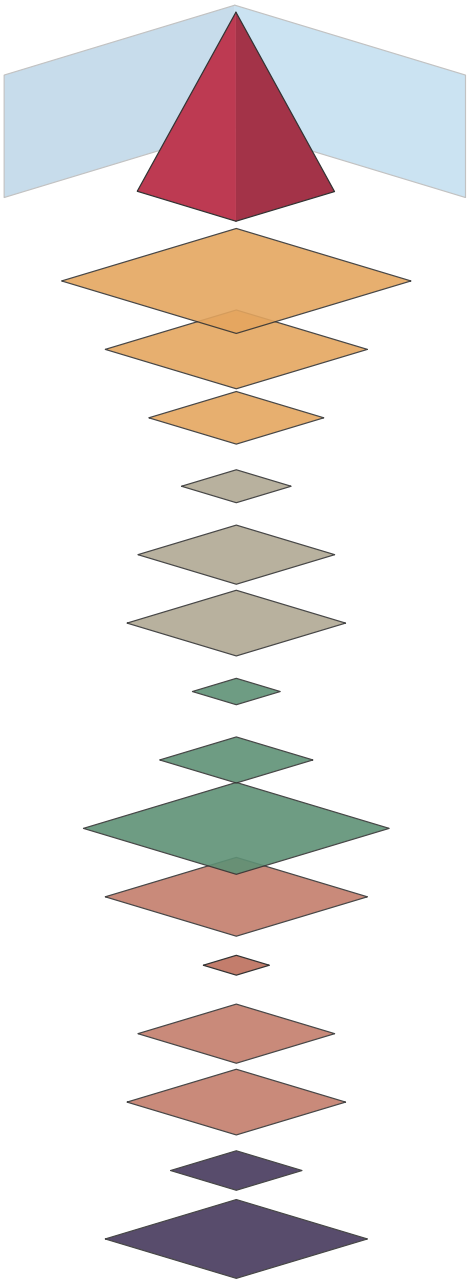
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

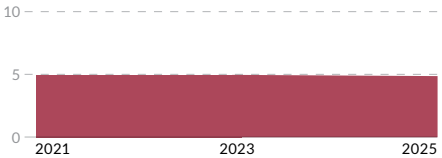
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

UZBEKISTAN



4.93 ↘0.02
CRIMINALITY SCORE

108th of 193 countries ↘8
31st of 46 Asian countries ↘3
4th of 8 Central Asian and Caucasian countries ↘1



CRIMINAL MARKETS 4.57 ↘0.03

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.00 ↗0.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.00 0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	4.00 0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	2.50 ↘0.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	4.50 ↗0.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5.00 0.00
FLORA CRIMES	2.00 ↘1.00
FAUNA CRIMES	3.50 0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7.00 0.00
HEROIN TRADE	6.00 ↘0.50
COCAINE TRADE	1.50 0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50 0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	5.00 ↗0.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	3.00 0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.00 0.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS 5.30 0.00

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	4.00 ↘1.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.00 ↘0.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.00 ↗0.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.00 0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5.50 ↗1.00

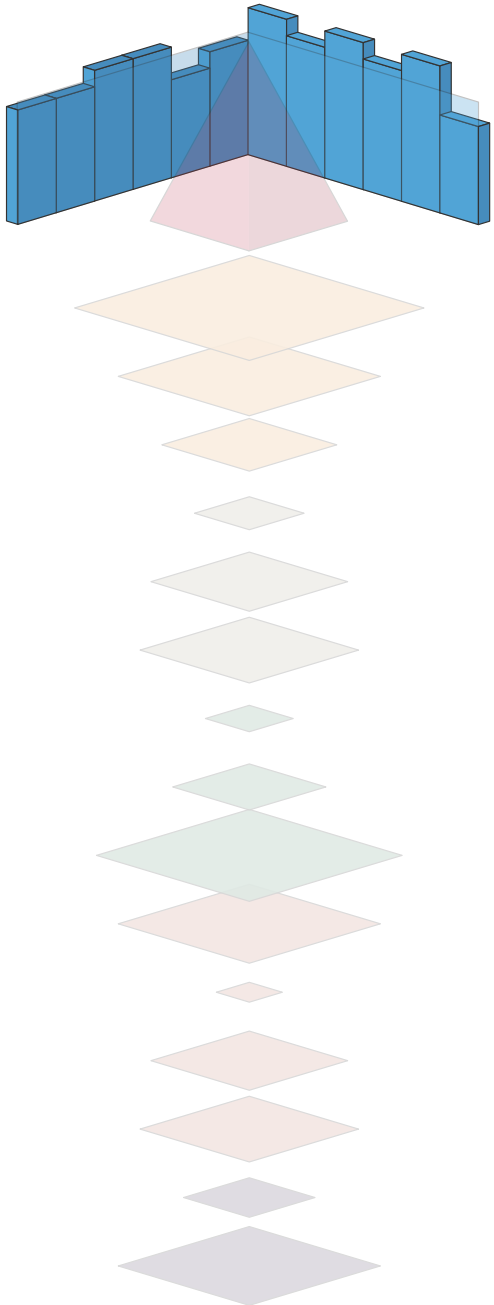
This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.

enact

Funded by the European Union

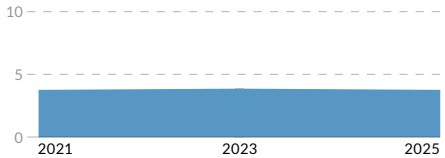
ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

UZBEKISTAN



3.83 ↘0.04
RESILIENCE SCORE

140th of 193 countries ↘2
31st of 46 Asian countries ↘1
5th of 8 Central Asian and Caucasian countries -



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

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

enact

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.

CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Uzbekistan is both a source and a destination country for human trafficking, with significant labour and sex trafficking concerns. Although government efforts were somewhat effective in curbing forced labour in cotton production, issues persist in the textile industry, especially in silk production, where monitoring remains difficult owing to reliance on informal labour. Women are primarily victims of domestic sex trafficking, whereas men are subjected to labour exploitation abroad, particularly in construction, transportation, agriculture and cyber-scam operations in Myanmar. Child trafficking is a grave issue, with nearly half of human trafficking crimes in Uzbekistan involving the sale of newborns, which is motivated by poverty and social stigma. The increasing digitalization of trafficking networks has further complicated enforcement efforts. Uzbek nationals are trafficked for forced labour and sexual exploitation across several regions, including Western Asia, Europe and Central and South Asia.

Uzbekistan is a primary source country for irregular migration, with Russia being the predominant destination. However, growing restrictions and shifting labour market dynamics have led to increased smuggling activity to alternative locations such as Belarus, Germany, Poland, Japan and the UK. Many Uzbek nationals also attempt illegal entry into the US via Central and South America, although such attempts have become increasingly difficult owing to strengthened US enforcement efforts, resulting in fewer successful crossings. The smuggling market relies on well-established networks operating in both Uzbekistan and destination countries. These intermediaries provide falsified documents, particularly for travel to Russia. Notably, Uzbek individuals dominate cases involving fraudulent documentation in Moscow. Although there is insufficient evidence to suggest a fully consolidated extortion market, incidents related to this type of crime have been documented. Criminal groups have been implicated in extorting businesses, with notable cases including kidnapping of entrepreneurs, coercion to transfer land and assets, and systematic demands for revenue shares from agricultural exports.

TRADE

Although Uzbekistan does not have a highly developed arms trafficking market, sporadic cases involving smuggling of firearms, particularly from Kyrgyzstan, have been recorded. The country's law enforcement has demonstrated capability in disrupting illicit arms transactions, as seen in operations leading to the seizure of Kalashnikov rifles and hunting weapons. The Fergana Valley is a vulnerable region for arms trafficking, given its proximity to instability in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The trade in counterfeit goods is a growing problem in Uzbekistan, affecting sectors such as food, pharmaceuticals, electronics and clothing. Counterfeit agricultural chemicals have been particularly damaging, undermining productivity and food security. In addition, counterfeit alcohol production is widespread, especially in the Fergana region, with authorities seizing thousands of bottles of falsely labelled vodka in 2024. Major counterfeit markets, including Tashkent's Farkhad Market, facilitate the distribution of fake goods, often using fraudulent documentation and altered branding.

Illicit trade in excise goods, particularly tobacco, is a prevalent concern in Uzbekistan. Smuggled cigarettes, particularly from the UAE, are introduced through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, often via interrupted transit schemes. The illegal sale and purchase of alcohol is also a ubiquitous issue in Uzbekistan, especially in the Fergana region. Customs officials intercepted large quantities of contraband goods in the reporting period, indicating that the problem remains pervasive despite efforts to curb it.

ENVIRONMENT

Illegal logging and unauthorized deforestation have been reported, particularly in mountainous regions where juniper forests are exploited for charcoal production. However, limited evidence exists of organized criminal networks or significant international trafficking in flora-related products. The majority of cases appear to be localized and driven by economic factors. The trade in valuable tree species, such as walnut and pistachio, continues despite increasing government-imposed penalties. Localized harvesting of wild plants, such as soaproot (Allochrusa species), further contributes to unsustainable depletion. Wildlife trafficking is also an issue, with Uzbekistan serving as both a source and a transit point for endangered species, including steppe tortoises and saker falcons. Air transport is the preferred smuggling method, with Russia being the primary destination. Poaching of snow leopards has been documented across Uzbekistan's conservation areas, with bones and claws trafficked for use in traditional medicine.

Illegal gold mining is a long-standing issue, with up to 30 000 miners operating unlicensed each year. Gold smuggling is centred in the Navoi, Tashkent and Samarkand regions, with fatalities frequently reported owing to unsafe extraction methods. Corrupt business practices within the gas and oil sectors exacerbate criminality, with politically connected actors benefiting from opaque contracts and monopolized resource control.

DRUGS

Uzbekistan is a transit country for Afghan heroin en route to Russia and Europe. Although border controls have been tightened, trafficking persists along routes through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Despite widespread corruption, high-level state officials remain largely uninvolved in the heroin trade. Cocaine consumption is limited owing to high costs and competition from opioids. However, small-scale recreational use exists among affluent urban residents, with Russia serving as the primary supply hub.

The cannabis trade in Uzbekistan is mostly centred on small-scale cultivation in rural regions such as Fergana and Bukhara, alongside ongoing trafficking activities. A key concern is the smuggling of cannabis products – particularly hashish – from neighbouring Afghanistan, with recent crackdowns resulting in increased seizures. Authorities have disrupted several distribution networks, some of which used cryptocurrency for transactions. Despite these enforcement efforts, cannabis remains the most prevalent illicit drug in the country. Synthetic drugs, particularly tramadol and methamphetamine, are found in Uzbekistan, although the market is relatively small in scope and scale. In 2024, authorities dismantled a major mephedrone production laboratory, seizing a substantial amount of the drug. Smugglers have used creative methods to avoid detection, such as disguising liquid methamphetamine as pomegranate juice. The synthetic drug market is transnational, with both domestic and foreign actors being involved.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Although the market for cyber-dependent crimes is limited in Uzbekistan, incidents such as ransomware attacks and hacking schemes have surged in recent years. In 2024 alone, multiple cyber-attacks were recorded, with government websites, along with those of private organizations, being frequently targeted. Most of these attacks were carried out from within Uzbekistan itself, or from Russia, Germany, the UK and the US. These incidents underscore the increasing challenge of securing Uzbekistan's digital infrastructure against rising cyber threats. The rise of cybercrime in Uzbekistan is closely linked to expanding internet penetration across the country.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crime in Uzbekistan is on the rise, with theft from bank cards emerging as a major concern. In recent years, thousands of cases of digital financial fraud resulted in considerable losses. Members of criminal organizations frequently pose as bank security personnel to extract personal banking details. Corruption is also widespread in the banking sector, with significant funds misappropriated by employees.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Uzbekistan's organized crime landscape has been shaped by Soviet-era criminal structures, particularly 'thieves in law', a hierarchical mafia-style group formed in prison camps. Although the Uzbek government has repressed many remnants of these groups, some influential figures remain active, blending legal and illicit enterprises. They operate under the protection of state actors and have substantial influence in business and politics. Prominent mafia-style actors are believed to oversee criminal operations, including drug trafficking along the northern route between Afghanistan and Russia. Despite past attempts to prosecute criminals for money laundering and extortion, these actors continue to wield power, often leveraging their positions within government-linked institutions. The blurred lines between political elites and organized crime allow mafia-style groups to exploit state resources, facilitating corruption and illicit financial flows.

Unlike mafia-style groups, criminal networks in Uzbekistan are more fluid and opportunistic, engaging in human trafficking, wildlife crimes, drug trade and resource smuggling. These networks lack rigid hierarchies, but maintain extensive transnational connections. Their level of violence varies by market, with human trafficking networks often displaying high levels of coercion and brutality, whereas environmental crimes such as flora and fauna trafficking operate with lower visibility. These networks function across Uzbekistan's borders, particularly with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, taking advantage of porous border controls and law enforcement gaps. The lack of a clear distinction between criminal networks, mafia-style groups and state-embedded actors further complicates efforts to dismantle their influence.

State-embedded criminal actors have a central role in Uzbekistan's organized crime landscape, where corruption and rent-seeking practices permeate multiple levels of government. The distinction between political elites and organized crime is blurred, as many high-ranking officials directly or indirectly engage in illicit activities. This dynamic allows organized crime to operate with relative impunity while simultaneously providing political protection to criminal enterprises. Key figures have been implicated in using political connections to sell government positions and manipulate state tenders. However, Uzbekistan's security apparatus has largely distanced itself from the narcotics trade, focusing its rent-seeking efforts on other sectors, including cotton, energy and telecommunications. The government's control over key industries ensures that illicit financial flows remain embedded within state structures rather than falling into the hands of independent criminal organizations.

Foreign actors have limited but notable influence in Uzbekistan's criminal markets. Historical ties to Russia continue to shape the country's criminal underworld, with

Russian and Central Asian networks maintaining operational links. Small Tajik criminal groups are particularly active along the Uzbek–Tajik border, engaging in smuggling and local-level organized crime. Although Uzbekistan does not have a significant presence of foreign diasporas controlling criminal enterprises, the country contributes to facilitating Russia's circumvention of international sanctions. It is likely that the shifting geopolitical landscape has attracted new foreign actors seeking to exploit Uzbekistan as a transit hub for illicit goods moving between Europe and Asia. Law enforcement efforts have led to a decrease in the number of foreign nationals being arrested for drug-related crimes, but transnational criminal activities persist, particularly in narcotics and human smuggling.

Uzbekistan's private sector has a crucial role in laundering illicit proceeds, with politically exposed persons and shadowy business elites manipulating financial institutions. Investigations have revealed offshore accounts linked to high-ranking officials, whose business dealings have raised concerns over money laundering. The country's banking sector is vulnerable to corruption, with commercial banks often controlled by politically connected figures who facilitate financial crimes. Both the telecommunications and oil and gas industries have been heavily implicated in corrupt practices, with companies tied to political elites from both Uzbekistan and Russia. Companies with opaque ownership structures often secure lucrative government contracts, reinforcing the cycle of corruption and criminal economic activities. Despite occasional crackdowns, private-sector actors remain instrumental in sustaining organized crime in Uzbekistan.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Political leadership is heavily centralized, with limited transparency and strong state control over civic freedoms. The 2024 parliamentary elections introduced a mixed electoral system and digital voting mechanisms, marking an effort to improve democratic processes. However, the ruling party maintained its dominance and restrictions on opposition parties remained in place, highlighting continued political constraints. Despite some institutional reforms since President Mirziyoyev took office in 2016, public trust in the government remains low owing to persistent corruption and the influence of organized crime in political affairs. Despite Uzbekistan's robust security apparatus, resources are often directed towards repressing civic freedoms rather than tackling crime comprehensively. Uzbekistan has recently initiated the development of its first national strategy against organized crime, with support from international bodies such as the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. Although this marks a positive step towards formalizing efforts against organized crime, the country continues to struggle with governance issues.

Uzbekistan has implemented oversight mechanisms to combat corruption, including setting up a dedicated department within the Prosecutor General's office and an interagency anti-corruption commission. Despite these efforts having led to some improvements, corruption remains deeply embedded in state institutions, particularly among the political elite. In addition, systemic transparency is a challenge despite the government's introduction of online platforms where citizens can file complaints. Legal loopholes and high barriers to appealing government decisions hinder public access to information. Although steps have been taken to prevent corrupt officials from returning to public office, enforcement mechanisms remain weak. In addition, reports suggest that anti-corruption measures largely target lower-level officials, while high-ranking figures remain shielded from scrutiny.

Uzbekistan has ratified key international treaties on organized crime and continues to participate in regional and global initiatives. The country is a member of INTERPOL and actively cooperates in the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre. In addition, Uzbekistan has strengthened bilateral security agreements with its international counterparts such as Azerbaijan and Finland, to address human trafficking and terrorism. Despite these positive engagements, Uzbekistan's law enforcement agencies are sometimes reluctant to fully cooperate with international partners owing to institutional limitations and corruption. The country has yet to ratify certain treaties, such as the Arms Trade Treaty and the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime protocols on migrant smuggling and firearms trafficking, reflecting gaps in its commitment to international standards. As for national policies, Uzbekistan has taken steps to modernize its legal framework against organized crime, with revised legislation covering human trafficking, arms smuggling, drug offences and environmental crimes. However, enforcement is inconsistent. Forced labour violations, for example, are initially treated as administrative offences rather than criminal acts, weakening deterrence measures.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The Uzbek judicial system continues to face significant challenges, particularly concerning corruption and political interference. Judicial independence is questionable, with courts often acting in coordination with prosecutors and law enforcement rather than serving as impartial adjudicators. Despite the country having introduced reforms to strengthen judicial accountability, such as discontinuing the practice of returning cases for additional investigation and establishing a Supreme Judicial Council, corruption in the judiciary remains widespread. Judges often favour government-aligned interests, and bribery within the legal system is recurrent. Efforts to improve judicial independence have yielded some progress, but systemic issues persist. Detention conditions remain concerning, with reports of overcrowding and poor access to medical care. Although the government has increased transparency regarding prison conditions, instances of corruption in the penitentiary system, including preferential treatment for influential detainees, continue to be reported.

Corruption is pervasive within Uzbekistan's law enforcement agencies, with reports of officers extorting bribes from businesses and criminal suspects. Although the government has taken steps to modernize law enforcement capabilities, including establishing specialized units for targeting cybercrime and economic offences, many police operations remain susceptible to political influence and corruption. Law enforcement efforts against organized crime have yielded some notable successes, such as increased investigations into human trafficking and drug smuggling; however, fear of retaliation and police violence discourages victims from reporting crimes or cooperating with authorities. Uzbekistan's geographic location makes it an important transit country for illicit goods, particularly narcotics from Afghanistan. Border security has improved, with increased surveillance along the Afghanistan and Tajikistan frontiers, but corruption among customs officials remains an issue. Smuggling tunnels along the Kyrgyz and Kazakh borders highlight ongoing weaknesses in territorial integrity.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Uzbekistan has made some strides in addressing money laundering, including implementing new disclosure requirements for government contracts and enhancing financial investigations. However, the country remains vulnerable to illicit financial flows owing to weak regulatory oversight and extensive corruption within banking institutions. The financial sector is dominated by state-owned enterprises, limiting market transparency. High rates of cash transactions, a large informal economy, and reliance on remittances contribute to money laundering risks. Although Uzbekistan is not on the Financial Action Task Force's blacklist, it remains classified as a jurisdiction of concern owing to the persistence of financial crime.

Uzbekistan has taken steps to improve its business environment by reducing bureaucratic barriers and promoting foreign investment. However, state control over key industries, such as energy and finance, continues to hinder market competition. Corruption within regulatory agencies further complicates efforts to ensure fair business practices. Despite Uzbekistan enacting anti-monopoly laws and attempting to privatize state-owned enterprises, enforcement remains inconsistent. Businesses often require government connections to operate successfully, leading to concerns over crony capitalism.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Uzbekistan has increased its efforts to assist victims of human trafficking and organized crime, including funding rehabilitation centres and providing financial assistance to NGOs. However, services remain inadequate, and victims are often required to cooperate with law enforcement to receive aid, which discourages many from seeking help. Legal protections for victims remain weak, particularly concerning witness confidentiality. Courts do not consistently provide safeguards for victims, leading to cases of intimidation and retraumatization during legal proceedings. The government operates several specialized centres offering treatment and rehabilitation services for drug users, but these facilities are reported to have limited capacity and effectiveness, highlighting gaps in the availability and quality of support for individuals struggling with substance use.

Public awareness campaigns regarding human trafficking and labour rights have been implemented, particularly through cooperation with the International Labour Organization. However, labour protections are inconsistently enforced, and forced labour persists in sectors such as cotton harvesting. Community engagement in crime prevention is limited, with no formal community policing initiatives. Some whistle-blower protections exist, but these are largely ineffective because of a lack of trust in law enforcement and fears of retaliation.

Civil society organizations have a limited role in addressing organized crime, as government restrictions on NGOs and media hinder independent oversight. Although some NGOs operate in human trafficking prevention and victim assistance, their activities are closely monitored, and registration barriers prevent many from functioning effectively. Press freedom is severely restricted, with journalists facing censorship, surveillance and occasional arrests for reporting on corruption and crime. Although minor improvements in media freedom have been noted, Uzbekistan remains categorized as a state with limited press autonomy.

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.