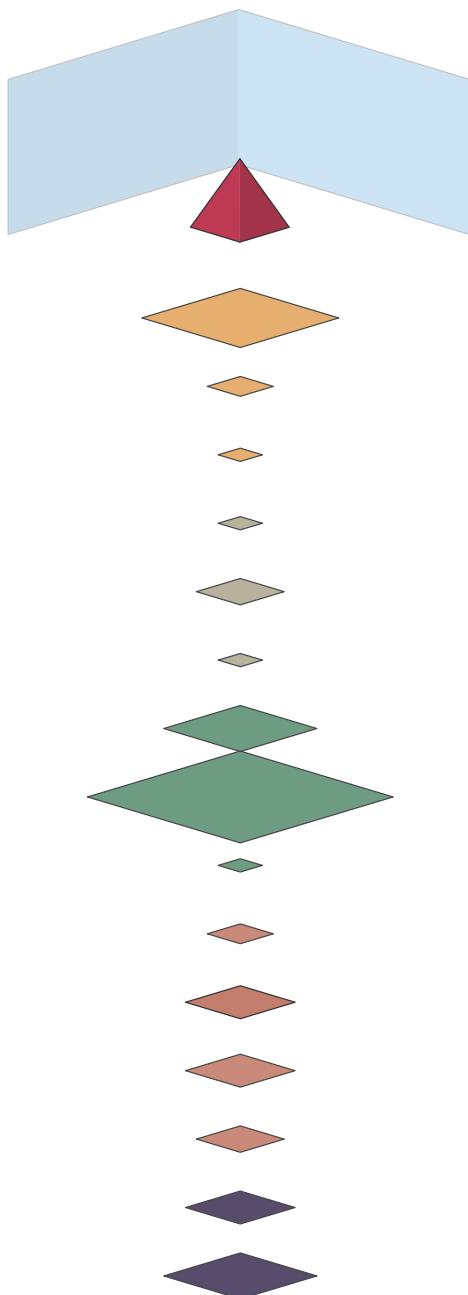


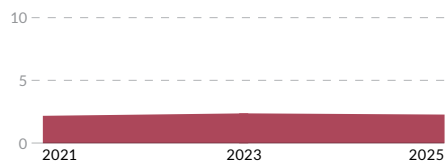


VANUATU



2.33 $\nearrow 0.10$
CRIMINALITY SCORE

186th of 193 countries $\nearrow 2$
10th of 14 Oceanian countries $\nearrow 1$
4th of 4 Melanesian countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS 2.47 $\nearrow 0.20$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	4.50 $\nearrow 1.00$
HUMAN SMUGGLING	1.50 0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	1.00 0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	1.00 $\searrow 0.50$
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	2.00 $\searrow 2.00$
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	1.00 $\searrow 1.50$
FLORA CRIMES	3.50 0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	7.00 $\nearrow 1.00$
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	1.00 $\searrow 0.50$
HEROIN TRADE	1.50 $\nearrow 0.50$
COCAINE TRADE	2.50 0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	2.50 $\searrow 1.00$
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	2.00 0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	2.50 0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	3.50 0.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS 2.20 0.00

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	1.00 0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	1.50 0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	3.00 0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	4.00 0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	1.50 0.00



This project was funded in part
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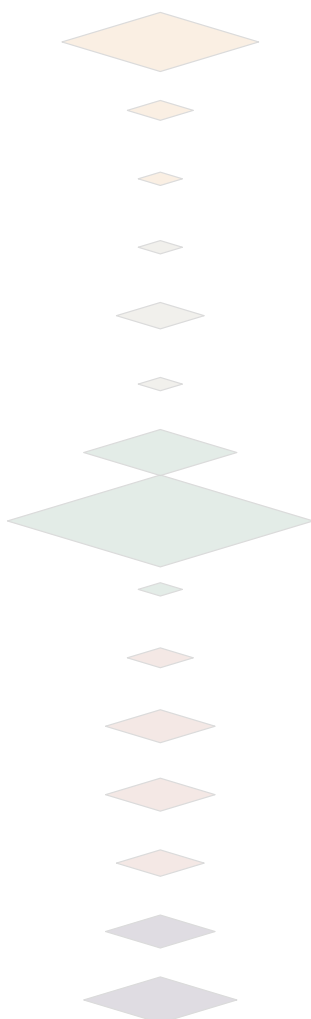
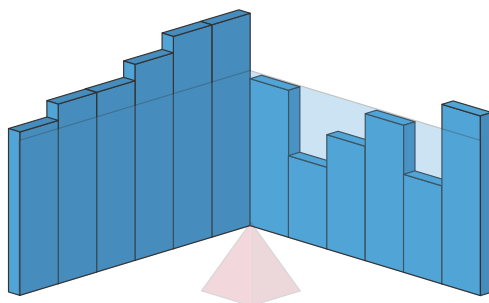


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VANUATU



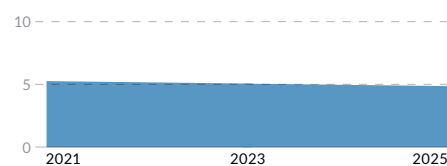
4.88 $\downarrow 0.25$

RESILIENCE SCORE

93rd of 193 countries $\downarrow 9$

10th of 14 Oceanian countries -

2nd of 4 Melanesian countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.00	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	5.50	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	5.50	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	6.00	$\downarrow 0.50$
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	6.50	$\downarrow 0.50$
LAW ENFORCEMENT	6.50	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	4.50	$\uparrow 0.50$
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	2.50	$\downarrow 0.50$
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	3.50	$\downarrow 0.50$
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.50	$\downarrow 0.50$
PREVENTION	3.00	$\downarrow 0.50$
NON-STATE ACTORS	5.50	$\downarrow 0.50$



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Historically considered a transit country, Vanuatu is increasingly becoming a destination for human trafficking, particularly for victims from neighbouring Pacific nations, China, Thailand, Bangladesh and the Philippines. Emerging evidence suggests that both foreign and domestic criminal actors are involved. Lured by promises of well-paying jobs, victims often find themselves forced to work in the construction, logging, agriculture, fishing and domestic service industries. China-based companies are frequently implicated in exploitative practices, with transit routes involving Fiji, India and Singapore. Bangladeshi men are trafficked to work in construction and wood manufacturing, while women (especially from China and South Asia) are trafficked to work in hospitality and tourism. Commercial sexual exploitation is exacerbated by cultural practices, such as bride-price payments, which can lead to forced marriages and subsequent debt bondage. Fishing vessels have been identified as hotspots for trafficking, with reports of underage girls being sexually exploited at sea. Trafficking networks are enabled by weak law enforcement, corruption and bribery, particularly among immigration officers. Post-disaster economic struggles further contribute to vulnerabilities, with higher incidents of child marriages and human trafficking linked to past cyclones. In contrast, there is no substantial evidence of human smuggling in Vanuatu, although weak border enforcement raises concerns about the potential overlap with trafficking networks. State-embedded actors have reportedly facilitated irregular migration through bribery, and smuggling could be going undetected, given the country's post-pandemic tourism resurgence. There are no reports of extortion and protection racketeering activities in the country.

TRADE

Arms trafficking is virtually non-existent in Vanuatu, with no reported cases of illicit firearms smuggling or related crimes. Moreover, no cases of counterfeit goods trade were reported during the current reporting period, suggesting this is not a widespread issue in Vanuatu. However, regional trends in the Pacific, particularly involving counterfeit pharmaceuticals and clothing, indicate a potential risk for Vanuatu. The sale of replica products operates in a legal grey area, with distinctions between counterfeit and replica goods often unclear. Anecdotal evidence suggests that replica items are available in local markets and online platforms. The illicit trade of excise consumer goods, particularly tobacco products, has not been documented in Vanuatu.

ENVIRONMENT

Illegal logging is a notable criminal market in Vanuatu, and of particular concern is the illicit rosewood trade. Foreign entities (mainly Chinese firms) exploit legal loopholes and weak forestry regulations, bypassing licence fees or exporting timber without proper documentation. Community opposition to illegal logging is strong, and authorities have demonstrated a growing willingness to investigate and prosecute offenders, but systemic corruption within the forestry authorities has allowed illegal activities to continue, particularly in conservation areas. Vanuatu's main fauna crime is illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which is widespread within the country's maritime borders. Foreign, especially Chinese-owned, vessels dominate IUU fishing and use drift nets, which are prohibited under the Fisheries Act. Forced labour and sexual exploitation occur on fishing vessels, highlighting links between IUU fishing and human trafficking. Illegal activities are further enabled by corruption in the fisheries sector, including fraudulent quotas and misrepresentation of catch volumes. There is no evidence of a criminal market for non-renewable resources in Vanuatu. The country has manganese deposits but no known link to illicit extraction or smuggling.

DRUGS

The cannabis market in Vanuatu is small and caters mainly to local users, expatriates and tourists. Recreational cannabis is illegal, but medical cannabis and industrial hemp were legalized in 2021, with regulations enacted in 2023. Cultivation is strictly for export, but potential illegal domestic use is a concern. Public opinion is divided between those who advocate for legalization and those who cite social and health risks.

Vanuatu has a modest local cocaine market and is not an important transit hub for transnational cocaine trade. Local consumption is rare, but foreign traffickers have used Vanuatu's maritime routes to move large shipments. Similarly, the synthetic drug market is limited, particularly for crystal methamphetamine, and heroin trafficking is largely absent. The country serves mainly as a minor transit point for such substances en route to New Zealand and Australia. Domestic demand is minimal, and no major trafficking networks are known to operate locally.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

In Vanuatu, cyber-dependent crimes, such as malware attacks, are increasing but are less prominent than traditional criminal markets. The most significant ransomware attack occurred in 2022 and disrupted government services

for over 30 days, highlighting vulnerabilities in national cybersecurity frameworks that are still present.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Vanuatu is a well-known offshore financial centre and has been blacklisted by the EU as an uncooperative tax jurisdiction. Although financial crimes committed within the country are relatively rare, its tax haven status and Citizenship-by-Investment (CBI) programme attract foreign nationals who may be involved in financial and transnational criminal activities.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

There is no evidence of mafia-style groups, which are structured, hierarchical criminal organizations that exert control over illicit markets. Opportunistic and transnational actors, rather than entrenched, locally dominant criminal organizations, operate in Vanuatu. No specific criminal networks originate from Vanuatu, but local or hybrid indigenous groups have emerged and are involved in human trafficking and drug-related crimes, particularly as intermediaries for transnational criminal groups operating across the Pacific. However, these networks tend to be loosely connected and frequently change in composition. Their overall influence on the country's criminal landscape is relatively limited, as they lack the long-term stability and deep entrenchment of more developed criminal networks. Several systemic challenges in Vanuatu allow state-embedded actors to facilitate organized crime. They include weak border controls, insufficient law enforcement resources and corruption within government institutions. Evidence

suggests that certain officials, particularly within border control and immigration services, have accepted bribes to facilitate the entry of criminal people or enable illicit trafficking operations. Fraudulent activities within state institutions have also been reported, including the illicit sale of Vanuatu passports and fishing licences.

Foreign actors are involved in human trafficking, illegal logging and illicit fishing in Vanuatu. Criminal elements from China and other Asian countries are active in human smuggling and forced labour schemes. Some Chinese-owned companies operating in Vanuatu have been implicated in the trafficking of foreign nationals for forced labour in the construction, hospitality and fishing industries, while Chinese-owned fishing enterprises are frequently linked to IUU fishing. These actors engage in various forms of fraud, including acquiring forged fishing licences, misreporting catch sizes and using prohibited drift nets. In the logging industry, foreign actors (mainly Chinese firms) have been involved in illegal timber exports, often circumventing local forestry regulations through corrupt practices. Organized crime syndicates from China, Australia, Mexico, South America and New Zealand coordinate drug trafficking operations through maritime routes, using Vanuatu as a transit hub for shipments bound for larger markets such as Australia and New Zealand. Hybrid local criminal groups sometimes collaborate with these foreign syndicates, particularly in the methamphetamine and cocaine trade, although their influence remains secondary. There is no concrete evidence of domestic private-sector actors being directly involved in criminal markets in Vanuatu. However, the country's economic and regulatory environment presents opportunities for illicit financial activities, particularly through the CBI programme and tax-related loopholes.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Vanuatu's government has recognized the existence of various criminal markets and committed to addressing security concerns, emphasizing human rights, justice and the rule of law. However, the gap between rhetoric and implementation is significant, and limited government resources and political instability hinder effective action against organized crime. Political divisions, particularly over Vanuatu's security partnerships with international allies, further weaken the government's ability to address crime comprehensively. There is a lack of sustained, coordinated efforts to combat organized crime across all criminal markets. Vanuatu has experienced considerable political instability, exacerbated by leadership changes, natural disasters and unresolved territorial disputes. In 2023,

the country had three different prime ministers in a single month. Constitutional amendments were introduced to promote government stability, with the intention to reduce party-switching among MPs, but have been criticized for restricting political freedoms. In addition, in 2024, disputed land agreements led to large-scale evictions, causing social unrest and reflecting ongoing governance challenges. Political corruption is a persistent challenge in Vanuatu. Voter decisions are largely independent, but corruption among national officials continues to be an issue, with reports of power abuse. The majority of citizens perceive corruption as a problem, with reports of bribery in elections and public services. The Auditor General's Office is chronically underfunded, and the National Ombudsman's Office struggles with reduced budgets. Despite these challenges, Vanuatu's legal framework for transparency

is robust. For instance, the country has strong legislative provisions for information access and public disclosures, parliamentary sessions are broadcasted and elected officials must disclose financial records, although access to these documents remains limited. Furthermore, an independent judiciary has taken action against corruption and prosecuted high-profile cases, but enforcement is inconsistent.

Vanuatu's commitment to international cooperation in combating organized crime is mixed. The country is active in regional anti-crime and security initiatives and a member of multiple international organizations, including the Pacific Transnational Crime Network. It collaborates with the Pacific Islands Law Officers' Network and has hosted regional workshops on anti-money laundering (AML). However, Vanuatu has yet to ratify key international treaties, including UN protocols on human trafficking and arms trafficking, and lacks extradition agreements, although plans to improve cross-border law enforcement cooperation are suggested in national policies. The country hosts the Pacific Fusion Centre, a regional intelligence-sharing hub, but its border security remains weak, with reports of unauthorized entries and limited screening procedures. Vanuatu's primary legal instrument for addressing organized crime is the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime Act of 2006, which criminalizes a range of offences including human trafficking, people smuggling and terrorism-related activities. However, the Act is considered outdated and does not fully reflect the country's current organized crime challenges, such as drug trafficking, wildlife crimes and corruption. To address these gaps, over the years, Vanuatu has introduced several complementary laws, including the Dangerous Drugs Act, the Wild Bird (Protection) Act, the Fisheries Act and legislation targeting environmental and financial crimes. More recently, the government legalized the cultivation of medicinal cannabis and hemp in 2023 and enacted the Cybercrime Act in 2021 to regulate digital offences. The cybercrime law aims to strengthen digital security and investigative capacity, but concerns have been raised about its impact on freedom of expression.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Vanuatu's judiciary operates through two high courts, the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court, alongside subordinate courts. Although the judiciary is largely independent, resource constraints limit its efficiency. The Office of the Public Prosecutor functions autonomously and has demonstrated effectiveness in some areas but does not have specialized units focusing on organized crime. Vanuatu's detention system is overcrowded in urban centres such as Port Vila and, although the country's prisons partially meet international human rights standards, concerns remain over security, infrastructure and prolonged pre-trial detention. Limited funding and inadequate living conditions contribute to recurring prison escapes. The Vanuatu Police Force includes the Vanuatu Mobile Force and the Police Maritime Wing, which both play critical roles in border

security and crime prevention. Law enforcement agencies struggle with resource limitations, particularly related to maritime surveillance and drug interdiction. Yet despite these constraints, the police have successfully investigated regional transnational crime cases. Complicating law enforcement efforts is Vanuatu's geography, which provides opportunities for illicit activities such as drug trafficking. The country participates in regional law enforcement networks, but monitoring its extensive maritime territory is challenging and exacerbated by corruption among border officials. Vanuatu's national security strategies aim to strengthen border control and streamline trade monitoring through new electronic customs data systems, but implementation is limited. After a major cyber-attack in 2022, cyber resilience emerged as a concern and, in response, Vanuatu has increased collaboration with international cybersecurity agencies, but human resource constraints continue to pose challenges.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Despite the existence of AML legislation and independent authorities tasked with combating such activities, Vanuatu is considered a high-risk jurisdiction for money laundering. Criminal networks and international actors exploit the country's underdeveloped financial sector, lenient financial regulations, financial secrecy laws, limited resources and weak enforcement of AML measures. Further exacerbating the situation is the country's CBI programme, which sells passports to foreign nationals and has been linked to financial crimes and illicit financial flows. Ongoing concerns about money-laundering risks mean that the EU has blacklisted Vanuatu as a non-compliant tax jurisdiction. Although efforts have been made to strengthen financial oversight, authorities appear reluctant to enforce stricter regulations, as the CBI programme remains an important source of national revenue.

Vanuatu's economy used to rely heavily on revenue from offshore financial services but has seen a relative downturn in recent years. The business and economic environment has been strained by cumbersome and opaque bureaucratic processes, inflexible and outdated labour regulations, and the mismanagement of state-owned enterprises. Instances of fraud and scams affecting the Central Provident Fund pose particular risks for low-income citizens in Vanuatu.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim support services in Vanuatu are limited. Legal frameworks may exist, but implementation is inconsistent. For the fourth consecutive year, authorities have failed to provide support services to human trafficking victims. Government institutions are the primary providers of victim assistance, as civil society engagement is low. Prevention measures against organized crime remain underdeveloped. Vanuatu lacks systematic anti-trafficking awareness campaigns, and key national coordinating bodies

on migrant protection have not met in recent years. The reallocation of resources to disaster recovery efforts has further weakening the government's capacity to address trafficking and other organized crimes. Non-state actors, including non-government organizations (NGOs), operate freely but are rarely involved in combating organized crime. Media freedom is generally respected, although threats against journalists have been reported. In 2024, the government's decision to ban LGBTQIA+ advocacy raised concerns regarding freedom of expression and civil rights. Moreover, the cybercrime legislation introduced in 2021 has reportedly been used to target people critical of political figures, raising concerns about freedom of expression in the country.

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.