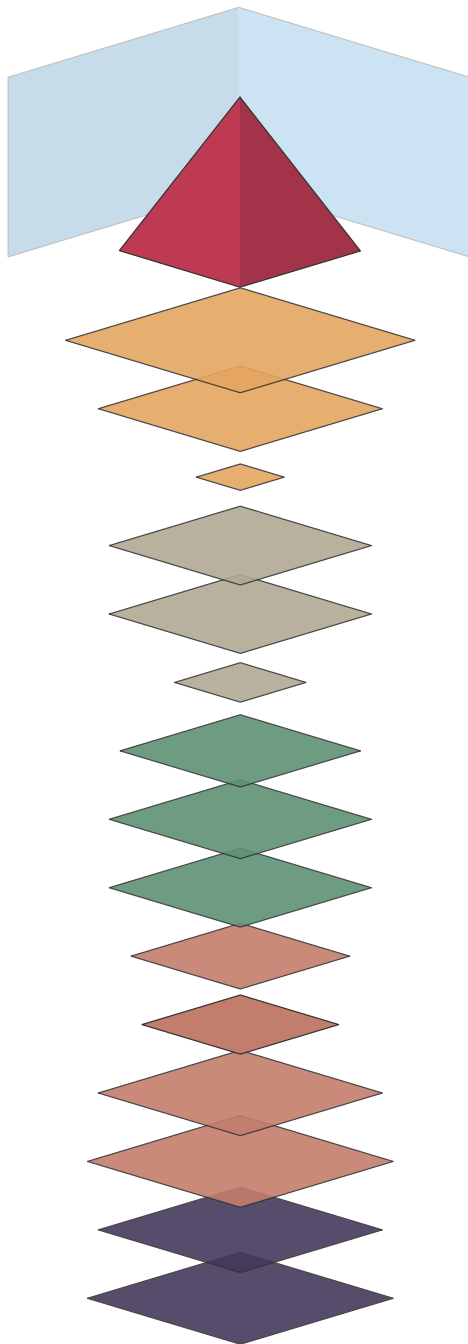




KUWAIT



5.20

CRIMINALITY SCORE

84th of 193 countries

25th of 46 Asian countries

10th of 14 Western Asian countries



CRIMINAL MARKETS

5.70

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	2.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	6.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	3.00
FLORA CRIMES	5.50
FAUNA CRIMES	6.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	6.00
HEROIN TRADE	5.00
COCAINE TRADE	4.50
CANNABIS TRADE	6.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	7.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	6.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS

4.70

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	1.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	6.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	4.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.50



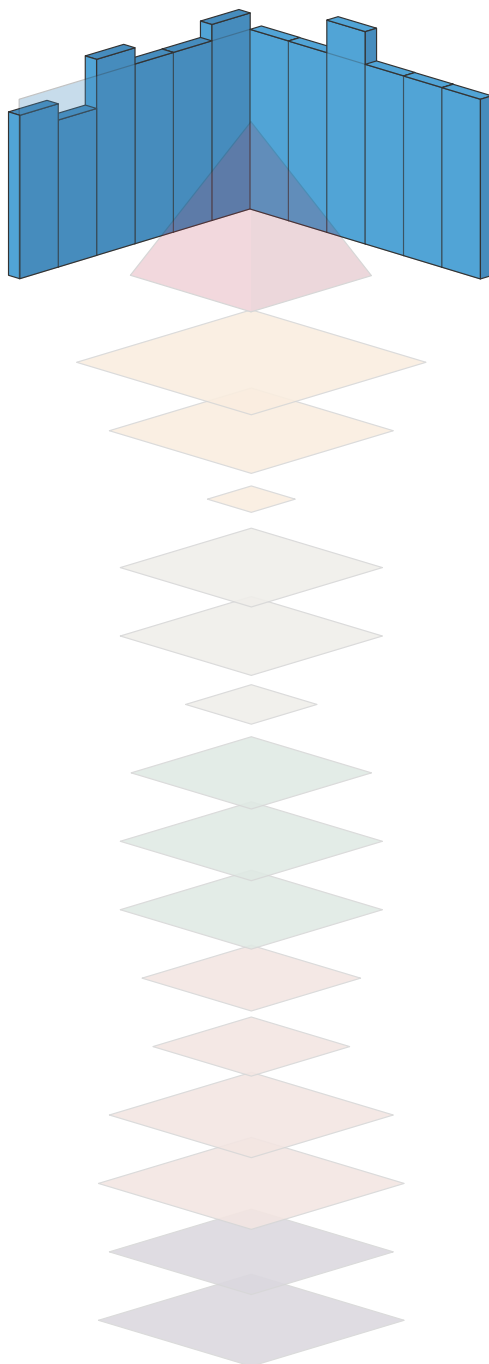
5.54

RESILIENCE SCORE





KUWAIT



5.54

RESILIENCE SCORE

56th of 193 countries

9th of 46 Asian countries

3rd of 14 Western Asian countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	4.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	6.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	5.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	6.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	5.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	5.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	6.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	5.50
PREVENTION	5.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	5.50



5.20

CRIMINALITY SCORE



CRIMINAL MARKETS 5.70



CRIMINAL ACTORS 4.70



CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Human trafficking continues to be a significant problem in Kuwait, specifically in the forms of labour and sexual exploitation. Kuwait relies heavily on foreign nationals hailing from South and Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East who seek employment in sectors like domestic service, construction and hospitality. Although some migrants enter willingly for economic purposes, they remain vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. The Kafala system, which binds migrant workers to their employers as sponsors, further heightens their vulnerability to abusive work relationships. Unskilled labourers and female domestic workers face even greater vulnerability due to limited diplomatic representation and restricted access to assistance.

Foreign nationals seeking employment in Kuwait may engage with labour recruiting companies that promise legitimate documents for a fee. However, instead of receiving enforceable agreements, genuine visas, and actual job positions, they fall victim to unenforceable agreements, counterfeit visas, and non-existent employment opportunities. Abuses include passport confiscation, movement restrictions, long working hours, non-payment of wages, food deprivation and physical or sexual abuse. To exacerbate matters, these individuals frequently work in unsafe conditions, without formal employment contracts, and are offered only inadequate housing. Fraudulent visas and fake work permits remain pervasive in Kuwait, with illicit markets for visa trading expanding onto social media platforms.

As stated, Kuwait relies heavily on imported labour, which also promotes a large human smuggling market. Irregular migrants are typically smuggled into the country through the al-Abdali border crossing. The use of fraudulently obtained visas and fake work permits remains common. However, when migrant workers are unable to obtain such documents, they opt to be covertly smuggled into the country. Cases of extortion and protection racketeering appear to be sporadic and anecdotal.

TRADE

Despite an increase in small and light arms, which has posed an increasingly dangerous threat to security, the illicit arms trade in Kuwait has not flourished. The country's small geographical area allows for efficient border control and effective law enforcement measures against smuggling. However, the defence and security sector in Kuwait faces a significant risk of corruption, particularly in operational and

procurement areas, due to the absence of public reporting. While cases of attempted arms trafficking into the country have been recorded, information regarding the scope and scale of such activities is scarce.

Kuwait is a significant player in the global counterfeit market. Counterfeit goods have gained popularity in local markets throughout the country, with increased availability of counterfeited watches, glasses, bags and clothing. The prevalence of counterfeit clothing and luxury brands, primarily originating from China, is an ongoing issue. Authorities frequently make large-scale seizures of fake goods at the country's national airport. The counterfeit market also extends to electrical goods, such as phone batteries, fans, kitchen equipment, hair straighteners and car parts. These products pose a growing risk, as they have been associated with potential dangers like electrocution or accidents.

Kuwait has a limited market for excisable goods. Incidents of the illicit trade of tobacco products, hookah supplies, and alcohol have been sporadic, and the extent of the issue remains unclear. Intercepted shipments of tobacco and alcoholic drinks destined for Kuwait or passing through to Saudi Arabia primarily occur at the borders.

ENVIRONMENT

An illicit market for agarwood is reported to exist in Kuwait, although its dynamics are unknown. The UAE is an important part of the illicit agarwood trade, importing, consuming and re-exporting agarwood, with Kuwait being among its primary end destinations. Data indicates that Kuwait is also a re-exporter of agarwood. Moreover, Kuwait serves as a transit country for the illegal trade of various wildlife products. Rhino horn, ivory, and pangolins are primarily traded to supply Asian markets. Live rare species, including cheetahs, tigers, birds, reptiles, eagles, great apes, and sharks are also traded illicitly. Cheetah cubs, in particular, are highly sought after as status symbols in the Gulf region. Social media platforms, including the Kuwait-based app '4sale', are used for trading wildlife illegally.

Even though Kuwait has one of the largest oil reserves in the world, the boost in oil-derivative prices in neighbouring countries has increased the smuggling of oil derivatives into the country. Oil smuggling occurs through both seaports and land borders. Additionally, reports have surfaced regarding gold smuggling flows to India and Bangladesh, but these appear to be small in scale.

DRUGS

Heroin and cocaine have a relatively low presence in Kuwait, although a small domestic market does exist. The al-Abdali border crossing with Iraq is a primary entry point for these drugs, with reports of taxi drivers being involved in their distribution. Attempts at smuggling cocaine via postal parcels or by air have been reported. The exact dynamics of the heroin and cocaine markets are unclear although it is known that in some cases their trafficking in the country is managed by foreign actors.

Kuwait is a destination country for the cannabis trade with traffickers, both domestic and foreign actors, using land borders and seaports to smuggle the drug into the country. Similarly, it serves as a destination country for the synthetic drug trade. Spice, a type of synthetic cannabis, is the most prevalent drug in Kuwait. Significant synthetic drug seizures have occurred in recent years, with multiple incidents involving Captagon, methamphetamine, tramadol and Lyrica pills, which are primarily trafficked into Kuwait via air cargo.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Kuwait is an appealing target country for cybercriminals worldwide, as it has made substantial investments in ICT infrastructure in recent years. Although Kuwait experiences relatively low numbers of users affected by local threats, there has been a noticeable rise in distributed malicious files, encounters with ransomware, and malicious downloads compared to previous years.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes, especially cyber-enabled forms, are a growing concern in Kuwait. Kuwaiti citizens are victims primarily of online scams, including phishing and non-delivery of paid goods. Scammers typically impersonate well-known brands in the Gulf region, such as telecom companies and e-commerce platforms. The rise in digital payments and reliance on technology for work has increased the population's vulnerability to online financial crimes. Kuwait experiences a high number of email attacks, malware attacks

and scam-related links, with millions of such incidents reported. Instances of fraudulent operations targeting clients of local banks have been observed, wherein clients are deceived into clicking on links that enable fraudsters to gain remote access to their devices and steal banking data. Embezzlement of public funds and corruption are also pervasive in the country.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Private sector actors, in particular recruitment agencies, play a major role in criminal markets, most notably in human trafficking. Private entities are also heavily involved in money laundering activities and other forms of illicit activities, making them the most pervasive category of criminal groups in Kuwait.

State-embedded actors are also significantly involved in illicit activities in the country. The Kuwaiti elite exert control over key economic sectors, leading to informal monopolies and oligopolies. Kuwait's extensive oil reserves are subject to corruption cases, including those exposed by the Pandora Papers investigation. High-level state officials are involved in the organized theft of public funds related to state control over the lucrative oil and gas sector. Additionally, in terms of bribery, facilitation payments and gifts are widespread and occur with impunity, and state-embedded actors also aid the illicit activities of criminal networks. The latter for the most part engage in human smuggling and trafficking as well as drug trafficking, taking advantage of their ties to state-embedded actors to avoid investigations, escape prosecution or obtain fraudulent documents.

Criminal networks organize online 'slave markets' where they post listings of human beings for sale. Moreover, criminal networks engage in smuggling drugs into Kuwait, which has been exacerbated by Iraqi instability and a lack of control along the Kuwait-Iraq border. While foreign criminal actors have minimal influence, they are involved in drug trafficking and cyber-related crimes. However, foreign actors are probably less influential than domestic criminal networks and state-embedded actors. There is no evidence to suggest that mafia-style groups exist in Kuwait.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Both its geographical positioning and its high dependence on foreign labour make Kuwait attractive for organized crime operations. As drug trafficking and human smuggling and trafficking are the most prominent markets in Kuwait,

they tend to feature more strongly in the government's anti-organized crime agenda. The Arab Spring uprisings have increased political pressure on Kuwait, especially with respect to a lack of transparency as well as social and political freedoms. Recent power struggles between the

government and the elected assembly have resulted in multiple government resignations, reflecting ongoing tensions.

Tribal influence in politics, traditionally supportive of the government, has become increasingly oppositional, leading to further political strife. The marginalized Bedouin community has been denied citizenship rights and state services, amplifying opposition narratives against the government. Transparency and accountability remain areas of concern, as officials face more political rather than legal accountability. The government exercises control over the dissemination of information and online services, limiting transparency and civil liberties. Despite anti-corruption strategies, effective implementation of anti-corruption laws remains a challenge, and corruption cases are often left unprosecuted.

Kuwait has ratified international treaties and agreements related to organized crime and corruption, including the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The country collaborates with international organizations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and INTERPOL to combat organized crime. Bilateral agreements on extradition and labour regulations have been established with various countries, although issues related to migrant worker abuse persist. Kuwait has a comprehensive framework pertaining to a variety of organized crime activities, including human smuggling and trafficking. However, its enforcement continues to be problematic. Moreover, labour laws lack effective protections to provide workers safeguards against exploitative practices, and sponsorship laws tie migrant workers' legal residence and valid immigration status to employers, which limits their movement and punishes workers for fleeing abusive workplaces. Kuwait is also actively engaged in initiatives to enhance cybersecurity and protect critical infrastructure. Efforts to address cybersecurity include the establishment of the national cybersecurity agency and the enactment of relevant laws and regulations. The cybercrime law criminalizes cyber-related offences and provides a legal framework for investigation and prosecution, which intends to protect important sectors, such as oil and gas, from cyber threats.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Executive pressure renders the justice system unsuccessful in guaranteeing fair trial and due process rights, despite the judiciary being independent on paper. Domestic workers lack expedited legal mechanisms for seeking redress, back wages, or permission to return home. The supreme judicial council, approved by the emir, appoints judges, with Kuwaiti citizens serving for a lifetime and non-citizens for up to three years. While the judiciary has supported the government in some cases, it has also ruled against government decisions and advocated for the improvement of conditions for blue-collar workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prosecution and conviction rates for organized

crime cases in Kuwait are low, leading to concerns about the duration of judicial processes and the lack of fast trials for trafficking cases. Victims of organized crime hesitate to report due to lengthy litigation and appeals processes, allowing traffickers to act with impunity.

Law enforcement agencies have been criticized for abuses during arrests and interrogations, undermining their effectiveness. In addition, ongoing conflicts in Western Asia are increasing Kuwait's vulnerability to organized crime. Authorities have encountered difficulties in controlling the smuggling of people and goods across the Iraqi-Kuwaiti and Kuwaiti-Saudi borders, putting strain on the Kuwaiti army and border security forces. Moreover, drug smugglers persistently devise new and creative methods to carry out their illegal activities.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The country is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, and has implemented a comprehensive legal framework and established a financial intelligence unit to create safeguards against money laundering. However, corruption and money laundering continue to be interconnected in Kuwait, with public officials engaging in corrupt activities with little accountability. While some major money laundering cases related to real estate fraud involving prominent individuals have been examined by the courts, money laundering charges are often treated as secondary offences, downplaying the link between corruption and money laundering. Nonetheless, Kuwait overall actively collaborates with national and international agencies to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

While Kuwait has taken steps to improve its regulatory capacity, it faces serious barriers to foreign investment. The requirement for Kuwaiti ownership in businesses limits foreign participation, and the dominance of established business elites with political ties poses challenges for new players. Transparency issues, contract delays and favoritism towards the local population further hinder foreign investment. However, efforts have been made to address monopolistic structures and promote competition. Initiatives to enhance investor protections and support small and medium-sized enterprises in international trade have also been implemented, aiming to improve the investment climate in Kuwait.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

In Kuwait, many migrant workers who leave their jobs without permission face criminal penalties, detention, and deportation. Fearful of organized crime and lacking adequate legal protection, they often fail to file complaints or report human trafficking cases. Women and girls face challenges due to male guardianship laws, which prevent them from seeking assistance or could result in their arrest for being

absent from home. The absence of domestic violence shelters further discourages witnesses and victims from coming forward. Assistance and protection are provided to female domestic workers in government-managed shelters, while male migrant workers lack similar support.

The government uses training, workshops and participation in conferences to increase awareness among civil servants and first responders in combating organized crime. However, prevention efforts are still in the early stages, as recruitment processes and employment agencies continue to enable abuses, such as labour and sexual exploitation. Public awareness campaigns have been conducted to educate the population on human trafficking, and a national strategy has been implemented with brochures distributed to foreign migrant workers. Efforts to combat human trafficking include the installation of security cameras to reduce violent crimes, but violence between migrant workers and employers remains an issue. Whistleblower protection laws in Kuwait vary in effectiveness, and some reports suggest that whistleblowers still face retaliation and difficulties in reporting corruption.

Kuwait exercises strict censorship laws, limiting freedom of expression and threatening critics with arrest. Civil society is largely monitored by state authorities, although certain informal settings are insulated from intervention. While freedoms of assembly and association are protected by law, limitations exist in practice, with restrictions on the registration and licensing of NGOs. Activism, particularly among youth and women, has increased with the use of online campaigns and social media platforms. Kuwaiti society holds a positive view of democracy and its parliamentary tradition, although the legitimacy of the monarchical system is still recognized. Traditional newspapers with the largest market share tend to avoid criticizing authorities, and state-controlled information channels limit freedom of expression. Corruption remains a sensitive subject for journalists, and authorities impose constraints on civil liberties despite the influence of the elected parliament.

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