, with outbound smuggling exceeding illicit imports. Although illicit tobacco imports from Afghanistan have declined since the Taliban takeover, smugglers are finding alternative routes. Plans to expand domestic cigarette production may exacerbate smuggling concerns. Furthermore, Tajikistan serves as a transit country for smuggled cigarettes destined for Kazakhstan, primarily originating from Gulf countries. The Khujand–Isfara highway, which crosses the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, is a key route for the movement of these illicit goods, including shipments from the UAE.

ENVIRONMENT

Although limited, flora crimes in Tajikistan include illegal logging driven by domestic demand for firewood. Violations of forest legislation, including unauthorized grazing and collection of wild plants, are also common. Overharvesting of medicinal plants threatens biodiversity, and illegal logging contributes to deforestation. Nevertheless, the involvement of organized crime actors in these activities is not significant.

Tajikistan functions as a transit hub and, to a lesser extent, a source of illegal wildlife products. Trophy hunting of mountain ungulates such as argali and markhor is legal, but raises conservation concerns. Illegal hunting threatens endangered species, including snow leopards and Marco Polo sheep. Seizures of illegally hunted animals and live falcons have been reported, with smuggling routes linking Tajikistan to the UAE. However, the scope and scale of these activities appear limited, and community-led conservation initiatives have begun to address poaching concerns.

Tajikistan possesses significant natural resources, including one of the world's largest silver deposits. Although private individuals can legally mine metals, illegal extraction and sales persist. Illegal mining of gold and other minerals is facilitated by poor oversight. The non-renewable resource trade in Tajikistan is deeply entwined with corruption, and fuel is also smuggled from Kyrgyzstan. Despite official claims of enforcement, smuggling routes remain active, with high-level officials reportedly being involved. Gold trafficking networks link Tajikistan to Western Asia, often facilitated by state actors.

DRUGS

Tajikistan is a major transit country for heroin trafficking, forming part of the northern route for Afghan opiates destined for Russia and Eastern Europe. Its long, porous border with Afghanistan and weak security infrastructure make it highly vulnerable to large-scale trafficking. State actors, local networks and foreign criminal groups from Central Asia are active in the heroin trade. In contrast, the cocaine trade is extremely limited. Cocaine is too expensive for local markets, although regional trade is expanding.

Cannabis trafficking follows similar patterns to heroin, with Tajikistan serving as a transit hub for Afghan cannabis heading to Russia and Eastern Europe. Cannabis, opium and heroin are often trafficked together across Tajikistan's porous border with Afghanistan. In addition, Tajikistan is a producer of cannabis and hashish. Criminal networks engaged in cannabis trafficking are typically linked to those in the wider drug trade, often involving organized crime groups collaborating with state-affiliated actors.

Synthetic drugs are an emerging concern, with rising seizures indicating increasing domestic use, particularly among urban youth. Methamphetamine and MDMA originate mostly from Russia and Europe. Criminal actors in this trade include Tajik nationals and foreign groups. Digital platforms facilitate new distribution channels for psychoactive substances.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Although internet penetration in Tajikistan is low, cyber-dependent crimes do occur, albeit to a limited extent. The country is highly vulnerable to malware- and cryptocurrency-related attacks, and ranks among the least cyber-secure nations. Cryptocurrency mining surged following China's ban on the industry, but low electricity reliability limits expansion. Foreign campaigns targeting government infrastructure have also been reported. The motives behind these cyber activities are unclear, blurring political and financial interests. Despite limited organized cybercrime networks, vulnerabilities in digital security expose the country to external threats.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crime in Tajikistan is extensive, with fraud endemic in the private sector and large-scale embezzlement of state funds. Corruption is entrenched, with high-profile officials implicated in embezzlement and real estate fraud. Furthermore, tax evasion and misuse of public funds are widespread, draining critical resources from public services.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Tajikistan is home to multiple mafia-style groups that operate domestically and internationally, particularly in Russia and Uzbekistan. Certain enclaves where law enforcement faces significant challenges in exercising authority, such as Vorukh, Sokh, Qalacha, Khalmion and Chorku, serve as strongholds for organized crime. Many of these mafia-style groups trace their origins to former guerrilla factions. These groups, often armed and with military experience, have been integrated into the political and criminal landscape of Tajikistan. Mafia-style groups are influential in Gorno-Badakhshan, with strong support from local communities. Over time, elements of these groups have become embedded within the state apparatus, contributing to the systemic collusion between the government and organized crime. The eastern regions of the country frequently experience violent confrontations between local criminal leaders and the central government, as individuals at the higher levels of criminal hierarchy – often referred to as 'authorities' – continue to assert control over illicit economies, including the drug trade. Government crackdowns on these groups have been met with resistance, further entrenching the conflict between state forces and regional criminal networks.

Similarly, Tajikistan has well-established criminal networks, many of which operate within an ethnically and regionally defined clan structure. The country's five main clans – the Leninobod/Khojand, Kuliab, Kurgan-Tyube, Garm/Kataregin and Pamiri – compete for influence over organized criminal activities. These networks, which evolved from civil war factions, are largely decentralized and opportunistic, rather than strictly hierarchical. The most lucrative criminal enterprise within these networks is the narcotics trade. Two clans control a large share of opiates from Afghanistan and which are trafficked through Tajikistan. Some criminal entrepreneurs diversify their activities by engaging in legitimate trade, such as cross-border car sales and agricultural exports to Russia, using legal businesses to launder proceeds from illicit operations. Tajik criminal networks maintain strong ties with Russian and Uzbek organized crime groups. Russia is the primary destination for Afghan heroin transiting through Tajikistan, and Russian syndicates rely on Tajik traffickers to facilitate shipments.

Systemic corruption involving top-level government officials in Tajikistan significantly facilitates organized crime, in particular drug trafficking. Following the civil war, the regime strategically consolidated power over illicit markets by replacing influential traffickers with loyalists, thereby protecting connected individuals while selectively prosecuting minor actors to maintain appearances. Drug trafficking has thus become a major revenue source underpinning the local economy. High-ranking officials and their family networks dominate strategic economic sectors; they benefit from privileged access to state contracts and resources, with minimal accountability from judicial and security institutions. Weak governance and insufficient anti-corruption frameworks exacerbate these vulnerabilities. In addition, organized crime dynamics are shaped by both local patronage and broader regional criminal networks.

Foreign criminal actors have a notable role in Tajikistan's organized crime landscape. The country's geographic location makes it a key transit point for narcotics trafficking from Afghanistan, attracting regional and international actors. The most prominent foreign groups include elements of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), and Russian and Chechen criminal organizations. The IMU, although weakened in recent years, maintains a presence in Tajikistan, with links to criminal markets and radical Islamist networks. ISKP, the Islamic State's Central Asian affiliate, has expanded its recruitment efforts in Tajikistan, particularly in the country's northern regions. In addition, cross-border smuggling networks between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan remain active, particularly in illicit fuel trading and gold smuggling.

Private-sector actors in Tajikistan are involved in facilitating organized crime, particularly through money laundering and illicit financial flows. The country's informal or 'grey' economy allows local entrepreneurs and politically connected individuals to use dubious intermediaries to facilitate cross-border transactions. One of the most common methods of money laundering in Tajikistan involves the use of fake import companies. These entities allow criminal actors to move illicit funds through trade-based money laundering schemes. Businesses affiliated with the political elite have been implicated in financial crimes, with funds frequently funnelled to Russia, the UK, the EU and the UAE. The financial sector's weak regulatory oversight further enables such activities, with little transparency in how funds are transferred or reinvested. Although Tajikistan's business community is subject to extensive state control, there is little enforcement of anti-money laundering (AML) measures. Corruption within regulatory bodies ensures that businesses connected to the ruling elite remain largely immune from scrutiny. As a result, the private sector continues to serve as a critical channel for laundering illicit proceeds generated from narcotics trafficking and other criminal enterprises.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Tajikistan's government does not actively address organized crime, and widespread corruption has facilitated its growth. Governance challenges persist, with low rankings in international assessments of political stability, democracy and civil liberties. The highly centralized regime, which has been in power for decades, suppresses political opposition, media and religious expression. Human rights abuses, including arbitrary killings and torture, have been reported. Despite a public stance against crime, political rhetoric often serves to consolidate central control rather than genuinely address criminal networks, particularly in peripheral regions. Elections are tightly controlled, eliminating genuine opposition.

The country continues to struggle with severe corruption and transparency challenges. Corruption is entrenched at all levels of society, allowing ruling elites to maintain power. The country's right-to-information laws are weak, with limited access to justice and ineffective enforcement mechanisms. Government oversight institutions lack independence, as key anti-corruption agencies are controlled by the ruling family. Although Tajikistan has had an anti-corruption law since 2008, enforcement is weak, with ineffective asset disclosure and inadequate oversight of conflicts of interest. Limited transparency, particularly in budget formulation and state financial audits, exacerbates the lack of accountability.

Tajikistan engages moderately in international cooperation activities. Despite having acceded to the United Nations Convention against Corruption and other key international treaties against organized crime and illegal trafficking, substantive cooperation is minimal. The country notably resisted certain international protocols, including the Firearms Protocol and Arms Trade Treaty. Although cooperation with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) exists, it remains superficial, hindered by governmental reluctance to deeper collaboration. Tajikistan engages in cybersecurity and security collaborations with Russia, the OSCE and China, including joint military exercises. Recently, Tajikistan and Russia signed an anti-corruption agreement centred on joint investigations and training.

Nationally, the government promotes strategic priorities such as energy independence, food security and employment, but lacks resources and governance quality for effective implementation. Departments specifically addressing organized crime under the Ministry of Internal Affairs are reportedly compromised themselves, undermining the legal framework set by the 2013 Law on Combating Organized Crime. Despite a national action plan against human trafficking and anti-corruption legislation, international assessments deem these efforts inadequate. Severe penalties, including capital punishment, apply to large-scale drug crimes.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Although constitutionally independent, Tajikistan's judicial system is significantly influenced by the executive branch, with judicial appointments firmly under presidential control. This undermines the impartiality and fairness of trials, reflected in a negligible acquittal rate, indicative of systematic judicial bias. Detention conditions in Tajikistan are dire, marked by overcrowding, violence and widespread abuses. Political prisoners, particularly from opposition parties, suffer severe rights violations. Prison environments exacerbate vulnerability to organized crime recruitment, with bribery and inadequate oversight being prevalent. Nevertheless, the full extent of the situation remains unclear owing to the significant lack of international independent oversight. The International Committee of the Red Cross has been denied access to prisons and detention facilities in Tajikistan since the late 1990s, limiting transparency and external monitoring.

Law enforcement struggles considerably with corruption and insufficient training in Tajikistan. The country's Drug Control Agency is the primary law enforcement body combating organized crime and benefits from international cooperation; however, allegations of bribery and collusion with traffickers undermine its credibility. The US and UNODC launched a capacity-building project for the agency, aimed at improving investigative techniques. Despite the country participating in INTERPOL and regional efforts to counter human trafficking, policing reforms are slow, and law enforcement prioritizes suppressing dissent over tackling crime. Structural issues such as low wages and inadequate training contribute to corruption. Meanwhile, Tajikistan is increasing military spending owing to regional tensions, although experts warn that this may not enhance stability.

Maintaining territorial integrity is challenging, especially along the Afghan border, a critical asset for narcotics trafficking. Weak border security due to rugged terrain allows extensive transnational crime. Border tensions with Kyrgyzstan, despite recent improvements in demarcation, frequently lead to violent clashes, exacerbating security vulnerabilities. Military capacities are insufficient to counter serious insurgent threats without Russian support, underscoring reliance on external military partnerships.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Tajikistan's AML framework demonstrates incremental improvements and partially complies with Financial Action Task Force recommendations; however, it remains substantially insufficient to address the extensive risks of money laundering and terrorist financing. The National Bank's Financial Monitoring Department struggles to exert effective oversight, particularly amid increased remittances vulnerable to misuse.

Economically, Tajikistan suffers from structural weaknesses. Dependence on remittances, bureaucratic inefficiencies and pervasive corruption hinder economic resilience. State-linked enterprises dominate critical sectors, benefiting politically connected elites and limiting private sector development. Despite modest improvements in business climate, entrenched patronage networks and corruption continue to deter meaningful foreign investment.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support mechanisms in Tajikistan are notably deficient. The absence of specific legislation or effective protection programmes for whistle-blowers severely limits accountability. Victims of human trafficking face inadequate identification processes and support, with reliance on international organizations rather than government-funded initiatives, thus limiting effective interventions. The failure to implement effective victim and witness protection systems further undermines prosecution and accountability.

Prevention efforts, although formalized in legislation such as the national action plan against trafficking, lack substantial impact. Persistent issues of forced labour and child labour, particularly in the cotton industry, remain inadequately addressed.

Civil society, although legally recognized and partially liberalized since the late 1990s, remains severely constrained by government interference and repression, especially regarding advocacy and human rights activities. Recent crackdowns have closed hundreds of NGOs, notably those involved in advocacy and human rights. Media freedom has significantly deteriorated since 2023 with government pressures compelling journalists into exile or self-censorship, which further limits transparency and accountability.

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.