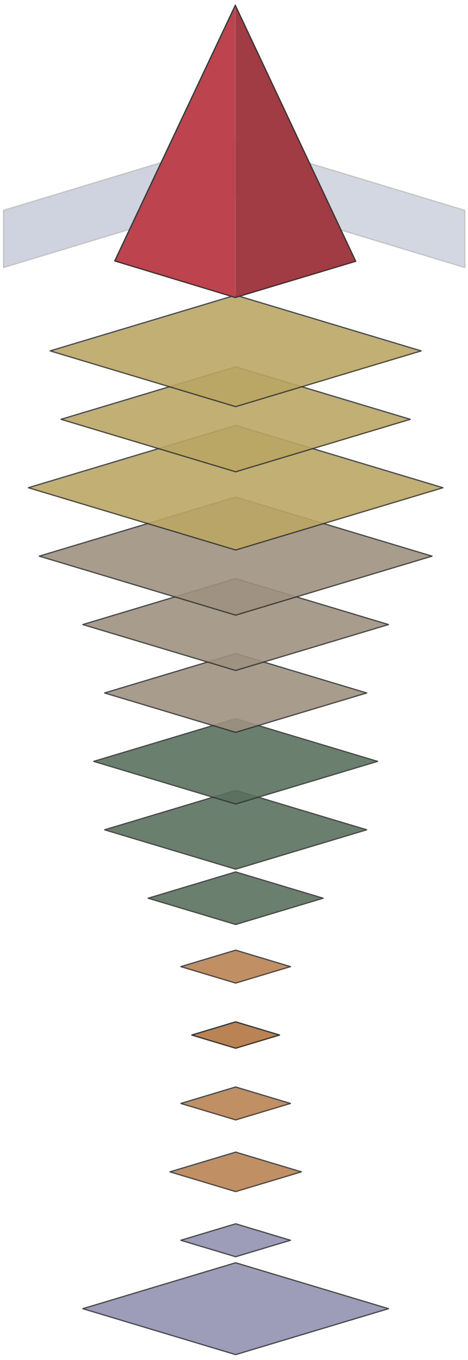
Africa **ORGANISED CRIME INDEX 2025**

enact — Enhancing Africa's response to transnational organised crime

This project is funded by the European Union

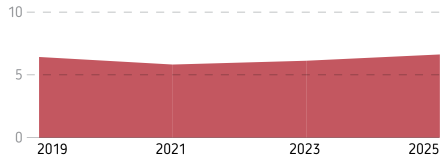
SOMALIA



6.55 ↗0.42

CRIMINALITY SCORE

10th of 54 African countries ↗3
4th of 9 East African countries ↗2



CRIMINAL MARKETS	**5.60**	↗0.33
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.50	↗0.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	8.00	↗0.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	9.50	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	9.00	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7.00	↗1.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.00	↗1.00
FLORA CRIMES	6.50	↘0.50
FAUNA CRIMES	6.00	↗0.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	4.00	↗1.00
HEROIN TRADE	2.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	2.00	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	2.50	↗0.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.00	↗0.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	2.50	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.00	0.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS	**7.50**	↗0.50
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	9.50	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.50	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00	↗1.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.00	↗0.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.50	↗1.00

ISS INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY STUDIES — INTERPOL — GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

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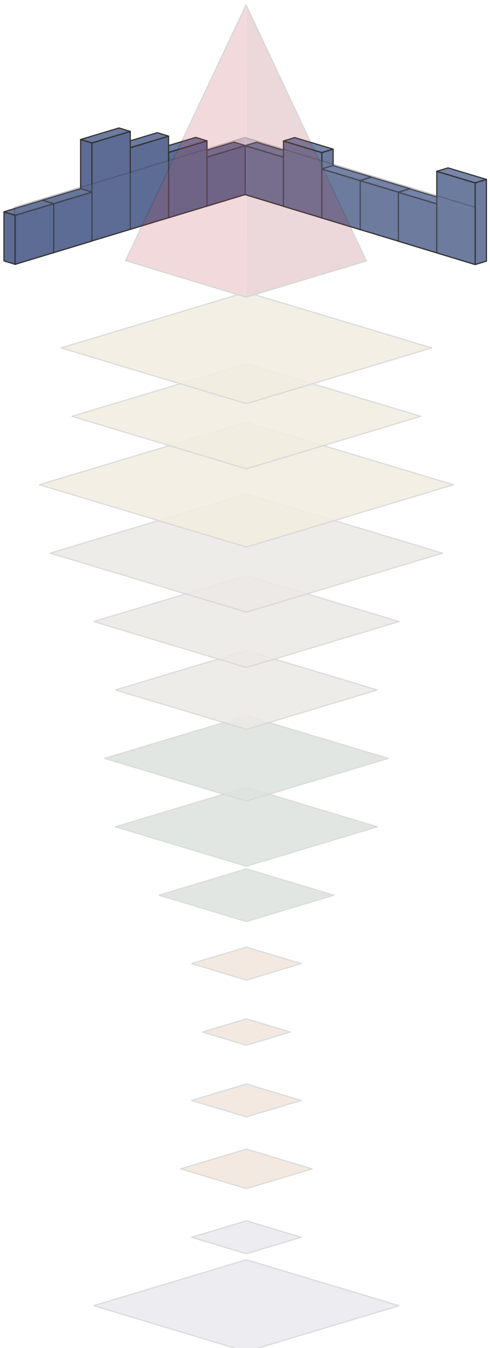
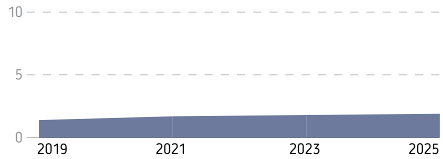


1.88 ↗0.08

RESILIENCE SCORE

53rd of 54 African countries ↘1
9th of 9 East African countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	1.50	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	1.50	↗0.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	3.00	↗0.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	2.50	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	2.00	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	1.50	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	1.50	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	2.00	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	1.50	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	1.50	↗0.50
PREVENTION	1.50	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	2.50	↘0.50

CRIMINALITY

Criminal markets

PEOPLE

Somalia is a key source and transit country for human trafficking, with criminal networks, including armed groups, exploiting instability and weak governance. Al-Shabaab is a dominant actor and engages in recruiting child soldiers, forced labour and sexual slavery, leveraging the government's limited territorial control. Corruption among state-embedded actors exacerbates trafficking. Victims are trafficked to Europe, the Gulf States and southern Africa for forced labour and sexual exploitation, often transiting through Djibouti and Ethiopia. Internally displaced persons and ethnic minorities face forced marriages and labour exploitation. The anticipated security vacuum following the withdrawal of African Union (AU) troops in late 2024 raises concerns of worsening conditions.

Somalia also serves as a source and transit country for human smuggling, driven by conflict, drought and economic instability. Clan clashes have continued to displace hundreds of thousands of people, exacerbating migration flows. The country is a key transit hub for smuggling networks facilitating movement towards South Africa, the Gulf States and Europe, with increasing activity on the Somalia–Gulf route. Smuggling is intertwined with human trafficking and extortion, with minimal enforcement against entrenched illicit networks. Conflict in Sudan and Yemen has intensified migration pressures, while return migration from Yemen adds to the dynamic two-way movement of people across the region.

Extortion is a major source of revenue for armed groups in Somalia, particularly al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia, affecting businesses, trade and humanitarian operations. Al-Shabaab enforces a structured taxation system, generating substantial income through checkpoints, port fees and zakat collection, while ISIS-Somalia targets urban businesses. These groups have regained control of territories lost in recent years, imposing heavy tariffs and extorting businesses and residents in these areas. The withdrawal of AU troops by late 2024 is expected to exacerbate these extortion and protection racketeering activities as the groups expand their control.

TRADE

Somalia is a major hub for arms trafficking, with open markets in Mogadishu and smuggling routes linked to regional conflicts. Despite a UN arms embargo being lifted in 2023, illicit trade has persisted, and concerns about proliferation have grown ever since. Weak storage infrastructure and prevalent corruption lead to weapons often being leaked from official stocks into illicit markets. Weak border controls and maritime smuggling also contribute to the flow of weapons, including Iranian arms intended for Yemen that end up in Somalia. Al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia are key beneficiaries, acquiring arms from local markets and Yemen. Corruption within security forces fuels supply chains, while militias and criminal groups use weapons to maintain control, engage in conflicts and support illicit activities such as piracy and kidnapping. This proliferation is exacerbated by regional conflicts, such as in Ethiopia and Yemen, where surplus arms flow through maritime routes, worsening violence and instability across the Horn of Africa.

Somalia's weak regulatory framework, ongoing conflict and vast maritime borders also contribute to the widespread trade in counterfeit goods. Electronics, primarily sourced from China, dominate the market, while counterfeit and substandard medicines pose significant public health risks. Limited enforcement allows these products to be sold even through registered pharmacies. The absence of domestic pharmaceutical production exacerbates the issue, making the country highly dependent on imported medicines, which are vulnerable to counterfeiting.

Somalia is also a key hub for illicit trade in excisable goods, particularly in tobacco and alcohol, and this trade has been increasing in recent years. The cross-border illicit trade along the Ethiopia–Kenya border continues, with checkpoints imposing levies on goods, including arms. The illicit tobacco market is linked to regional smuggling routes extending to Western and South Asia. Despite alcohol being illegal, demand persists, with smuggling networks operating primarily from Ethiopia. The fragmented political landscape further complicates regulation, fostering a trade environment reliant on informal networks.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crime is consolidated in Somalia, despite illegal charcoal trade having declined in recent years owing to measures targeting key facilitators, thereby reducing its significance as a revenue source for armed groups. Smuggling networks previously operated between Somalia and the Persian Gulf, but enforcement actions have weakened this illicit market. Even so, high gas prices partially sustain domestic demand, with most households relying on charcoal despite long-standing bans. Frankincense harvesting, particularly in Somaliland and Puntland, has increased, contributing to environmental degradation.

Somalia is highly vulnerable to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing (despite slight improvements in its risk assessment), leading to significant economic losses and depletion of marine resources. Foreign fleets, including from China, are involved and undermine local fisheries. Somaliland also serves as a hub for cheetah trafficking to the Arabian Peninsula, driven by weak governance and corruption. Smugglers exploit poorly manned land borders with Ethiopia and Kenya. The practice threatens cheetah populations and regional biodiversity.

Artisanal gold mining in Somalia has increased, particularly in the Golis Mountains, with some reports indicating that militant groups benefit through illegal taxation. Mining in Milxo includes both surface and deep-cast mining, often under hazardous conditions and with minimal safety measures. The ongoing conflict in Sudan has shifted some gold mining activity to Somalia, leading to the expansion of operations in regions such as Awdal. Foreign-backed Somali shell companies, supported by Sudanese expertise, are involved in resource extraction. Another important market is the illicit fuel trade, involving the smuggling of petrol and diesel from neighbouring countries, as well as the theft of fuel from ships crossing the Indian Ocean. This fuel is sold on the black market at a lower price, which, in turn, encourage purchases. For example, in al-Shabaab-controlled territories, trucks carrying fuel are taxed, which increases the final price.

DRUGS

Although not a significant heroin market, Somalia is a key transit point along the 'southern route', which moves Afghan heroin through Pakistan and Iran across the Indian Ocean to East Africa before reaching global consumer markets. The country's strategic location exposes it to illicit trafficking, but internal heroin flows are limited. Similarly, cocaine trafficking in Somalia is minimal compared with that in other regions. Although there have been reports of drug shipments dropped off in the Somali-Kenyan maritime area, the drugs are typically intended for Kenyan ports rather than Somalia. This indicates that Somalia has a minimal and secondary role in the trafficking of cocaine, serving mainly as a transit point rather than a destination.

The cannabis market in Somalia is small, with low but increasing levels of consumption; limited production is seen, primarily in the capital, Mogadishu. The use of synthetic drugs, particularly tramadol, has risen in Somalia, especially among young people, owing to its availability and lower cost compared with other substances. The synthetic drug market in Somalia is limited, despite a reported increase in the availability of substances such as pregabalin, pethidine and benzodiazepines. Evidence indicates that these drugs are being used by both civilians and combatants. This increase in synthetic drug consumption is linked to a shift in demand from khat to synthetic substitutes. The trend is notably present in Mogadishu and Hargeisa.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent criminal activity in Somalia is relatively limited although incidents have occurred, including hacking of e-mail systems and government websites, data destruction and pirated software use, which heightens the risk of malware attacks. The lack of a robust cybersecurity regulatory framework leaves Somalia vulnerable to cybercrime.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in Somalia are widespread, affecting both the public and private sectors. Common offences include embezzlement, fraud, tax evasion and misuse of public funds. Al-Shabaab plays a significant role in these crimes, managing its own finances through independent mechanisms. During election periods, fraud and embezzlement are frequently reported, especially in government contract awards. International investigations uncovered systemic theft of aid meant for displaced persons. Youths are increasingly involved in online scams and gambling. Somalia's informal financial system, reliant on the black market and unregulated money transfer services, facilitates these illegal activities, contributing to the country's high corruption levels.

Criminal actors

In Somalia, al-Shabaab dominates a wide array of criminal markets, including extortion and illicit taxation, human trafficking and arms trafficking. Despite setbacks, the group has regained territories, partly owing to the planned withdrawal of AU troops. Al-Shabaab operates a sophisticated mafia-style taxation system throughout southern and central Somalia, imposing fees on agricultural goods, livestock and telecommunications, and exerting control over critical infrastructure. Its influence is so pervasive that its operations are akin to a shadow government. Al-Shabaab's violence targets civilians and security forces, as evidence by attacks such as bombings in Mogadishu during the reporting period. Other groups, including clan militias and Islamic State affiliates, use similar criminal tactics, contributing to Somalia's widespread instability and the influence of mafia-style groups on nearly all parts of society.

Looser criminal networks operating in Somalia are largely driven by entrepreneurs who control clan-based operations, facilitating the smuggling of goods such as charcoal and sugar to East Africa and the Gulf. These networks are intertwined with local political systems, where ethnic and clan rivalries fuel competition for power and resources, often through violence and corruption. Instability in neighbouring regions, particularly in Yemen and Somaliland's Sool, has exacerbated this situation, fostering an environment conducive to the growth of human and arms trafficking cartels.

Weak state control over criminal markets is compounded by widespread corruption within government institutions. Officials often facilitate illegal activities in exchange for bribes, and extortion is rampant across government forces, militias and clan factions, particularly at checkpoints where citizens face violence and looting. Al-Shabaab has penetrated nearly all levels of government and security services in Mogadishu, including the National Assembly and the National Intelligence and Security Agency. In addition, about a third of the Somali Police Force in the capital is estimated to be compromised, to varying degrees. Internally displaced persons in Mogadishu face exploitation, and protests highlight frustrations over illegal taxation by government officials. Corruption extends to strategic infrastructure such as the port and airport. The pervasive informal taxation and bribery practices fuel smuggling, contributing to significant economic instability and making it difficult for legal trade to thrive.

Transnational criminal networks are embedded in Somalia's illicit economy, with foreign actors playing a notable part in arms trafficking, wildlife crime and illegal fishing. Iranian nationals are notably involved in smuggling small arms and light weapons to Yemen, collaborating with al-Shabaab and smaller local networks. Networks involving East and North African traffickers, especially from Djibouti and Eritrea, exploit corruption and political financing to facilitate illicit trade and secure land rights. Foreign influence extends to electoral interference and private military contractors, while fishing vessels operating under foreign flags contribute to IUU fishing in Somalia's maritime zone.

The Somali private sector, mainly informal and clan based, has a significant role in the country's economy, but also facilitates financial crimes, including money laundering. Many businesses operate through personal networks, with kinship and religious affiliations influencing economic interactions. Some private-sector actors are implicated in illegal financial activities, such as conducting hawala transactions for arms traffickers and financing al-Shabaab. The group sources intelligence from multiple channels, including business contacts and intermediaries within critical economic sectors such as real estate and trade. These illicit connections extend beyond Somalia, involving networks across the Horn of Africa, the UAE and Cyprus. The lack of formal regulation and oversight in the private sector, combined with systemic corruption, allows these illegal activities to thrive.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Somali government has publicly committed to combatting organized crime, particularly al-Shabaab, with strong rhetoric under the current presidency. However, efforts have slowed since initial progress in countering al-Shabaab's financial networks, and the group still controls large areas of the country. The government faces financial and political challenges, with insufficient funding to meet security goals. Governance issues, including corruption and internal power struggles, further hinder progress. Despite international oversight, including support from organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, corruption continues to impede reform progresses. Key issues include diversion of aid funds, theft of resources meant for famine relief and government misappropriation of arms and ammunition. One of the challenges to political leadership and governance is the disputed power-sharing between the federal government of Somalia and its member states. This has led to parallel governance issues when it comes to criminality such as IUU fishing.

Somalia has established a financial and economic crimes unit and strengthened the Auditor General's office to combat corruption, yet widespread corruption remains a significant challenge. The government has ratified several anti-corruption conventions, such as that of the UN and AU, and developed a National Anti-Corruption Strategy. However, the impact of these efforts is unclear, and implementation of anti-corruption measures has been slow.

Somalia has ratified three out of ten key international treaties on organized crime. In 2024, Somalia signed the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols, marking a commitment to enhance global cooperation and address crimes such as human trafficking, migrant smuggling and illicit arms trade. The country relies heavily on international cooperation, including support from the AU's peacekeeping mission and maritime security programmes such as the EU's Operation Atalanta and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's initiatives against human trafficking. Somalia also collaborates with the UN Refugee Agency for refugee and asylum seeker support.

Internally, Somalia struggles with significant challenges in combating organized crime owing to outdated legislation and weak enforcement mechanisms. The country's penal code, unchanged since 1964, lacks specific provisions on many types of crime, including sex trafficking and forced labour, although there have been discussions about reforms during the reporting period. Although Somaliland has endorsed a human trafficking law, it has yet to be enacted. Puntland also made progress with new anti-trafficking laws, but implementation is incomplete. State institutions are largely ineffective, hindered by corruption and insufficient capacity to enforce laws. In the fight against al-Shabaab, the federal government recently introduced a phased strategy aimed at disrupting the group's financial networks. However, the initiative has stalled, hampered by limited implementation capacity, inadequate prioritization of financial intelligence gathering and poor compliance from financial institutions with reporting requirements.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Despite having specialized units for organized crime, Somalia's judiciary is severely dysfunctional owing to clan-based politics, corruption and limited resources. Court orders are often ignored and judges face threats and lack security, particularly outside urban areas. Despite functioning courts in Somaliland, interference and a shortage of trained judges persist. The legal system struggles with impunity, understaffing and violence against legal personnel, complicating the handling of organized crime cases. Military courts, which often try civilians, bypass legal rights, and in areas controlled by al-Shabaab, sharia law is enforced with harsh penalties. Prison conditions are dire, with overcrowding, poor sanitation and frequent disease outbreaks.

Somalia lacks dedicated law enforcement units for organized crime and relies heavily on international support, such as donations and training from organizations such as INTERPOL. The police force is understaffed, corrupt and distrusted, and no community policing programmes are in place. Despite receiving technical aid and equipment from international agencies, the police fail to enforce formal laws and often rely on informal justice mechanisms. The National Intelligence and Security Agency have been infiltrated by al-Shabaab, further weakening the state's security apparatus. Law enforcement's reach is limited to certain areas, and effective policing primarily depends on international partnerships.

Somalia's borders are challenging to police, particularly along the country's extensive coastline, which is vulnerable to trafficking and controlled by al-Shabaab in many areas. Al-Shabaab maintains influence in the country, operating a parallel government and engaging in illicit activities such as charcoal trade and extortion, exacerbating Somalia's ongoing struggle with organized crime. Despite limited maritime infrastructure, international aid from countries such as Denmark and the US has helped combat piracy, although it has had little impact on other forms of trafficking. The country also lacks sufficient border control personnel, particularly in regions controlled by al-Shabaab, and suffers from fragmented governance in territories like Puntland and Somaliland.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Somalia has implemented anti-money laundering regulations with support from the US Department of Treasury and established a financial reporting centre to monitor transactions. With assistance from the US and the International Development Law Organization, the country has worked to increase the capacity of financial intelligence units in both the federal government and Somaliland. Efforts have focused on regulating the financial sector, particularly mobile money services, and initiating biometric registration. However, challenges remain, including difficulties in enforcing 'Know Your Customer' mechanisms and a lack of awareness among financial institutions. Although not on any Financial Action Task Force blacklists, Somalia faces significant money laundering risks and businesses have been sanctioned for money laundering and terror financing. Despite the Somali government's financial crackdown on al-Shabaab, which involved freezing and investigating accounts, imposing sanctions (including the release of its first domestic sanctions list) and tightening regulatory guidelines, enforcement is weak. Key institutions, such as the Financial Reporting Center and the Central Bank of Somalia, have struggled to ensure compliance, especially among vulnerable non-financial sectors such as real estate, legal and notary services – areas that al-Shabaab continues to exploit.

Somalia's government is weak and fractured, struggling to ensure that businesses operate free from criminal activities. Land and property rights are poorly upheld, particularly in regions controlled by al-Shabaab. Economic regulations are minimal (registration being required for mobile money services is an exception). The country's economy suffers from decades of instability, corruption and lawlessness, which have led to economic collapse and reliance on remittances. The private sector is largely controlled by organized crime, with many businesses fearing al-Shabaab's influence.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Somalia has not implemented significant measures with regard to care for victims of organized crime. Non-state actors, such as the Migrant Resource Centre in Mogadishu, perform an important role, identifying human trafficking victims and supporting returnees. However, apart from this centre, no formal victim care mechanisms exist. Although the state has low- and high-level defector programmes aimed at deterring individuals from joining al-Shabaab, these initiatives have mostly been ineffective owing to heavy infiltration by the group, and enforcement is absent. Somalia lacks substantive national crime prevention strategies or significant engagement with civil society working in this area. Efforts are primarily focused on eliminating al-Shabaab and cutting off its funding sources. Although national and international policies aimed at combating transnational organized crime exist, they are poorly implemented. Preventive measures for human trafficking vary regionally, and although awareness campaigns have been run, substantial issues such as sex trafficking and domestic servitude are largely neglected. The government continues to implement a plan to end child soldier recruitment, but both state and non-state actors, including al-Shabaab, recruit children. Despite efforts, crime prevention and anti-trafficking initiatives are minimal and ineffective.

During the reporting period, both domestic and international organizations have continued operating in Somalia, despite facing security risks and government resistance. Freedom of expression is legally protected but frequently violated, with journalists facing harassment, violence and imprisonment for criticizing the government, clan groups, private entities and terrorist organizations such as al-Shabaab. Censorship is widespread, with media outlets facing raids, forced closures and limited access to information. Al-Shabaab also restricts media, further impeding independent reporting. The media landscape is dangerous, with Somalia being one of the deadliest countries for journalists.