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Global Organized Crime Index 2025

Crime at a crossroads

**Eastern Asia and
South-Eastern Asia**



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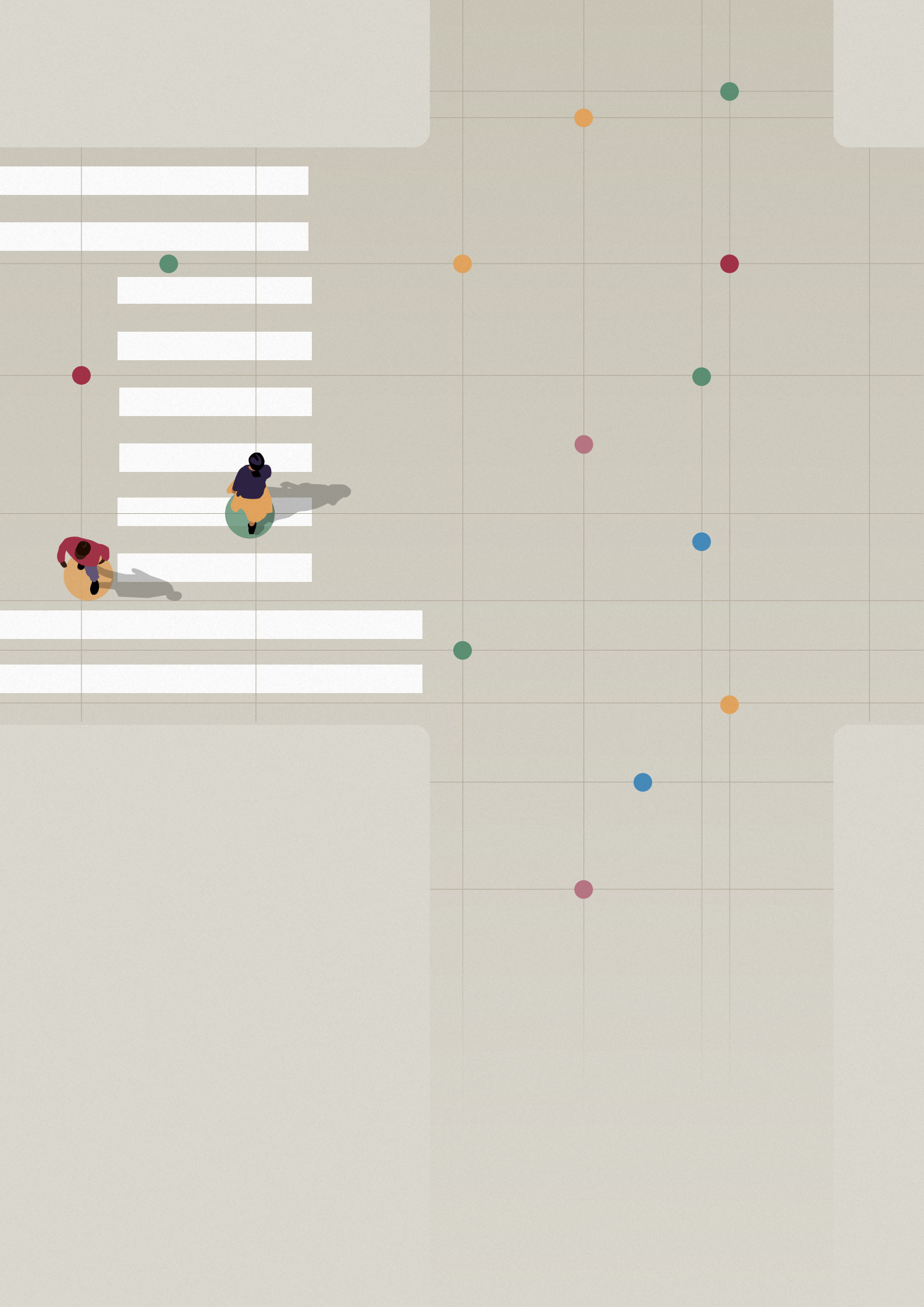
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INTRODUCTION

With a population of around 4.86 billion people, Asia accounts for almost 60% of the world's population. Owing to its vast geographic, political and economic diversity, patterns of organized crime and state resilience vary considerably across the continent's regions. According to the 2025 Global Organized Crime Index, Asia records the highest average criminality score of any continent, yet ranks only fourth globally in terms of resilience to organized crime.

Many of the major trends identified in the 2025 Index are particularly pronounced in Asia. These include the continued growth of synthetic drug markets, the surge in financial and cyber-dependent crimes, the proliferation of counterfeit goods, and the increasing influence of foreign and private-sector actors in criminal economies. At the same time, the drivers, manifestations and impacts of organized crime vary substantially from one region to another.

This report focuses on Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, home to around 2.32 billion people – almost half of Asia's population and around 28% of the global total. Despite their geographical proximity, the two regions have markedly different organized crime profiles. South-Eastern Asia experiences levels of criminality significantly above the global average, driven by entrenched illicit economies and the rapid expansion of cyber-scam industries. By contrast, Eastern Asia combines comparatively low levels of criminality with some of the highest resilience scores in the world.

The regions also encompass some of the world's most striking national contrasts. Japan, Singapore and the Republic of Korea, for example, rank among the global leaders in resilience and maintain relatively low levels of organized crime. At the other end of the spectrum, Myanmar has the highest criminality score and lowest resilience score of any country assessed in the Index, while the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) combines moderate criminality with one of the world's weakest resilience frameworks.

This report examines developments in criminality and resilience in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, highlighting key regional trends, major criminal markets, the actors driving illicit economies, and the factors shaping countries' capacity to respond to organized crime. A forthcoming companion report will examine trends in Western Asia, Southern Asia, and Central Asia and the Caucasus.

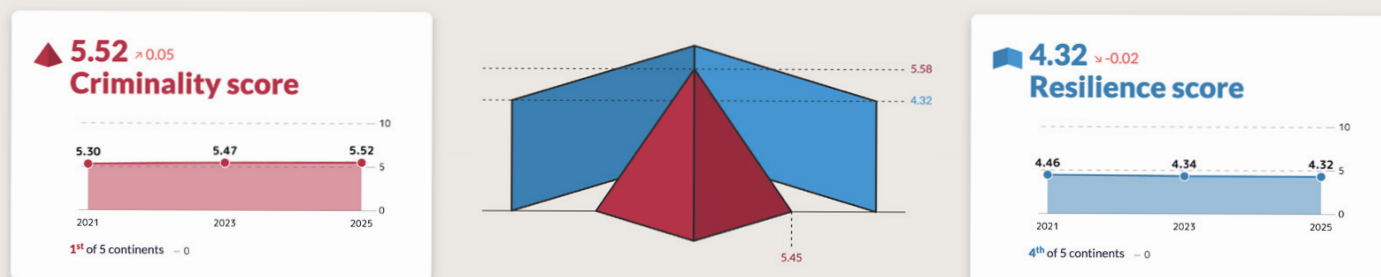


FIGURE 1 Criminality and resilience scores, Asia, 2025.

METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of the Global Organized Crime Index, Eastern Asia comprises China, Japan, the DPRK, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, and South-Eastern Asia comprises Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. Regional and global figures are calculated as unweighted country means.

Comparability caveat: The 2021 Global Organized Crime Index assessed 10 criminal markets and four criminal-actor types; the 2023 and 2025 editions assessed 15 markets (adding cyber-dependent crimes, financial crimes, the trade in counterfeit goods, the illicit trade in excisable goods, and extortion and protection racketeering) and five actor types (adding private-sector actors). The increase in scores between 2021 and 2023 therefore partly reflects this broader measurement scope rather than solely real-world changes. However, because this methodological change affected all countries equally, cross-country comparisons of change remain informative.

Main findings

- South-Eastern Asia scores well above the global average for criminality, criminal markets and criminal actors, but below the global average for resilience. Eastern Asia shows the opposite pattern, with below-average scores for criminality, criminal markets and criminal actors, and an above-average score for resilience.
- Since 2021, criminality scores in South-Eastern Asia have increased considerably, whereas Eastern Asia is one of the few regions of the world where criminality has declined since the first edition of the Global Organized Crime Index in 2021.
- In terms of criminal markets, South-Eastern Asia exceeds the global average most significantly in synthetic drugs, fauna crimes, flora crimes and cyber-dependent crimes. Both regions, however, score well below the global average for the cocaine trade.
- The countries hosting cyber-scam operations on an industrial scale, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos, have experienced the largest increases in their criminality scores since 2021. The markets and actors that underpin this industry (for example, human trafficking, cyber-dependent crimes and financial crimes) are among the region's highest scoring and fastest growing.
- Resilience scores for both regions are pulled down by two of the world's worst-scoring countries: the DPRK, which has the third-lowest resilience score, and Myanmar, which has the highest criminality score and lowest resilience score of all 193 countries assessed in the Index.

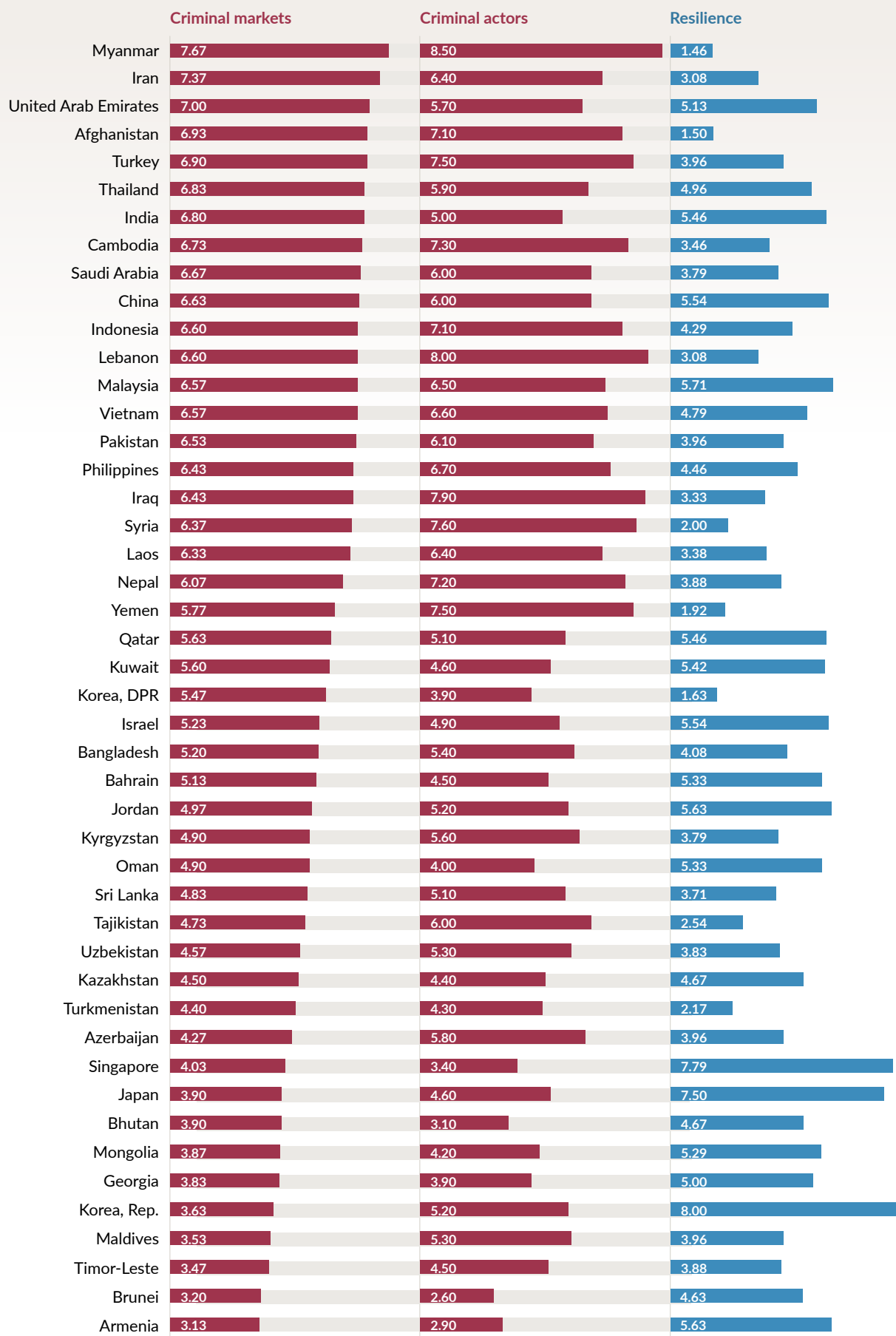


FIGURE 2 Index scores by country, South-Eastern and Eastern Asia, 2025.

REGIONAL SCORES IN COMPARISON

South-Eastern Asia and Eastern Asia ranked fifth and fourteenth, respectively, out of the 22 regions assessed in the 2025 Global Organized Crime Index in terms of criminality. As shown in Figure 3, South-Eastern Asia scores well above the global average for criminality, criminal markets and criminal actors, but below the global average for resilience. In contrast, Eastern Asia recorded below-average scores for criminality, criminal markets and criminal actors, and above-average resilience. Furthermore, criminality in South-Eastern Asia has increased considerably since the first edition of the Index in 2021, whereas Eastern Asia is one of the few regions worldwide where this indicator has declined.

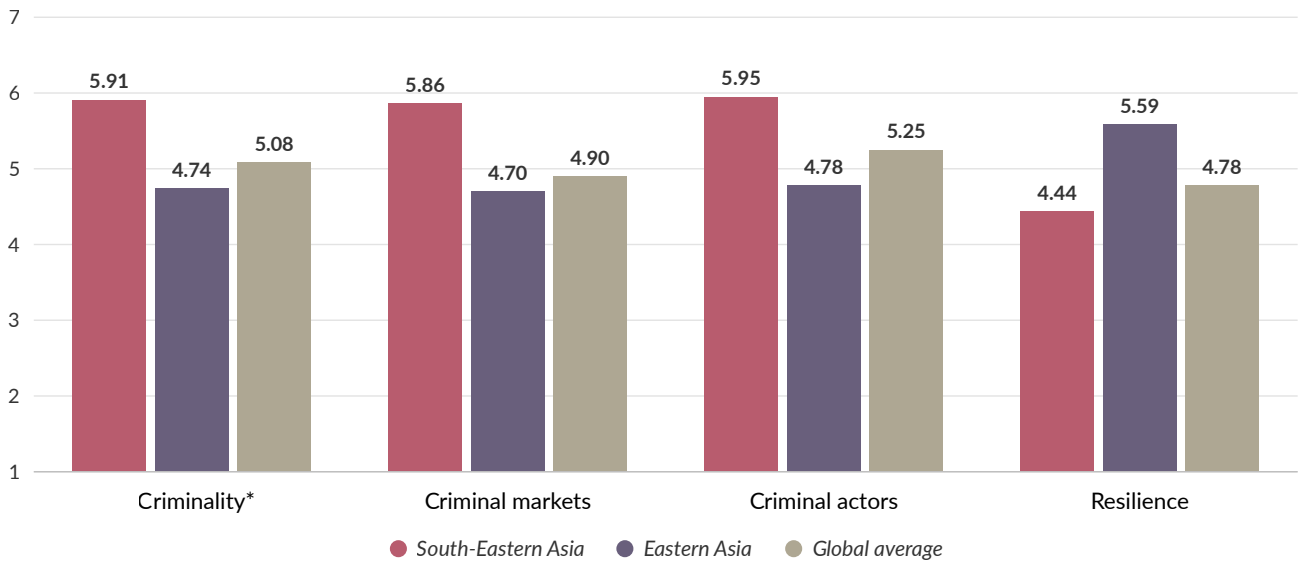
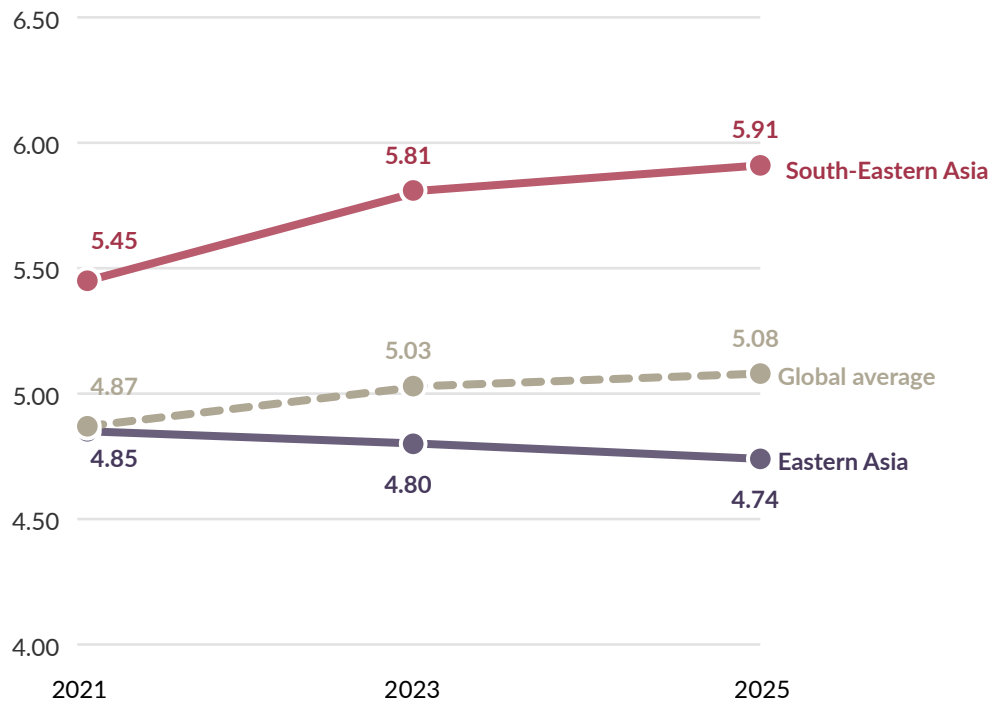


FIGURE 3 Averages for the four headline indicators, 2025.
 *Criminality is the mean of the criminal markets and criminal actors scores.

INDICATOR	EASTERN ASIA 2021	EASTERN ASIA 2025	SOUTH-EASTERN ASIA 2021	SOUTH-EASTERN ASIA 2025	GLOBAL 2021	GLOBAL 2025
CRIMINALITY	4.85	4.74	5.45	5.91	4.87	5.08
CRIMINAL MARKETS	4.62	4.70	5.44	5.86	4.65	4.90
CRIMINAL ACTORS	5.08	4.78	5.47	5.95	5.09	5.25
RESILIENCE	5.50	5.59	4.58	4.44	4.82	4.78

FIGURE 4 Average scores by region and Index edition (unweighted country means), 2021 and 2025.

CRIMINALITY



RESILIENCE

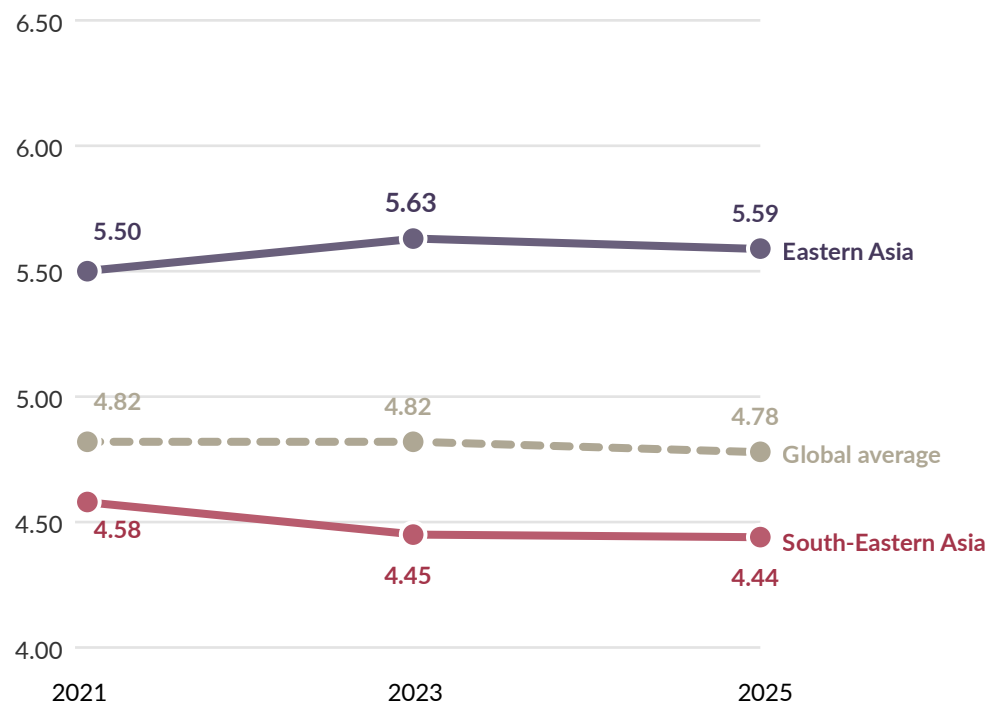


FIGURE 5 Regional and global averages across the three Index editions.

BIGGEST MOVERS

Since the publication of the first Index in 2021, there have been significant changes in the trajectories of illicit economies across several of the 16 countries comprising South-Eastern and Eastern Asia. As illustrated in Figure 6, the criminality scores of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar have increased dramatically, largely due to the expansion of cyber-scam operations, and resilience in Myanmar has deteriorated further.

Some countries, such as Singapore, have seen an increase in criminality since the inclusion of financial and cyber-dependent crimes in the second edition of the Index in 2023. This reflects a broader global trend whereby countries with major financial centres are more vulnerable to financial and cyber-dependent crimes. The Republic of Korea and the Philippines stand out as notable positive cases, having both reduced criminality while simultaneously improving resilience since 2021.



FIGURE 6 Score changes between the 2021 and 2025 editions, countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia.

NOTE: The 2021 edition assessed 10 criminal markets and four actor types; 2025 assesses 15 and five, so part of the 2021–2025 rise reflects broader scope.

HOW EACH COUNTRY MEASURES UP

When criminality is plotted against resilience, most countries in South-Eastern Asia are found in the most vulnerable quadrant, characterized by above-average criminality and below-average resilience. Myanmar is the most dramatic example, even by global standards: it is ranked first for criminality and last for resilience among all 193 UN member states. Cambodia and Laos share this quadrant with Indonesia and the Philippines.

It is worth noting how close Thailand and Vietnam are to the global average for resilience. This suggests that targeted improvements in resilience could elevate these countries to the high-resilience quadrant.

Meanwhile, Malaysia and China have above-average criminality scores and above-average resilience, while Brunei and Timor-Leste exhibit the reverse combination, with below-average resilience and relatively low criminality. Singapore, Japan and the Republic of Korea are anchored in the quadrant with low criminality and high resilience. Indeed, all three countries rank among the 15 most resilient globally.

The DPRK is an outlier for a different reason. It has a moderate criminality score, reflecting relatively closed conventional illicit markets, but high scores for state-embedded actors and cyber-dependent crime, combined with the world's third-lowest resilience score.



FIGURE 7 Vulnerability classifications, 2025.

CRIMINAL MARKETS

High criminality scores in South-Eastern Asia are concentrated in five markets, each of which significantly exceeds the global average. As shown in Figure 8, the region ranks third out of 22 regions for synthetic drugs, particularly due to the methamphetamine economy, as well as the growing diversification of the drug market, including substances such as ketamine and etomidate. The region ranks first for fauna crimes, largely due to wildlife trafficking; first for flora crimes, primarily driven by illegal logging; fourth for cyber-dependent crimes; and third for the heroin trade. Financial crimes are the region's second-highest scoring market, and many of its countries also record relatively high scores for counterfeit goods.

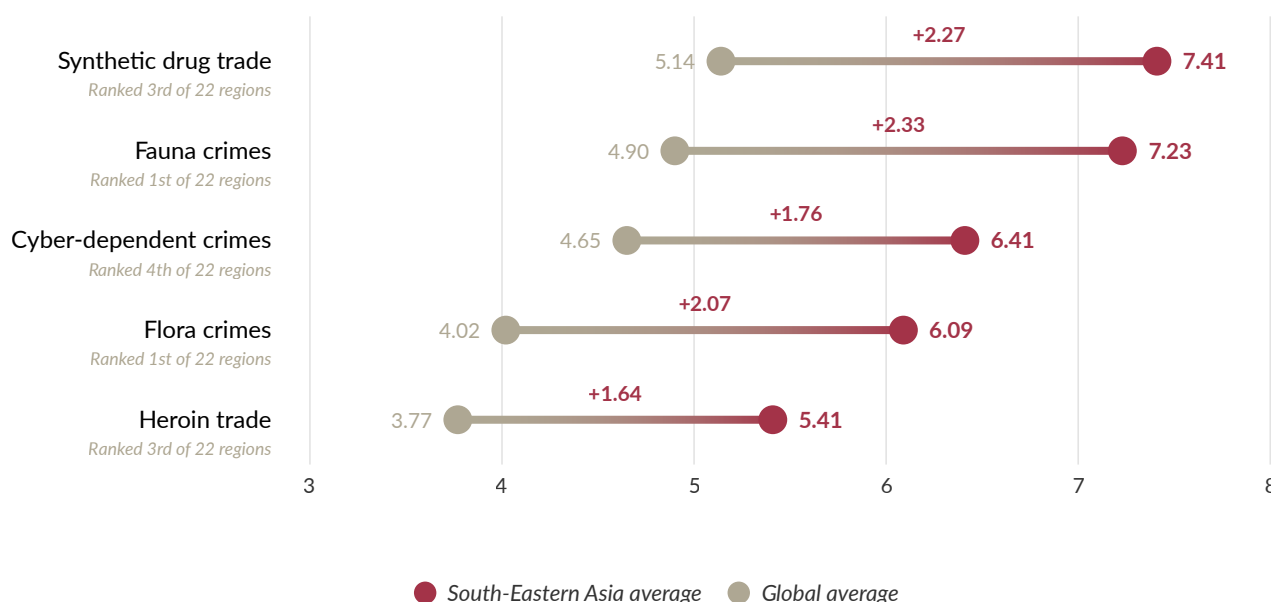


FIGURE 8 The criminal markets that contributed most strongly to South-Eastern Asia's elevated criminality in 2025.

Human trafficking also remains a serious problem in South-Eastern Asia. In several countries in the region, women and men, as well as children, are coerced into forced labour, sex work (both online and offline), or participation in scam operations, domestically and abroad. Special economic zones, among other locations, have emerged as hubs for these activities, acting as spaces where various criminal markets converge.

As Figure 9 indicates, Laos and Myanmar have seen a particularly striking rise in human trafficking scores over the past five years, which substantially exceeds global trends. Although historically functioning primarily as countries of origin and transit, both have also become destination markets.

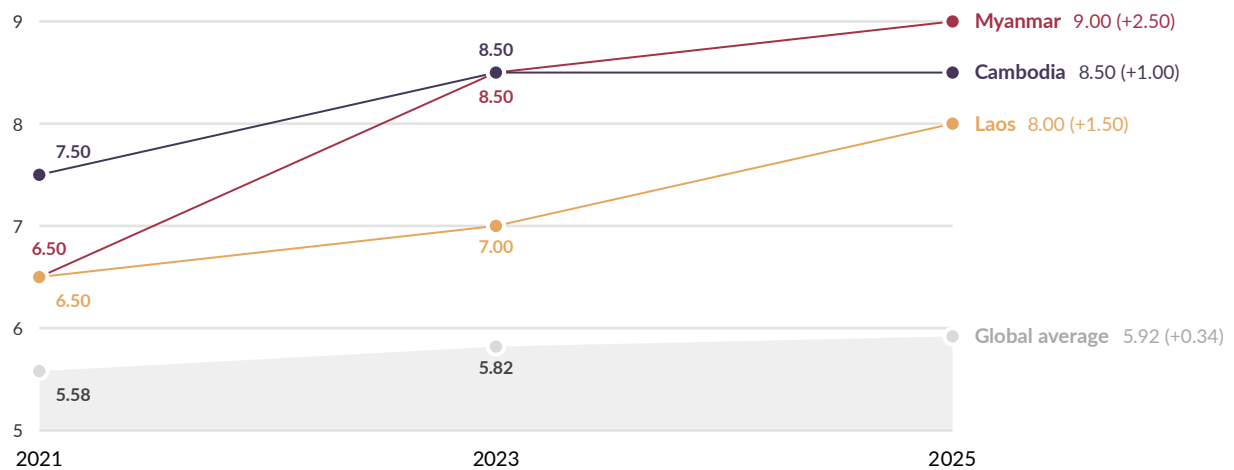


FIGURE 9 Human trafficking scores in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, 2021–2025.

Furthermore, around half of the countries in South-Eastern Asia record high scores for human trafficking, cyber-dependent crimes and financial crimes, a triple threat that underlines the severe influence of scam operations in the region. Due to the transnational nature of these operations, their impact extends well beyond national borders, affecting countries across the region and around the world.

As noted above, Eastern Asia scores below the global average for most criminal markets. However, China and the DPRK are the main drivers of regional scores for cyber-dependent crimes and the synthetic drug trade. China also records high scores for flora crimes (including illegal timber trafficking) and fauna crimes (including the trafficking of wildlife products for traditional medicine, food, fashion and the exotic pet trade). It also serves as a major global hub for counterfeit goods. The DPRK, meanwhile, records high scores for human trafficking and arms trafficking.

Notably, both regions score well below the global average for the cocaine trade, diverging from the trend observed in many other regions worldwide.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

As previously mentioned, South-Eastern Asia scores well above the global average for criminal actors. This is largely due to the significant presence of state-embedded actors in Myanmar and Cambodia (both scoring 9.0 out of 10), as well as in Indonesia and the Philippines (8.0 out of 10). The region also records high scores for mafia-style groups, particularly in Myanmar and the Philippines, as well as for foreign actors in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

It is striking that Cambodia's criminal actor score rose by 1.80 points between 2021 and 2025, representing the biggest jump of any country worldwide. In contrast, Eastern Asia scores below the global average for all criminal actor types, with the notable exception of the DPRK, which scores 10 out of 10 for state-embedded actors.

South-Eastern Asia is the world's second-highest-scoring region for foreign criminal actors, behind only West Africa, while Eastern Asia ranks eighteenth in this category and is below the global average for all five criminal actor types. South-Eastern Asia also scores well above the global average for private-sector actors involved in organized crime.

RESILIENCE

Eastern Asia scores well above the global average in terms of resilience, higher than any other region in Asia, including South-Eastern Asia. This is all the more remarkable given that the region comprises only five countries, one of which is the DPRK, which has the third-lowest resilience score worldwide. Furthermore, unlike most other regions, resilience to organized crime has increased in Eastern Asia since 2021, driven particularly by high scores in Japan and the Republic of Korea.

South-Eastern Asia has relatively low resilience to organized crime compared to other regions of the world. A notable exception is Singapore, which has the second-highest resilience score in Asia and the tenth-highest in the world. In 2025, the region's weakest institutional links were with 'non-state actors' (3.50), 'government transparency and accountability' (3.86) and 'judicial system and detention' (4.0), all of which are below global norms. The region's highest-scoring resilience indicators are 'international cooperation' and 'national policies and laws', although both remain below their respective global averages. 'Anti-money laundering' and 'economic regulatory capacity' are the only two resilience indicators that score just above the global average.

In Eastern Asia, countries generally score above the global mean for 'political leadership and governance', 'international cooperation', 'national policies and laws', 'judicial system and detention', 'territorial integrity' and 'prevention' – with the exception of the DPRK. The DPRK is well below the global mean for all resilience indicators except 'territorial integrity'. China is around the global mean for 'government transparency and accountability' and 'victim and witness support', but well below it when it comes to relations with 'non-state actors' (i.e. civil society).

Notably, these two regions are among the most polarized in the world in terms of resilience. In Eastern Asia, there is a significant 6.37-point gap between the high score of South Korea and the DPRK, while South-Eastern Asia exhibits an almost equally wide gap between Singapore and Myanmar. These ranges exceed those of any other region in the world, demonstrating both the diversity of illicit economies and the uneven capacity of states to respond to organized criminal threats. This situation highlights the importance of understanding both national and regional dynamics.



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ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with over 800 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.



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