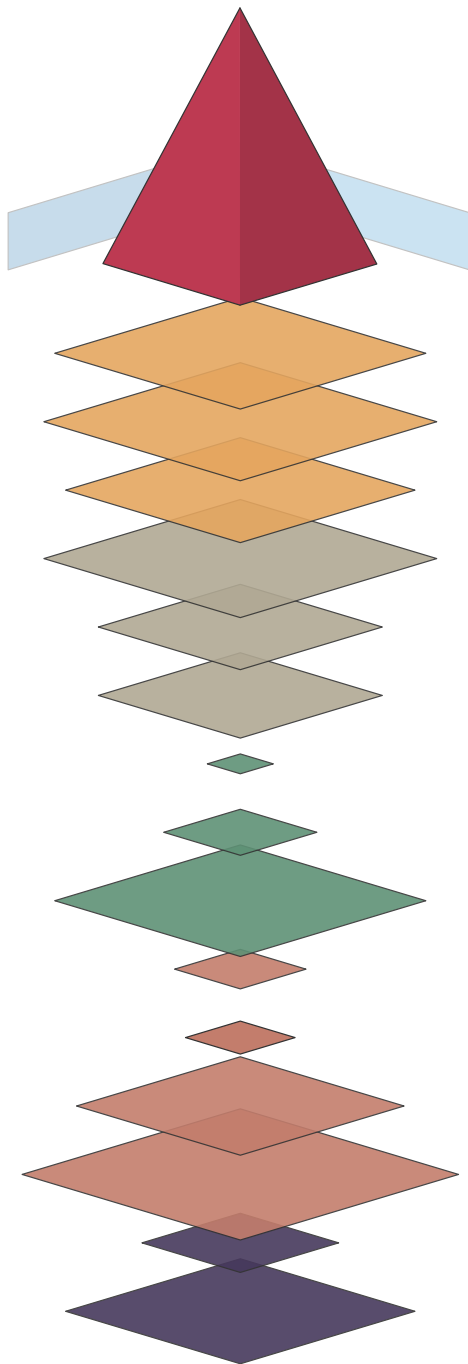




SYRIA



7.07

CRIMINALITY SCORE

11th of 193 countries

5th of 46 Asian countries

3rd of 14 Western Asian countries



CRIMINAL MARKETS

6.43

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	9.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	8.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	9.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.50
FLORA CRIMES	1.50
FAUNA CRIMES	3.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	8.50
HEROIN TRADE	3.00
COCAINE TRADE	2.50
CANNABIS TRADE	7.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	10.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	4.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	8.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS

7.70

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	4.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	9.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	10.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	8.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.00



1.92

RESILIENCE SCORE



Funding provided by the United States Government.

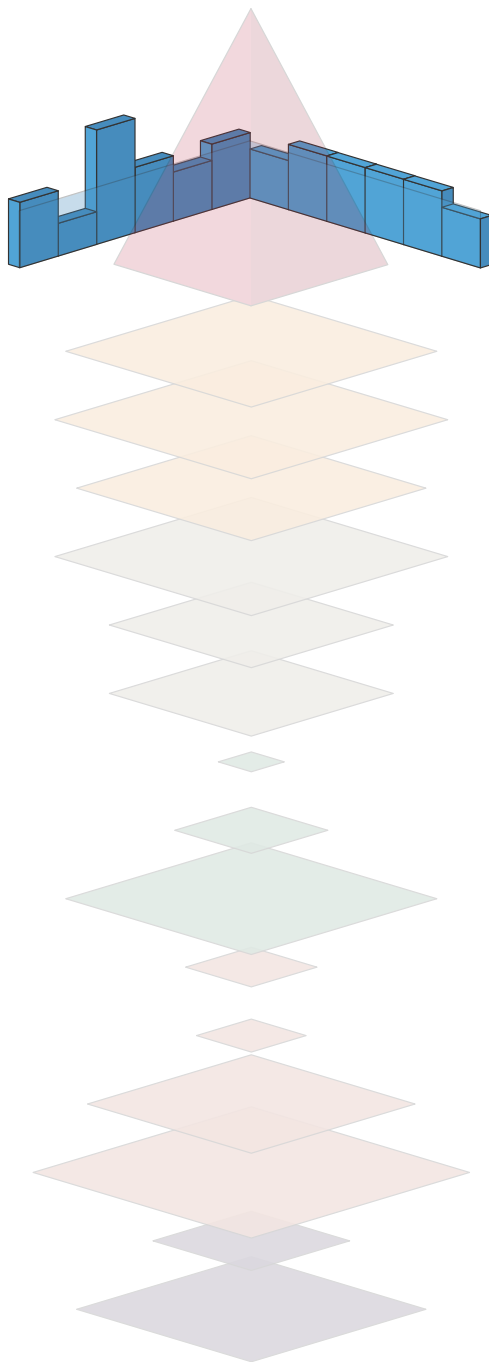


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SYRIA



1.92

RESILIENCE SCORE

184th of 193 countries

42nd of 46 Asian countries

13th of 14 Western Asian countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	2.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	1.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	3.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	2.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	1.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	2.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	1.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	2.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	2.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	2.00
PREVENTION	2.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	1.50



7.07

CRIMINALITY SCORE



CRIMINAL MARKETS 6.43



CRIMINAL ACTORS 7.70



CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

The human-trafficking market in Syria continues to be pervasive, with the country being ranked among the worst in the world for human trafficking. Syria remains a major source and destination country for forced labour, sexual exploitation and domestic servitude targeting both local and foreign victims, these being women, children and men. While Syrians are being trafficked to neighbouring countries such as Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan, people from different nationalities (mostly Iraq and the Philippines) are trafficked into Syria, either to be exploited there or to be trafficked to another destination. Syrian children continue to be exploited by both state and non-state actors, forcing them to participate as combatants, human shields, suicide bombers or executioners, despite the introduction of new legislation intended to deter child trafficking through stricter legal consequences. The market is extremely lucrative. While profits from sexual exploitation are primarily generated from local demand, profits from organ trade are generated from foreign demand, with online platforms increasingly used to advertise and facilitate the trade of organs. Although human trafficking occurs across the country, Deir ez-Zor and Al Qaim remain major trafficking hubs.

Although human-smuggling flows within and from Syria had initially stabilized after ISIS's defeat and the government's consolidation of the majority of the country, there has been an upsurge in recent years, predominantly caused by recent military campaigns as well as a declining economic situation. Human smuggling mostly occurs along Syria's borders with Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq, which is allegedly facilitated by the assistance of actors linked to the state. In addition to state-embedded actors, Syrian smugglers also cooperate with foreign counterparts in neighbouring countries to transport both asylum seekers and refugees. In recent years, there have also been reports of a migration flow of Lebanese, Asian and African migrants being smuggled into Syria, although this takes place to a lesser extent. Moreover, the deteriorating financial situation, the discrimination against Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries and the repatriation of Syrian refugees have led some of them to pay smugglers to be smuggled back into Syria, with Syrians irregularly re-entering from Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan and Lebanon.

Extortion and protection racketeering in Syria are generally interconnected with geopolitical developments. In the wake of territorial disputes, opposition militias have been carrying out extortion by imposing taxes on businesses and civilians in the areas under their control, in exchange for 'services' or 'protection'. The most commonly known

form of racketeering occurs through the misuse of zakat, normally a charitable donation that is considered a religious obligation in Islam but exploited by militias via the so-called zakat tax. Almost all highway trade and transportation in the country are also subject to regular extortion.

TRADE

The illicit-arms market in Syria is one of the largest markets worldwide, with arms prices considerably increasing over the years. This market is reportedly led by both domestic and foreign actors who are aligned with the Syrian regime. Arms trafficking continues to take place in the Kurdish-affiliated areas (Al-Hasakah, Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor) and in southern Syria. Arms are primarily sourced from neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan, with some of the weapons being stolen from the regime's armoury or sold by corrupt state officials and ending up on the black market. There has also been a surge in Iranian-made weapons and missiles trafficked into Syria via illegal crossings in Iraq, and which are allegedly destined for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and Iran-backed militias present in the country. Furthermore, a large number of weapons smuggled into Syria for the armed opposition have ended up in the hands of militia groups or in the black market. A share of the illicit arms reaching Syria are re-trafficked into neighbouring Lebanon due to higher demand and profitability. There is also a significant demand for small arms from civilians for protection purposes due to the ongoing conflict and consequent instability in Syria. Purchasing small arms continues to be relatively easy with the use of both online channels and open-air bazaars, which have increased unlicensed arms possession in the country.

Transnational trade of counterfeit goods, for which Syria is both a source and destination, is prevalent in the country. This market is boosted by the increased demand for cheap products following the decade-long conflict and growing unemployment and poverty, as well as the country's porous borders. The issue is especially pertinent in northern Syria, where fraudulent goods reportedly enter the region with legal documents and licit trade infrastructure. Goods commonly counterfeited include household products such as laundry detergents, cleaning supplies and dishwashing soap, as well as expired or counterfeit food items, which are also produced in the country.

Similarly, the illicit trade in excise goods is commonplace in Syria, especially tobacco products. Trafficking networks extend well beyond the country's own porous borders, often being connected to neighbouring countries in the region. Although illicit cigarette flows into and out of the country have presumably changed direction at various points in time, depending on market dynamics, in recent

years Syria has been characterized as a destination country for tobacco products smuggled from Lebanon, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates. These smuggling activities are reported to be facilitated by the foreign forces present in the country as well as state-embedded actors. This criminal market is a significant source of revenue for smuggling networks along borders and a significant source of bribes for government officials and armed groups who control said borders and checkpoints. Some actors involved in the continuing conflict in the country have allegedly been relying on financing generated by the illicit trade in tobacco products, among other goods.

ENVIRONMENT

The illicit flora trade continues to be negligible to non-existent in Syria, although there is some information circulating on the smuggling of charcoal from Somalia into Syria. Conversely, Syria continues to be a relatively small transit and source country for fauna crimes, with illicit bird trade and poaching pervasive in the country. There are wildlife breeding centres in Aleppo and Damascus, from which exotic animals are smuggled out of Syria to elsewhere in the Middle East.

Fuel smuggling continues to be lucrative, with an increasing demand due to the country's recent and successive price increases and fuel shortages. Syria continues to be a destination country for oil smuggled from Lebanon and Iran. Moreover, in north-west Syria, there has been a recent influx of smuggled oil from areas controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), due to the growing price differences between the two regions. The illicit oil and fuel economy has tremendous reach within all sectors of Syrian society, making it one of the most profitable illicit markets, with most of the functioning oil infrastructure and foreign imports in the hands of either non-state armed groups or smugglers. There are also reports of those connected to high-ranking Syrian officials being involved in the illicit trade of oil. The smuggling modus operandi is reportedly very diverse and can take place by van, bicycle, donkey, car, motorcycle or Syrian Army trucks. Diesel is also manufactured in the country by criminal groups to be sold in the local market as well as in neighbouring countries, including Turkey. Moreover, there have been reports of gold being smuggled into neighbouring Lebanon.

DRUGS

Although drug trafficking has been on the rise in Syria in recent years, heroin and cocaine markets in the country continue to be less pervasive due to the high cost of and limited demand for these drugs. In this respect, the country is primarily a transit country for heroin and cocaine trafficked in the region, especially towards the Gulf states. Hezbollah is involved in both heroin and cocaine smuggling in Syria. The port cities of Tartous and Latakia as well

as the city of Qamishli in north-eastern Syria are major drug-trafficking hubs.

The illicit cannabis trade is widespread in Syria, and occurs in government-controlled, opposition-controlled and SDF-controlled areas. Although some cannabis is known to enter Syria from Turkey and Lebanon, cannabis is widely cultivated in the country. Cannabis cultivation and trade in Syria are also known to be carried out and/or facilitated by non-state armed militias and corrupt state actors, including military officials.

Synthetic drugs, specifically Captagon, are prevalent in the country, with Syria emerging as the global epicentre of Captagon production, which has been exacerbated following the civil war. Easy access to components enables synthetic-drug production to flourish, and Captagon production in particular has been increasing in recent years. Although synthetic-drug production is concentrated in regime-controlled areas, smaller-scale production is carried out in the areas outside of the regime's control. Captagon consumption has become normalized in Syria, but local demand continues to be limited with the country mainly serving as a source country for predominantly Gulf countries. Synthetic drugs are smuggled out of Syria to neighbouring countries and elsewhere in the Middle East, as well as to Europe. Recent reports suggest a strong financial reliance on Captagon production and trafficking by the country.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Even though cyber-dependent crimes are not common among the general population, these crimes are perpetrated with political intentions. There are notorious networks that reportedly have direct ties with the government and non-state armed militias carrying out numerous cyber-dependent crimes, including using malware, spamming and denial-of-service attacks to target media groups, NGOs, businesses and state bodies. Cyber-dependent crimes are mostly carried out to suppress dissent rather than generate economic profit. Syria's isolation from digital payment systems and international shipping inherently limits the profitability of cybercrime inside the country. Instead, the limited activity targets diaspora and other Arabic-language communities outside the country.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Although it is difficult to paint an accurate picture of the magnitude of financial crime in Syria, it is seemingly pervasive, especially in terms of tax evasion and the embezzlement of funds. These have become sizeable issues causing extensive losses to the government. Furthermore, sanctions and policy-driven distortions in the financial and foreign exchange sectors have resulted in the emergence of a widespread illicit finance and foreign exchange sector that operates outside the purview of the government.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Criminal actors in Syria encompass various entities, most notably state-embedded actors, criminal networks and foreign actors. Corruption, bribery and nepotism continue to be prevalent in the country. State-embedded actors, including the Ghaith Forces, the Tiger Forces, the Country Armor Forces and the National Defence Forces, continue to exert major control over criminal markets such as drug production and trafficking. State-embedded actors also provide criminal groups with weapons and security, providing them with protection from legal consequences and facilitating their transit through checkpoints.

Foreign criminal actors are also heavily involved in the criminal landscape of the country, with most of the Syrian borders being controlled by a large variety of foreign actors such as Sunni Islamist militant groups, the Syrian National Army, the Russian Armed Forces, the SDF and Turkish militias loyal to Turkey, among others. Lebanon's Hezbollah

continues to be the most active foreign group engaged in organized criminal activity in Syria, and plays a significant role in drug-trafficking markets. Foreign criminal groups also cooperate extensively with local criminals. Various foreign proxy groups involved in the civil war also control border crossings and human-trafficking operations, and are also suspected of involvement in oil trafficking.

The Syrian state is to a large extent embedded in the private sector, where organized crime is difficult to separate from the illicit activities orchestrated by the government. For instance, there are reports indicating the incorporation of private companies by the Syrian regime in an attempt to avoid Western sanctions. Tax evasion by large companies in the private sector is also pervasive in Syria. The Syrian state continues to not provide much room for mafia-style groups, but such groups with familial and kinship ties remain active in the country. ISIS and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham continue to engage in a variety of organized crimes to fund their activities.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Syrian regime's centralization of state legislative, judicial and executive institutions has long been restricting all forms of dissent. The presidential system revolves around the president's personal will and networks of social, economic and military interests, based on personal loyalty to the president. State intelligence agencies observe the daily lives of citizens in efforts to root out dissent through targeted detentions, torture and executions. The Syrian regime has not made sufficient effort to combat organized crime, even after the end of ISIS's domination in the country, and rather facilitated a favourable environment for criminal organizations to thrive and take advantage of the country's fragile post-war situation. Despite the government's strong rhetoric on combating organized crime, state-embedded actors continue to be closely associated with many criminal groups. Corruption continues to be a systemic issue throughout the governmental apparatus, rendering the infiltration of state institutions by criminal organizations very possible. Although the government, the Anti-Corruption Commission and the transparency of the state budget and electronic payment systems are present in all regions and governorates, this has played no role in limiting corruption in the country.

Syria has ratified the vast majority of relevant treaties pertaining to organized crime. However, while Syria does maintain formal ties to a number of countries, there is no meaningful substantive international collaboration or

cooperation on issues related to transnational organized crime. Syrian government actors have taken advantage of attempts at collaboration to advance own political goals. Syria also fails to extradite war criminals, although extradition treaties are in place. Nonetheless, Syria has been improving its relationship with other Arab states, which may open the door for regional and international cooperation in fighting organized crime in the future. The country was also reinstated to INTERPOL in 2021 after being suspended for approximately ten years. Syria has been also readmitted to the World Health Organization. At national level, the country's legislative framework addresses various types of organized crime with serious amendments made in recent years. However, the implementation of these legislations is severely lacking, with even pro-government forces engaged in certain criminal markets with impunity.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Despite the existence of relevant judicial institutions mandated with fighting organized crime, the judicial system in Syria continues to be deeply corrupt, highly politicized and dependent on the state. Judicial officials lack proper legal training and are required to be members of the ruling Ba'ath Party. The president is entitled to dismiss judges through presidential decrees, which further undermines the independence of the judicial system. As for the penitentiary system in Syria, prison conditions are reported to not meet the standard minimum rules for the

treatment of prisoners. Children are held in prison, where malnutrition and torture are rampant.

Similarly, law enforcement continues to be widely corrupt and politicized, and organized-crime groups are embedded within the system. The Syrian military also carries out arbitrary arrests of citizens. There have been reports of clashes between the security service and criminal militias loyal to the government in several parts of the country. Moreover, the state security apparatus continues to lack the necessary capacity to effectively combat organized crime caused by the civil war.

Syria continues to be a fragmented country, with a weak economy and weak governance structures. Even though the Syrian government controls Syria's major cities, including Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Hama, as well as Daraa, Syria's territorial integrity continues to be fragile, with large parts of the country still being held by the opposition, jihadi groups and the SDF. Moreover, the Syrian army only controls less than a quarter of the country's international land borders, while control of the remaining borders is shared by foreign actors, as well as the opposition. In effect, the country is divided into four administrative zones, with the government running the central, southern and coastal areas. The north-eastern provinces are managed by a Western-backed, Kurdish-led administration, the north-western Idlib province is dominated by jihadi factions and the northern borders and a swath of Syrian land is controlled by Turkey.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Despite the existence of a regulatory framework and measures pertaining to money laundering, their implementation is severely undermined in practice, as the Syrian government applies such measures selectively. Furthermore, internationally imposed sanctions appear to indicate complicity from the Syrian central bank in a range of money-laundering schemes.

Syria's economy has been deeply damaged by the ongoing conflict, which prevents foreign investments in the country. The crumbling state of Syria's economy resulted in the emergence of a black market for money exchange and transfers offering better rates than the Syrian central bank. As of 2022, the areas under regime control are suffering from an economic crisis which is unprecedented in Syria's history. Its effects range from soaring inflation, the devaluation of the Syrian pound and harsh shortages of fuel and electricity to increasing food insecurity and widespread poverty. Despite the government's attempts to mitigate the country's economic decline the crisis has been exacerbated by a multitude of factors, including the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic collapse of neighbouring Lebanon – which followed a 12-year-long war, corruption and sanctions.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Efforts made by the Syrian government to provide support to victims and witnesses of organized crime in the country are very limited. For instance, there are only two state rehabilitation centres for drug users in addition to a few private ones. Trafficking victims continue to be vulnerable and even reportedly punished for unlawful acts they were forced to commit, such as child soldiering or sex work. No protection services are provided to children who were recruited by armed groups. Rather, they are arrested and tortured by government officials. Courts continue to discriminate against women in particular, and perpetrators of sexual abuse can avoid punishment by marrying their victims. Women are afraid to report sexual abuse to the police for fear of further sexual abuse. The Syrian regulatory framework continues to lack witness protection programmes and judges may oblige witnesses to appear in court without protection.

Crime prevention in Syria revolves around community awareness-raising programmes, often targeted at the youth. The Syrian regime has plans to establish crime-reporting centres. Community-based initiatives led by NGOs to promote civil-society awareness have also been launched, although they have been largely ineffective. Moreover, various crime-prevention programmes supported by international aid organizations have been mostly unsuccessful in reducing crime. The government has not only failed to make efforts to prevent certain organized criminal activities such as human trafficking and drug trafficking, but it also has either failed to acknowledge the existence of the market or boosted the reach and effects of such markets.

Community-based initiatives, undertaken by civil-society organizations (CSOs), promote awareness of civil society, which are assisted by the media to encourage state actors to combat crime. Nevertheless, CSOs are unable to provide the state with resources to fight crime, as their contributions are limited to civil-society activities. There are also a few organizations whose secondary domain is protecting women, particularly victims of sexual violence, but their role is limited and they face several challenges, the most serious being financial. CSOs are unable to exist without explicit permission and practical protection from regime or state institutions in the country. The Syrian media is owned and controlled by state actors, and investigative journalism is nearly non-existent. Journalists engage in self-censorship, especially on matters regarding the ruling family. Journalists are also under constant threat of abduction and death, and have often been subjected to intimidation.

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