Fulfilling Clandestiny

Reframing the “Crime-Terror Nexus” by Exploring Conditions of Insurgent and Criminal Organizations’ Origins, Incentives, and Strategic Pivots

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This document was submitted as a dissertation in April 2018 in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the doctoral degree in public policy analysis at the Pardee RAND Graduate School. The faculty committee that supervised and approved the dissertation consisted of Angel O’Mahony (Chair), Christopher Paul, and Colin Clarke.

This dissertation received financial support from the Doris Dong Dissertation Award.
Abstract

From former Soviet states to prisons in post-Arab Spring nations to the slums of Latin America, ideological and criminal violent non-state actors’ (VNSAs) have harnessed weak governance conditions to challenge or infiltrate developing states, impeding democracy across the world and promoting longer and more expansive conflicts.1 While policymakers, researchers, and security officials discuss organized crime and terrorism as related threats converging in a “crime-terror nexus”, there is still only a limited understanding on how these threats are interconnected and what the best approach to counter them in the long-term is.

Using qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) of 27 cases and an in-depth case study of four organizations, this dissertation explores the fundamental relationship and underlying incentives that drive criminal and ideological strategies and operations. I codify the conditions under which different types of groups originate as ideologically or criminally inclined organizations and I examine factors that compel them to pivot their strategic focus in order to spread or maintain their influence. Finally, I propose a new theoretical framework that explains these pivots in relation to the sociopolitical environment in which VNSAs they operate.

Results of the QCA reinforce the view that ideological groups organize in opposition to the status quo while criminal groups work to infiltrate and coopt the status quo. The four specialized case studies show that both ideological and criminal VNSAs engage in strategic pivots or “borrow” tactics – especially low impact operations, such as smuggling or targeted threats and terrorism - opportunistically as their environment allows or their core strategies favor, but this flexibility appears to be more constrained as organizations specialize and grow. It appears more common when VNSAs splinter or their influence declines as their ideology or criminal structure loses steam.

Despite drawing support from a common “underground market”, criminal operations and ideological mobilization had limited compatibility in the long run. However, this shared dynamic space emphasizes the long-term need to bridge governance gaps through greater security coordination, information sharing, and, above all, prevention strategies that promote economic development and political inclusion.

1 De Boer and Bosetti “Examining the Interactions between Conflict and Organized Crime” Sept 2015
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This dissertation was made possible through the generous funding of $5,500 by the Doris Dong Dissertation Award.

I would like to thank my amazing committee - Angel, Chris, and Colin - for supporting and nudging me along this hard-fought process. Your constant guidance, constructive criticism, patience, and wisdom made this work get to where it needed.

I would also like to thank my fellow PRGS fellows and RAND colleagues for their friendship and solidarity – they made this Ph.D. journey unforgettable and inspiring. Special thanks to Phuong Giang Nguyen who was my unofficial quality assurance reader and Simon Hollands for graciously hosting me during this transition.

Third, I’d like to thank my bandmates James, Carlos, and Keith for keeping the music going while I was getting through this unconventional step for a musician.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my big Mexican family – Papá, Mamá, Car, Gix, Andita, y Flix - for being my unending source of motivation and good humor in everything I do. Este trabajo gigante es para ellos - ¡Gracias!
## Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>VNSA</td>
<td>Violent Non-State Actor</td>
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<td>DTO</td>
<td>Drug Trafficking Organization</td>
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<td>TCO</td>
<td>Transnational Crime Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>QCA</td>
<td>Qualitative Comparative Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>VRAE/VRAEM</td>
<td>Valle de los Rios Apurimac, Ene y Mantaro (Shining Path faction)</td>
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<td>ISIL</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant</td>
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<tr>
<td>FARC</td>
<td>Fuerzas Armadas de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)</td>
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<td>GTI</td>
<td>Global Terrorism Index</td>
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<td>MENA</td>
<td>Middle East North Africa Region</td>
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<td>AQ</td>
<td>Al Qaeda</td>
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<td>AQIM</td>
<td>Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb</td>
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<td>PCC</td>
<td>Primeiro Comando da Capital (Brazil)</td>
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<td>EZLN</td>
<td>Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation - Mexico)</td>
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<td>ISIS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and Syria</td>
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<td>ETA</td>
<td>Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Country)</td>
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<td>RUF</td>
<td>Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone)</td>
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<td>ELN</td>
<td>Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (National Liberation Army of Colombia)</td>
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<td>PIRA</td>
<td>Provisional Irish Republican Army</td>
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<td>IRA</td>
<td>Irish Republican Army</td>
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<td>KWP</td>
<td>Kurdistan Workers’ Party</td>
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<td>PKK</td>
<td>Kurdistan Workers’ Party</td>
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<td>IMU</td>
<td>Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan</td>
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<td>LTTE</td>
<td>Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP or SL</td>
<td>Shining Path or Sendero Luminoso (Peru)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MRTA</td>
<td>Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (Peru)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
<td>Muerte a Secuestradores (Death to Kidnappers – Colombia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFR</td>
<td>Council on Foreign Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>START</td>
<td>Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism</td>
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<tr>
<td>JTJ</td>
<td>Jama’at al-Tawhid wa’al-Jihad (Iraq and Jordan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CISAC</td>
<td>Center for International Security and Cooperation</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>PRI</td>
<td>Revolutionary Institutional Party (Mexico)</td>
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<td>PAN</td>
<td>National Action Party (PAN)</td>
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<td>CRS</td>
<td>Congressional Research Service</td>
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1. Pathways to Influence: Unravelling the Crime-Terror Nexus

I don’t want to be a product of my environment. I want my environment to be a product of me.

- Frank Costello, Irish Mob Boss in “The Departed”

Introduction

Policy Relevance

In June 2017, UN Deputy-Secretary General Amina Mohammed stated, “Transnational organized crime, violent extremism and terrorism are growing threats to stability […] On the ground, criminal and terrorist networks are competing to buy ungoverned spaces that are growing in size as governments retreat. Vigilante justice has replaced State authority.”

In line with Mohammed’s comment, studies of violent non-state actors’ (VNSAs) recruitment, operations, and financing patterns increasingly find convergence of criminal and terrorist groups’ social networks, environments, and milieus. This convergence is heuristically referred to as the “crime-terror nexus”. However, this field has only recently begun to unravel the ambiguous relationship between VNSAs of different types which had typically been viewed as operating towards different purposes in separate domains.

From former Soviet states to post-Arab Spring countries to slums of Latin America, violent non-state actors’ (VNSAs) ability to occupy spaces with weak governance - such as post-war areas, refugee camps, or prisons – and to develop resilient networks has allowed them opportunities to infiltrate or challenge states and impede democratic governance across the world, promoting longer and more expansive conflicts. And while policymakers, researchers, and security officials continue to discuss organized crime and terrorism as related threats that arise in similar settings, there is still only a limited understanding on how these threats are interconnected and what the best approach to counter them in the long-term is. A 2018 report by the UN University stated, “as current conflicts raging in Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Iraq can attest, the emergence of hybrid organizations engaged in terrorism and organized crime represents a major dimension of contemporary conflict. Yet, our knowledge on the extent and

2 Mohammed, Amina. “Good Governance Key to Addressing Causes of Instability in Sahel” June 2017.
3 Basra et al. 2016, Valasik and Phillips 2017
4 De Boer and Bosetti “Examining the Interactions between Conflict and Organized Crime” Sept 2015
nature (strategic or opportunistic) of this relationship and the mechanisms that support this collaboration remains weak.\textsuperscript{5}

Because of this knowledge gap authorities have tended to use siloed approaches on countering organized crime and terrorism or insurgencies.\textsuperscript{6} However, the crime-terror nexus has evidenced that these siloed policy approaches underestimate VNSAs’ flexibility and adaptability and often only push these groups into other vulnerable territories or harmful activities that allow them to gain influence. For example, the Islamic State’s unforeseen adeptness in weaving criminal networks in Europe to feed its expansion in the Middle East and politically destabilize Western powers at home through small-scale terrorist attacks showed how this ideological group had the potential to diversify both operationally and geographically. Similarly, the militarization and sociopolitical infiltration of drug trafficking organizations, such as the Zetas or Sinaloa Cartel of Northern Mexico, highlighted the versatility and resilience of criminal groups when faced with enforcement pressure, not to mention their proclivity to influence political agendas.

These cases point to a need for updated frameworks and policy approaches that accurately portray the overlapping dynamics between criminal and ideological VNSAs and provide insights to preventing their rise altogether. This study revisits the assumptions that underpin many crime-terror frameworks and moves beyond the conventional belief that VNSAs are siloed into either “economic profit-driven and crime-focused” organizations or “politico-ideologically-driven and terrorism-focused” organizations. I argue that criminal and ideological groups develop as alternative governance systems, and that crime and terrorism should rather be regarded as tactics used varyingly by both ideological or organized crime VNSAs to promote their influence in different settings. These tactics should not be considered exogenous to environment conditions and inherent to one particular type of group. By the same token, VNSA’s initial organizing principle – whether ideology or criminal profits – should not be assumed constant either.

This dissertation will explore the fundamental relationship between criminal and political-ideological strategies and operations, analyze the conditions under which VNSAs develop as ideological or criminal organizations, and lay out the processes under which they use crime and/or terror and under which they are compelled to shift their strategic or tactical approach to spread or maintain influence. Because much of the previous work in this domain rests on the problematic assumptions I have mentioned, I propose an updated crime-ideology theoretical framework that looks at VNSAs – both criminal and ideological - as adaptive entities, able to garner influence under changing conditions through various avenues, thus offering a truer representation of how these organizations operate in modern global society.

By incorporating these contextual elements, I expect this work will be able to provide a more holistic and accurate picture of the “crime-terror nexus” and the security threat posed by VNSAs

\textsuperscript{5} De Boer and Bosetti “Examining the Interactions between Conflict and Organized Crime” Sept 2015

operating in this space. I expect this will lead to more flexible, coordinated, and effective policy approaches to undercut VNSA influence in each environment and over the long term.

Research Questions

Specifically, this dissertation seeks to answer the following questions:

1) *How do VNSAs derive influence from crime and terrorism and how does this shape their behavior? Given this, how can we better classify and explain the crime-terror nexus dynamics of VNSAs?*

This question will be addressed through a literature review of previous crime-terror nexus studies and an evaluation of existing crime-terror nexus frameworks. Building on these models, I will develop a theoretical framework that reformulates the relationship between ideology-based groups and crime-based groups and examines the incentives behind both of these platforms. I then classify VNSAs in relation to their environment and explain their operations and behavior in terms of both external and internal shocks rather than only their purported goals - such as ideological mobilization or criminal profit.

2) *What combination of external conditions appear to prompt the formation of criminal and ideological VNSAs?*

Using 27 cases of standout criminal and ideological VNSAs analyzed in crime-terror nexus literature, I will perform a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to determine which conditional factors exist at the onset of ideological or criminal organizations.

3) *What shocks prompt VNSAs to shift from criminal to terrorism strategies or vice-versa? How do these shifts impact the group’s influence?*

For this question, I test several hypotheses discussed in the literature to explain VNSAs’ strategic shifts by delving deeper into 4 cases of varied “tactical flexibility” (one rigid and one flexible) – two ideological and two criminal cases. I examine the conditions underlying their crime-terror shifts by tracing the timeline of the organization and parsing out internal/external factors that may have prompted the shift.

4) *What security strategies are effective in countering the rise and expansion of actors in the crime-terror nexus?*

Incorporating significant factors behind VNSA origins and operational shifts into the new framework, I discuss how different security strategies might bring sustainable gains in each setting and how security stakeholders can incorporate these into a broader, longer-term approach to counter the crime-terror nexus.
Deconstructing the “Crime-Terror Nexus” – Existing Theoretical Models

Literature

Literature Background

In research and policy spheres, VNSAs tend to be classified by their operations, which align implicitly or explicitly with a driving motivation: where “terrorist” groups primarily use terrorism in pursuit of a political goal or ideology, “organized crime” groups primarily use crime in pursuit of economic profit.

Though the definitions vary, terrorism is generally classified as political violence or violence motivated by a political goal or ideology (Hoffman 2006), whereas crime or organized crime is illegal activity for the purpose of gains - typically financial, but also of power or influence - while protecting these activities through patterns of corruption and/or violence (FBI definition). Thus, while both may engage in violence, it is generally assumed that a terrorist group does so in pursuit of an ideology whereas a criminal group does so in pursuit of protecting or extending its gains. Although deviations from this behavior had been observed in the past, they were considered exceptional or temporary.

The logical extension of this view has been that terrorism is the guiding strategy for groups seeking political influence and crime is the guiding strategy for groups seeking economic gain. This is known as the “ideology vs. profit” dichotomy and it underpins most theoretical models of the crime-terror nexus. However, the crime-terror nexus emerges precisely in light of VNSAs “crossing over” to activities not in alignment with their traditional goals – sometimes for long periods of time or permanently - and creating more ambiguous, perhaps more dangerous, threats. Traditional scholars of the terrorism field, such as Bruce Hoffman, have contended that because criminal organizations are ultimately interested in profit, their activities have no fundamental political dimension as terrorist organizations’ do, and thus, this is the main point of differentiation between them.

However, recent cases have pointed out the weaknesses and archaism of this rigid traditional classification of VNSAs, with examples across the world where groups’ strategic goals, motives, and tactics shift continuously. For example, the Mexican government’s military crackdown on drug trafficking organizations using an aggressive “decapitation” strategy – taking down the leadership of criminal organizations, as is common for disarticulating criminal rings - quickly spiraled into widespread conflict as more violent groups like the Zetas emerged and began to challenge the government through force, often directed against the public. Over time, this led to a

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8 FBI Official Website (https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/organized-crime)
9 Ballina 2011
deterioration of democratic institutions, and a loss of faith in the government’s ability to provide security.

Newer studies point out that economic profit and political ideology are intertwined and complementary rather than dichotomous and thus, should not be dissociated as independent goals. De Boer and Bosetti of the UN University state that, “it is essential that policymakers understand the value of crime for various conflict actors, including the state, as well as the value of violent conflict for criminal actors.” This oversight has had important limitations in dealing with organizations of any type that have global capabilities, and have in some cases managed to infiltrate or take over states, as Shelley affirms:

By adhering to the artificial and obsolete distinctions that criminals are motivated only by profit and terrorists only by political or religious impulses, policymakers, law enforcement, and military strategists are failing to deal effectively with the new phenomenon of transnational crime networks generally.

As Ballina mentions, the tendency has been to overblow the immediate threat of ideological groups that challenge the state and to underestimate the long-term threat posed by criminal organizations, but both have the potential of disastrous consequences if improperly addressed.

**Existing Crime-Terror Nexus Frameworks**

Decades before the “crime-terror nexus” was formally introduced as a field of study, organized crime expert Joseph Albini gave what could be its first description in 1971 by examining the variance in structure and activities of major organized crime groups. In his seminal work *The American Mafia: Genesis of a Legend*, he classified organized crime in the following four major forms: 1) political-social organized crime, where the goal is not direct financial profit but the changing of or maintaining of the existing political-social structure, citing terrorism or the Klu Klux Klan as examples; 2) mercenary organized crime, where the goal is financial profit and includes racketeering, extortion, organized theft, gambling and other forms of profit-oriented crimes; 3) in-group organized crime, where financial gain is not a direct goal but individuals’ social and psychological gratification by belonging to a group; and 4) syndicated organized crime, where the goal is financial profit through provision of illicit goods and/or services by use or threat of violence, and sustained through attainment of police or political “protection” to safeguard from legal interference, citing drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) as prime examples.

Albini recognized the gradients of organized crime groups’ goals and even included ideological groups, like the Ku Klux Klan within these classifications. The field of terrorism, however, seemed to depart significantly from the field of organized crime, especially after 9/11

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10 De Boer and Bosetti “Examining the Interactions between Conflict and Organized Crime” Sept 2015
11 Shelley et al. 2005
12 Ballina 2011
when it became most associated with radical Islam. Upon closer look, many if not most VNSAs, criminal or otherwise, exhibit these four characteristics to some degree throughout their history.

The connection (yet separation) was reintroduced more explicitly in Tamara Makarenko’s “crime-terror continuum”, the most referenced framework for mapping crime-terror nexus dynamics. Makarenko posits that the crime-terror relationship can be best represented as a continuum that, “traces the evolution of groups depending on the predominant operational environment.” It rests on the notion that although they are related, terrorist and criminal group goals remain separate, even though their operations may fluctuate based on environmental conditions: “Organized crime and terrorism exist on the same plane, and thus are theoretically capable of converging at a central point.” From one side of the continuum, organized crime groups move towards terrorism in the following order: alliance with terrorist groups, use of terror tactics for operational purposes, use of political crime, and finally, convergence. On the opposite side, terrorist groups shift as follows: alliance with organized crime, criminal activities for operational purposes, commercial terrorism, and convergence (shown below).

Figure 1. Makarenko’s Crime-Terror Continuum

Figure 1 The Crime-Terror Continuum


Underlying this framework is the implicit dichotomy of commercial and political influence aims. However, the motive distinction between either type, she states, can reach a point where it

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14 Ballina 2011
15 Makarenko 2004
16 Ibid
17 Makarenko, Tamara The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Organised Crime and Terrorism 2004
is no longer perceptible at the center of the continuum: a point of convergence which she calls black hole:

Groups that thrive within ‘black hole’ environments are all equally motivated by the ‘accumulation of wealth, control of territory and people, freedom of movement and action, and legitimacy. Together, these elements represent usable power – power to allocate values and resources in society.’ […] A successful criminal organization with political interests or a commercial terrorist group will effectively challenge the legitimacy of the state, and ultimately replace the state in many (if not all) of its functions.\[18\]

Although Makarenko’s framework recognizes an important relationship between criminality and terrorism, it does not explain why different types of groups fundamentally exist in the same plane nor why they begin where they begin nor why they intersect. It also does not explain how or why some reach the point of becoming indistinguishable in the “black hole” despite being so differently motivated. Also, while the continuum discusses organizational phases, the point of convergence seems to address an environment where convergence happens, while the other points describe organizational phases. Subsequent studies have attempted to fill these theoretical gaps, mostly assessing environment or group conditions for moving along the continuum or entering a black hole state.

Shelley et al. (2005) build from Makarenko’s spectrum and devise an evolutionary system called the “terror-crime” interaction spectrum which consists of five stages: activity appropriation, nexus, symbiotic relation, convergence (hybrid), and transformation. Dishman (2001) and Hutchinson and O’Malley (2007) look into the incentives of “crime-terror” nexus shifts and argue that it is increased financial pressure towards ideological groups or political pressure on criminal groups that moves them towards operational transitions: “a political group whose traditional sources of funding have a evaporated, or a criminal group employing terrorism – in its tactical sense – to force government leniency and negotiation.”\[19\] The corollary to this, however, is that political-ideological groups require economic resources just as criminal groups require political capital to maintain their influence. But they argue that, in either case, these are only temporary tactical shifts while the group manages to re-establish its regular activities. It is unclear how the concept of a black hole fits into these views since, ostensibly, predominant activities of each organization would tend to revert to their original focus. Hausken and Gupta (2015) make the argument that it is not a group’s cause or choice of tactics that necessarily differentiate groups, but how their resources are directed. They argue that in fact both terrorist and criminal organizations are interested in resource capture, but that the former aim to provide them to their public, while the latter seek to privatize them, leading to different strategies for advancement and, very often, a decline into criminality.\[20\]

\[18\] Makarenko 2004
\[19\] Dishman 2001
Philips and Kamen (2014) offer another theoretical extension to Makarenko’s theory on “black hole convergence” by focusing on organizations’ operational characteristics which determine when a crime-terror group enters the black hole state or does not. They list three preconditions for the black hole state, using the Taliban as an example: 1) operating in a failed state or area with weak governance, 2) organization is chronically engaged in both terrorism and organized crime, 3) group has undergone a transformation but retains strategic raison d’etre. Valasik and Phillips (2017) modify Makarenko’s continuum to include street gangs as a common thread which tie into both organized crime and terrorist groups.

Most studies, however, continue to rest, at least implicitly, on the “profit-ideology” dichotomy. Ballina’s (2011) study on hybrid organizations – namely La Familia Michoacana and Abu Sayyaf - is one of the few to explicitly recognize the flaw in diagnosing VNSAs based on this dichotomy. To remedy this, Ballina proposes a three-dimensional model which first analyzes the social/cultural background that sees the emergence and growth of a certain tactical approach: “based on this model, any comprehensive analysis of clandestine organizations would begin by attempting to describe the broader context in which a particular group was born and then proceed to outline its profit- and ideology-based elements … Classification becomes secondary to understanding.”

This also echoes Kenney’s 2008 observation that instead of asking why insurgencies arise in certain contexts and mafias in others, we should ask “why, and under what conditions, do economically-motivated “mafias” develop political interests and why do politically-motivated insurgencies develop economic ones?” This type of analysis would provide a deeper basis for understanding clandestine organizations’ development and incentive structure, instead of explaining their behavior solely based on outward-facing motives which may change over time.

**Operational Dynamics of the Crime-Terror Nexus**

At the most basic level, the crime-terror nexus refers to either the environmental or operational convergence of VNSAs or clandestine organizations that have diverging strategic goals and would naturally tend to use differing tactics to achieve those goals. Although the term is often used ambiguously, the “crime-terror nexus” can be parsed down to one or a combination of the following five observed VNSA organizational dynamics:

- **coexistence** – criminal and terrorist groups operating in the same mediums;
- **activity appropriation** – criminal organizations committing terrorist acts or vice versa as tactics for greater strategic advantages;

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21 Ballina 2011


• **symbiotic collaboration (alliances)** - criminal and terrorist organizations collaborating and contributing their areas of expertise to achieve their separate strategic goals;

• **organizational fusion (mergers)** - criminal organizations becoming part of terrorist organizations, or vice versa;

• **strategic transformation** - criminal organizations shifting strategically to become primarily terrorist organizations, or vice versa.

It should be noted that these definitions are also limited by the implicit traditional associations of “criminal” (i.e. criminal profit-driven VNSAs) and “terrorist” (i.e. ideology-driven VNSAs)\(^\text{24}\) organizations. This becomes problematic when we reclassify VNSAs as adapting or evolving groups, since many of them have seen several operational shifts since their inception. However, we can maintain these associations when referring to the origin of an organization, and whether their approach was to acquire influence through criminal-financial profit or through politico-ideological mobilization – regardless of their subsequent activities.

Though the “crime-terror nexus” can refer to any one of the dynamics above, it has been frequently sensationalized as a potential dark alliance or union between profitable, transnational crime groups and subversive, influential radical groups\(^\text{25}\) that may eventually spawn a fearsome, radical-criminal transnational organization. While this prospect fits the definitions of “mergers” or “alliances” noted above, few cases ever come close to sustaining this dynamic over time. For example, though commonly viewed as aligned, the Chechen Mafia balked at Chechen separatists and Islamists when this alliance threatened their interests in Russia. In fact, breakaway factions of large ideological or criminal groups whose interests begin to diverge are far more common, such as the VRAE faction breaking away from Shining Path to focus on drug trafficking, or the Zetas breaking away from the Gulf Cartel to take on a more militarized model of turf control.

Hutchinson and O’Malley (2007) theorized this would be the case and that VNSA transformations were due to immediate necessity\(^\text{26}\) and because goals of criminal and terrorist organizations were typically misaligned or at odds with one another in the long run (why this is the case will be further discussed in the following sections). Dishman (2001) elaborated further, that any cooperation would be, “short-term linkages of convenience, and even these will be limited and spotty,” and rather, that transformation of political motivations and ends might very well lead to more permanent strategic shifts – again as seen with the VRAE faction of the Shining Path.\(^\text{27}\)

\(^{24}\) These definitions will be deconstructed in the following sections.


\(^{26}\) Hutchinson and O’Malley "A crime–terror nexus? Thinking on some of the links between terrorism and criminality." 2007

\(^{27}\) Dishman 2001
What these theories highlight is that using both crime and terror tactics with equal emphasis appears incongruent as they convey mutually exclusive advantages to VNSAs over the longer term. In the shorter term, however, convergence of these tactics may be useful to certain VNSAs. Gernot Morbach (1998) makes the following observation:

The long-term objectives of Organized Crime and Terrorism may differ significantly. Whereas organized crime generally wants to exploit the weaknesses of the host-system in its favor, and does not seek radical change, terrorism’s long-term objectives often envisage a radical-systemic change. While the motives of terrorist groups and transnational criminal organizations may differ, the strategies they adopt to achieve their objectives seem to converge. Linkages and alliances of convenience between them are likely – at least in the short and mid-term perspective – to saturate law enforcement agencies. Whereas the threat posed by organized crime is rather subtle and indirect, terrorist activities are perceived as more threatening to the security affected nations. Thus, law enforcement agencies could not but focus their efforts to combat the putative greater threat posed by terrorism.\(^{28}\)

The subsequent targeting of VNSAs engaged in terrorism implies a higher price and operational focus and may impair criminal activities. Moreover, some examples show that longer-term VNSA operational shifts, such as the VRAE faction of Shining Path or ISIS recruitment in criminal networks, may have a significant effect in reshaping VNSAs’ strategies or ideology (i.e. activity appropriation leading to strategic transformation, and vice versa)\(^{29}\), which signals that VNSAs cannot sustainably encompass the entire criminal-ideological spectrum. The reason may be that, while incentives for each approach may occasionally and temporarily align, upon consolidation and over time successful ideological and criminal groups may undermine their core competencies by diversifying into other strategies.

Moving Beyond the “Profit-Ideology” Dichotomy by Examining VNSA Conditions of Origin

Much of the bewilderment that arises from crime-terror nexus dynamics comes from misguided pre-existing beliefs about how VNSAs ought to operate based on antiquated classifications. But, as Shelley (2006) asserts, “the artificial distinction that has been made between crime and terrorism is based on the antiquated concept of both”. Scholar Harmonie Toros further argues, “the distinction between terrorism and organized crime crucially rests on the understanding of politics that is adopted, although, so far, the scholarly and policy communities have failed to investigate this question […] although scholars see an increasing coming together of the two activities – with terrorists engaging in lucrative criminal activities to raise funds for their political campaigns, and organized gangs using terrorist tactics to ensure they can continue their profit-making activities – they are still understood as distinct forms of violence and still distinguished by the political/economic dichotomy.”\(^{30}\)

\(^{28}\) Morbach 1998  
\(^{29}\) See Ballina 2011 study on Abu Sayyaf and Knights Templar.  
\(^{30}\) Toros et al. 2014
There are plenty of real-world cases that display the mutually reinforcing dynamic between economic profit and political power, casting doubts on their habitual separation as motives. Even if dynamic shifts in these cases are only temporary measures to return to business as usual, they highlight VNSAs’ tactical, and even ideological, flexibility. For example, prompted by shifting environmental conditions, ideologically-driven groups like Abu Sayyaf (O’Brien 2012), ISIS (Basra 2016), FARC (Phillips et al. 2014) resorted to criminal operations to spread their influence and build their war chests. Some analyses suggest that the distinction is overblown. Seth Jones et al. conclude in their exhaustive review of terrorist groups that, “terrorists are best perceived as criminals, not holy warriors…there is no battlefield solution to terrorism” (Jones et al., 2008). On the other hand, criminal gangs like the Red Commando or PCC in Brazil, the Medellin cartel in Colombia, and the Zetas cartel in Mexico (Grillo 2016) have resorted to terrorizing government officials and the population at large to pressure the state into negotiation or submission, not to mention their continuous use of corruption, violence, and intimidation to manipulate the political environment. Makarenko concluded, “Comparable with any traditional terrorist group, the Mafia engaged in terrorism as a tactical tool to force the government into negotiation and compromise”.

Rather than focus on a dubious distinction between profit and ideology, a more useful and universal description of VNSA motivation is the attainment, exercise, and preservation of influence or power - in D.D. Raphael’s words, “the ability to make other people do what one wants them to do” - in whatever form available. If we deconstruct organizations into human and/or material resources, a VNSAs’ influence then refers to its ability to mobilize either of these resources at will. Like the complementarity between political ideology and economic profit, control over material resources can be used to mobilize human resources and vice versa. An ideological movement can seize state resources or tax businesses “for the cause”, or a criminal organization can blow up an airplane to force political action.

What varies substantially is the source of influence available to clandestine organizations. Consequently, in certain environments – perhaps in those where capture of a valuable resource or service is viable and economic opportunities are scarce - the clearest path to influence is through criminal operations, and in others – perhaps where the dominant authority is viewed as unjust or illegitimate by many - through ideological mobilization against the status quo or insurgent terrorism as a more extreme measure. I outline this universal alternative development process below, highlighting how it compares to the traditional, siloed processes:

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31 Makarenko 2004
Taking the deconstruction of organizational influence further, we can posit that human resources – which mobilize or are mobilized by material resources - are ultimately what determine social influence or the ability to influence and shape society according the organizations’ will. It is fairly straightforward how an organization derives influence from material resources and economic profit, but in all cases, some form of underlying ideology plays a role in VNSA formation and activities. Ideology, or a proposed system of ideals over how the political-economic system ought to exist, attains influence when it reaches a base of followers willing to contribute, in both materials and effort, to its cause – most often, in competition with an existing system and as an alternative to it. Of all existent subversive ideologies, few reach a critical mass of militant followers, or influence, necessary to upset or subvert the status quo. The militant component is important because a key measure of government effectiveness is a monopoly over the use of force. In the case of militancy of organized crime elements, we will see that in many cases, their militancy works in service of the status quo rather than against it, and this symbiotic relationship with the state allows them to tap into the influence held by the state.

To that effect, a more useful distinction to determine why a VNSA opts for a given strategy lies in understanding how tactics such as crime and terrorism become effective mobilizers and operationally confer advantages or opportunities for expanding influence in different settings. While terrorism in the name of radical or insurgent ideology seeks to mobilize human resources directly in order to control material resources, criminal operations appear to work from the opposite direction, harnessing material resources through illicit channels and, using corruption or
coercion, to influence the social order and maintain and expand this control. This cycle of influence is shown below:

**Figure 3. VNSA Harness Points and Influence Cycle**

These different “harness points” create different threat perceptions and elicit different responses from the state. International Relations expert Tom Farer explains: “A 1997 State Department report asserts that large trafficking organizations ‘in many ways’ represent ‘a greater threat to democratic government than most insurgent movements,’ but this is typical Washington hyperbole…The ability of drug dealers to influence electoral outcomes and to corrupt public officials, legislators, and judges can undermine public confidence in democratic institutions and processes. However, such a threat is long-term and diffuse, whereas in countries torn by civil war, the insurgent challenge is immediate and substantial”.

The harness point itself also affects strategic choices thereafter. Organized crime groups generate wealth through clandestine operations within the state structure, overtaking black and gray sectors of the economy and eventually diversifying into the formal economy. They use this wealth to create favorable conditions for their operations, but ultimately, their wealth does not tend to go against the grain of the underlying system. Mafias instead tend use their influence to cement themselves as valuable economic actors in times of chaos or upheaval, rise up in the political system as influential economic elites, and even collaborate with the government in

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33 Farer 1999
clamping down insurgencies or populist movements.\(^ {34}\) Insurgent groups, however, prime the pump of wealth in contravention to the state, often at the direct expense of the government and disputing its legitimacy. Their activities and natural reaction of the state, thus, tend to follow an anti-establishment trajectory, and as they intensify, move towards further destabilizing the state structure.

The state’s response to VNSA activities has a significant effect on the value of VNSA influence-building activities. For example, cracking down on drug trafficking can raise the value of smuggling and corruption, and military campaigns against insurgent groups can result in state abuse or targeting against certain communities which legitimize the insurgent cause. While Hoffman (2006) states that, “the fundamental aim of the terrorist’s violence is ultimately to change ‘the system’ – about which the ordinary criminal, of course, couldn’t care less”\(^ {35}\), criminal organizations, we continue to observe, do in fact care about changing the system (or, at the very least, keeping it favorable towards their activities); otherwise, convergence would never occur. Criminal groups simply appear to follow different, more gradual strategies for influencing the system and different incentives for preservation. These incentives are largely shaped by environment conditions and state responses.

**VNSA Expansion and Evolution: Coerce or Coopt**

While the five richest criminal organizations currently operate under fairly stable, central government structures, - Solntsevskaya Bratva in Russia, Yamaguchi Gumi in Japan, Camorra in Naples, ‘Ndrangheta in Northern Italy, and Sinaloa Federation in Mexico - all have historical origins in post-war or weak governance settings and have managed to consolidate under the auspices of their respective governments over decades, or centuries even. Indeed many have been instrumental in solidifying their governments’ grip on authority. Similarly, those currently recognized as the deadliest terrorist groups by the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) – ISIL, Boko Haram, the Taliban, and Al Qaeda – emerged as important players from long-standing conflicts in the MENA region and operate in volatile war zones with weak or inexistent governance. GTI reports that in 2016, 99% of all deaths from terrorism and 96% of all attacks globally occurred in countries involved in an armed conflict or with high levels of political terror.\(^ {36}\) Other groups, such as the Kurdistan Worker’s Party turned to crime after losing state funding, or Abu Sayyaf became increasingly focused on kidnapping for ransom as they shifted to less centralized leadership.\(^ {37}\) These VNSAs consolidated amid ethnic marginalization or weak governance.

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\(^ {34}\) Dishman 2001; Howard, Russell O., and Colleen Traughber. The Nexus of Extremism and Trafficking: Scourge of the World or So Much Hype?. No. JSOU-13-6. JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIV MACDILL AFB FL, 2013.

\(^ {35}\) Hoffman 2006

\(^ {36}\) Global Terrorism Index 2017: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism. 2017

\(^ {37}\) O’Brien 2012
It comes as no surprise then that VNSAs tend to naturally converge, or indeed are born, in environments of weak or faulty governance and of high marginalization – slums, prisons, war zones - where influence is readily attainable through ideological mobilization or criminal ventures, both of which capitalize on failures of governance.

Harnessing weak governance conditions to establish an alternative order is a common thread for VNSAs: Hoffman states that, “Terrorism is designed to create power where there is none or to consolidate power where there is very little. Through the publicity generated by their violence, terrorists seek to obtain the leverage, influence, and power they otherwise lack to effect political change on either a local or an international scale.”38 This behavior also mirrors the established sociopolitical orders of criminal organizations in swathes of territory they control: “in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, criminal organizations such as Primeiro Comando da Capital regulate criminal activity with a so-called ‘criminal constitution’, which sets limits on what members can do to one another or even to the local population...”39 How these governance gaps are harnessed, and alternative orders established, appears to be a key differentiating point between criminal enterprise and ideological mobilization.

Terrorism backed by compelling ideology can effectively challenge the sociopolitical structure and mobilize individuals against it. As Hoffman explains, operationally, terrorism serves the purposes of challenging the status quo by undermining its stability and credibility, harnessing popular rejection of it, and promoting radical movements.40 Political scientist Barbara Walters further states, “extreme ideology can offer rebel entrepreneurs significant organizational advantages over more moderate groups, especially in environments with multiple competing rebel groups, weak rule of law, and bad governance.”41 Unsurprisingly, over 80% of terrorist groups between 1968 and 2006 proclaimed anti-establishment goals.42

Criminal activities, on the other hand, manage to work within the boundaries of this structure and work to infiltrate it gradually by coercing it or replacing unfavorable authorities. Organized crime capitalizes on the material resources or services that the state structure does not or cannot control – ironically, the economic value of these opportunities hinges simultaneously upon the state structure’s presence and its inability to capture these resources or prevent others from capturing them. These resources and promise of access then allow organized crime to mobilize human resources to coopt the status quo using corruption or coercion and, once successfully coopted, to actively enforce it. Toros explains:

Roth and Sever (2007) argue that to pursue their profit-making activities, criminal organizations use violence to sustain the status quo. Indeed, ‘it is often in the best interest of organized crime to keep...
corruptible and weak leaders in power’ (Roth and Sever 2007) … Although the ultimate aim is financial gain, this argument turns organized crime into reactionary force working to sustain the status quo.\textsuperscript{43}

Criminal organizations’ natural support of the status quo has been observed in many cases. A study by Alesina et al. (2018)\textsuperscript{44} on the Sicilian Mafia found that it traditionally supported center-right parties against left-wing parties and labor unions in elections, and Acemoglu et al. (2020) provide evidence of the Mafia emerging as a “military arm” of elites in the context of weak property rights’ protection.\textsuperscript{45} In a colorful example of these diametrically opposed purposes, the Medellin and Cali Cartels, with support of the Colombian government and US corporations, formed the paramilitary group $MAS$ (“Muerte a Secuestradores” or “Death to Kidnappers) to counter the Marxist insurgent group, FARC. This behavior is explained by Rensselaer Lee as follows:

Drug dealers, especially the larger operators, hold some anti-establishment views; they are strongly anti-U.S., and they favor a more egalitarian social structure. However, as landowners, ranchers, and owners of industrial property, dealers are far more closely aligned with the traditional power structure than with the revolutionary left – indeed, they tend to perceive the latter as a mortal threat.\textsuperscript{46}

And Mark Galeotti explains it in the context of Russia:

The gangs that prosper in modern Russia tend to do so by working with rather than against the state…They appreciate a degree of predictability within the system, and also – now that they are rich – a state apparatus dedicated to preserving property rights. However, they are also well aware that an honest, well-functioning police force and a dedicated, incorruptible judiciary would be a serious threat to them. As a result, they have a strong interest in preserving the current, compromised status quo.\textsuperscript{47}

Infiltration, through the continued use of corruption afforded by illegal accumulation of wealth, would be further enabled by the state which could use mafias as extralegal means to enforce the status quo. Siniawer explains how this process unfolded in the case of the Yakuza and the Japanese state:

This modern and arguably democratic state cooperated with nonstate violence specialists in order to violently suppress dissent while evading questions about the legitimacy of such use of force. In Japan, as elsewhere, the emergence of a modern state, democracy, capitalism, and the rule of law did not render impenetrable the boundaries between the legitimate and the illegitimate, the lawful and the criminal, but left them fluid and porous such that there were extended moments of symbiosis between the state and yakuza.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{43} Toros et al. 2014
\textsuperscript{46} Lee 1991
\textsuperscript{47} Galeotti, Mark. “Gangster's Paradise: How Organised Crime Took over Russia.” 2018
Indeed, in a startling majority of cases, it appears that consolidated mafias or criminal organizations have been instrumental to governments in suppressing anti-establishment movements or figures. As stated by John Dickie, “Over the 60 years and more that followed the flowering of the Fasci movement, Mafiosi would intimidate and murder countless socialists, Communists and trade union leaders – so many, in fact, that it came to seem as if the Mafia’s very purpose was to batter the organized working class in the countryside into submission.”

There is evidence to that effect in the cases of most larger, influential criminal groups: Sinaloa Cartel, Chechen Mafia, Yamaguchi Gumi, the Italian Mafias, the Russian Mafia, Colombian cartels, among others.

Thus, it appears that terrorism for ideological insurgency and organized crime as part of a group or network follow diametrically opposed paths towards influence. Whereas ideological VNSAs tend to use their influence to coerce and replace the status quo, criminal VNSAs use their influence to coopt the structure over time and defend this “favorable” status quo, as represented below:

**Figure 4. VNSA Strategy Growth Dynamic**

Both strategies are fundamentally anti-establishment in that they represent a challenge to the established order through different approaches, which explains VNSAs’ common appeal to marginalized communities or underground movements. But while insurgent groups’ rejection of the status quo is explicit – and indeed their influence may depend on the credibility of this rejection - criminal organizations “support” the status quo insofar as it favors or extends their influence within it.

Thus, the strategic dividing line of VNSAs seems to lie not on their use of crime or terrorism, but on alignment to an order supported by the state that runs counter or in favor of the VNSA’s influence-building activities. This essential difference conditions VNSAs’ growth dynamic and

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determines their future activities for expansion. Where terrorism is often useful in consolidating ideological movements and carving out spaces for governance, criminal operations can be effective in generating resources to infiltrate the system. However, VNSAs develop and consolidate their organization based on opportunities afforded by their specific environment while varying their tactics according to the challenge presented by rivals, including the state. In effect, VNSAs have been observed to fluctuate between terrorism and crime as a result of internal shifts or external pressures which change their position vis-à-vis the status quo. What these specific shocks are and how they prompt such shifts will be further explored in Chapter 3.

These diverging dynamics also point to why these strategies may conflict with each other over the long run. The intuitive explanation is that either the VNSA has coopted the status quo and is acquiring influence through this cooptation and has an interest in maintaining it, or it has positioned itself as a legitimate opposition to the status quo and acquires influence through this oppositional political capital. While the same organization can adopt a different strategy in different settings, these strategies seem counter to one another in the same setting.

VNSAs may, however, use secondary sources of influence that are not necessarily counter to its primary strategy. For example, an ideological group may license its followers to sell illegal drugs or smuggle for the sake of the general cause, or an organized crime group may authorize its members to carry out targeted killings of politicians or media who interfere with their core activities. Sustained use of a “secondary” source of influence may be an indicator that the VNSA has shifted its primary strategy for attaining influence. For example, Abu Sayyaf shifting towards kidnapping-for-ransom or the Zetas shifting towards widespread paramilitary activities were signals that both organizations were pivoting from their traditional ideological or criminal approaches, respectively. In the long run, however, they have been unable to maintain focus on both criminal and ideological strategies.

The worrying implication of these dynamics is that VNSAs are more ideologically flexible and operationally adaptable than previously thought. This means that closing off one avenue of influence will not preclude a VNSA from accessing another, especially since environments of chronically weak governance offer plenty of opportunities for corruption, crime, and radicalization. Moreover, VNSAs can now tap into opportunities made available by increased globalization, market interconnectedness, and digitalization of information.

The preponderance of crime:

The mutually exclusive long-term benefits of crime and terrorism do not imply that VNSAs cannot engage in both at a given time. In theory, both ideologically-based or crime-based groups can and do use crime and/or terror simultaneously to extend their influence. But crime especially can be tactically useful while minimally disruptive to a VNSA’s greater strategy; the same does
not apply to terrorism or aid to ideological movements, which draws attention to VNSA operations. Makarenko makes the following observation:

Considering the various components of the crime–terror continuum, one consistent and relatively easily identifiable factor is criminality. Regardless of where a group sits along the continuum (apart from each extreme end), every point necessitates some degree of involvement with criminal activities.\textsuperscript{51}

Criminal activities can indeed feed into the aim of an ideologically-based group as long as they do not detract from the legitimacy or potency of the ideology which propels them. However, it is only under certain settings that VNSAs would choose to strategically focus on crime. Al Qaeda, for example, did not embrace the ISIS model of recruiting criminals of questionable backgrounds as it feared this would reduce its political coherence as a fundamentalist organization. ISIS, on the other hand, made this a staple of its strategy and indeed struggled to maintain ideological consistency, alienating certain segments of the population which would have otherwise viewed them as legitimate representatives.

Conversely, organized crime implies a structure designed to attain influence primarily through these criminal activities and cooptation of the status quo. As such, the networks built by DTOs or smugglers become much more adept at using corruption within the system to further these activities, whereas ideological groups’ goals of upending the status quo can come into direct clash with certain criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, bribery of government officials, or extortion of certain groups.

Ideological groups may participate in criminal activities for tactical advantages (weapons trafficking, prison smuggling, etc.), but increased participation, structure, and methods may signal a more permanent pivot towards criminal enterprise (a “wag the dog” effect), where the group loses its ideological fervor and mobilizing strength and turns towards other forms of influence. Prolonged and successful use of crime may lead to strategic realignment of an ideological group, while the opposite is true for a criminal group. Unless an ideological group derives strategic benefits from forgoing crime, then certain types of profitable criminal activities will continue be a viable and accessible resource to garner influence.

Part of the reason for the preponderance of crime in all cases might also have to do with the broad definition of crime, which encompasses steps required to carry out terrorism. By definition, all terrorists are criminals, but not all criminals are terrorists. Terrorism is more specifically defined and tends to require a clear political motive; this tends to be hazy with groups that have no explicit ideology. Another explanation is the bluntness and unpredictability of terrorism as a tactical approach. Terrorism can more easily undermine the influence of criminal structures than crime can undermine the influence of ideological mobilization. In fact, terrorism or indiscriminate violence can also have a dampening effect on certain ideological movements.

\textsuperscript{51} Makarenko 2004
Thus, it appears that groups that are ideology-based - especially extremist anti-establishment VNSAs - tend to be more rigid ideologically and more flexible tactically, while groups that are crime-based tend to be more flexible ideologically and more rigid tactically.

Proposed Theoretical Framework and Assumptions:

The key points from my analysis of existing frameworks and the conceptual deconstruction of the crime-terror nexus and its dynamics are:

- Both economic and political power feed into a cycle that generates social influence - the ability to allocate values and resources in society and to make other people do what one wants them to do - and is ultimately what VNSAs of any origin or type strive to attain or maintain.
- Areas of weak, non-existent, or unreliable governance present ample opportunities for extracting social influence, either through economic or political gains.
- Criminal and terrorist activities are both avenues to social influence, although they seem to have different “harness points” within the cycle. The degree to which they are viable depends on sociopolitical-environmental characteristics. An organization’s choice of “harness point” will have varying implications of state response towards its activities and subsequent VNSA strategies for its expansion and preservation.
- Organized crime and terrorism are strategic and tactical tools that confer different advantages and imply different limitations in specific settings. Organized crime works to corrupt and coopt the status quo and enforce it if successful, while ideological groups work to coerce and replace it.
- The crime-terror nexus can be broken down into five operational dynamics: coexistence, activity appropriation, collaboration, organizational fusion, strategic transformation.
- VNSAs can shift their strategic or tactical focus based on how environmental conditions support or constrain their influence-building activities. Some degree of criminal activity is tactically viable for all VNSAs. However, because organized crime and terrorism utilize mutually exclusive expansion patterns in the longer run, occupying both strategic spaces permanently is unfeasible.

Based on these observations, I propose the following theoretical framework:
This framework is based on the following assumptions about VNSA behavior dynamics:

1) VNSAs of all types seek to maximize influence over their environment; by influence, I refer to the ability to control or mobilize human and/or material resources;

2) VNSA will align their strategic goals and tactical operations towards what they perceive will allow them to maximize influence (short term or long term). Consequently, VNSAs may adopt one or several of crime-terror nexus dynamics if they perceive it to be advantageous towards gaining or retaining their influence.

3) VNSAs develop brands, networks, structures, and tactical expertise based on their original strategic focus. While they are not rigid or monolithic, shifting or rebranding is not equally viable for all VNSAs.

The horizontal axis on this framework represents the degree to which a VNSA is invested in either rejecting and coercing the status quo (left side) or corrupting and coopting the status quo (right side). The vertical axis represents the level of social influence a VNSA commands, with progressively anti-establishment movements or insurgencies at the top extreme left and individuals or potential recruits at the bottom.
The full-fledged expression of an anti-establishment movement that works to coerce the state into concessions or submission is an insurgent movement (of any type) and is successful when it establishes itself as a viable competitor to the status quo. The counterpart on the right side is a developing criminal network which can eventually emmesh itself so far into the status quo that it creates a criminalized state, where an organization has managed to partially or fully take control of state functions. As influence of these organizations increase, their trajectory progresses and flows as shown by the arrows’ direction, where both incentives and goals become more closely aligned.

The top left quadrant represents the strategic space occupied by VNSAs that derive their influence through rejection of status quo, i.e. anti-establishment movements, while the top right quadrant is the space occupied by criminal organizations which derive and exercise influence through gradual cooptation of the status quo. While neither terrorism nor crime as tactical operations necessarily belong to either strategic space, the former is more strategically aligned to coercion while the latter is more aligned to cooptation of the establishment. As organizations pivot towards the middle space, due to sociopolitical shifts, their incentives for destabilizing the state structure become more ambiguous, prompting shifts in tactics.

Like Phillips and Valasick’s study, the framework incorporates gangs as loose and mostly localized groups that vie for influence in their respective underworlds and are thus, prime recruitment targets for larger organizations. Much lower in the influence ladder are individual actors attempting to spark mobilization to ultimately coerce or coopt change of the status quo towards their favor.

The above framework seeks to accomplishes three functions for an updated view of the crime-terror nexus: 1) move beyond “ideology vs. profit” dichotomy by using the concept of social influence to represent power in any form, 2) consider different forms of violence and illicit sources of influence – terrorism, criminal operations, and other hybrid forms - as tactical tools used for distinct purposes based on the strategic space occupied, and 3) explain or predict organizational trajectories and behaviors with respect to the sociopolitical environment they operate under.

In the following chapters, I will examine what sociopolitical conditions prompt the rise of different types of VNSAs and their choice of trajectory in order to better describe each strategic space in the framework. Further, I will explore how these conditions change over time and prompt changes in crime-terror dynamics of VNSAs and use this framework to map out these operational shifts.

52 “The criminalized state can be thought of as one where much, if not most, state activity has been ‘privatized’; that is, where either those in power or those with leverage over those in power use state agency to advance their private interest at the expense of the broader public good […] The concept of the criminalized state, in contrast [to the criminal state], implies a qualitatively different level of corruption, one in which the state itself is suffused with corruption. The state’s core activity may not be corrupt, but the process by which the state acts is.” (Levgold 2009)
2. From Spark to Fire: Origin Case Study of 27 Violent Non-State Actors

Introduction

Violent non-state actors often develop in power vacuums. As their name suggests, they exist as social entities whose influence in certain areas begins to rival the state’s or operate in its absence. Former administrators of USAID J. Brian Atwood and Andrew Natsios state that, “terrorist and criminal groups use failed and fragile states as launching pads, since they can recruit more easily from suffering populations that lack supportive communities and reliable institutions… much of the [population] growth is occurring in unstable regions in Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, where the combination of swelling ranks of young people and limited economic opportunities creates breeding grounds for terrorist groups and criminal gangs.”\(^{53}\) And while there are common and intuitive characteristics to environments where VNSAs arise, little work has been done to explore specific characteristics or combinations of characteristics that ideologically-extremist groups or criminal gangs have capitalized on and how these differ. As Ballina concludes, one of the recurring issues in evaluating non-state actors’ threat is that VNSAs’ classification precedes understanding of the deeper historical and contextual factors that promote their rise and shape their behavior and strategies\(^{54}\).

In this chapter, I look to fill this gap by examining the origins of a wide variety of VNSAs and evaluating the surrounding factors that prompted them to organize around a given strategy. I am particularly interested in factors that differentiate between groups that use ideology, especially anti-establishment or insurgent, as their organizing principle\(^{55}\) - their raison d’être - and those that seemingly do not. I expect this analysis to provide insights into the conditions that explain these positions as viable springboards to greater influence.

Many of these actors have surged as offshoots of other organizations or political entities, or in the context of protracted, historical conflicts. As such, their origins are often not straightforward, but the VNSAs selected for study are notorious enough to where an approximate year(s) of origin is discernable.

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\(^{54}\) Ballina 2011

\(^{55}\) I use Walter’s definition of ideology: “in its simplest form, a set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved.” (Walter 2017)
This chapter covers five sections: 1) a summary of conditional factors that the literature suggests are most relevant at the onset of VNSAs; 2) a case study of 27 VNSAs in which I identify characteristics of their respective environments of origin and determine whether each key factor is present in each case; 3) a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) where, using codified data from each case, I determine general patterns of factors present or absent at each group’s formation; 4) a section where I discuss the limitations of my approach, and 5) a conclusion section where I outline key takeaways from the QCA and discuss how these compare to general findings in the case study and literature. The results of this analysis will be used to inform the select case study in Chapter 3 and to elaborate on the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 1.

General Design

Conditional Factors

There is a plethora of factors that may play a role in the rise of violent non-state actors and that condition their survival and success thereafter. Many of these factors are often interrelated, which makes ascribing causality to any one specific factor an elusive task. However, as I explored in Chapter 1, because different strategies for expansion offer different avenues to influence depending on the environment, we can ostensibly determine which combination of characteristics appear more commonly at the onset of different VNSAs and from there suggest which conditions appear most exploitable by each VNSA’s strategies.

For example, the ubiquity of an unregulated, high-value resource in a low-income area might fuel the rise of criminal enterprises, or the systemic lack of opportunity of a politically marginalized population that lacks an escape valve to economic progress, such a valuable clandestine resource, might potentiate radical anti-establishment ideological movements; though
both may happen under conditions of socioeconomic inequality, the presence or absence of a
given factor changes the viability or effectiveness of a strategy. As conditions change, strategies
may lose potency and groups might be compelled to adjust them accordingly. The goal of this
chapter is to systematically analyze how these factors combine or interact and prompt the origin
of either radical-ideological or criminal organizations. Chapter 3 will delve deeper into the
tactical variations that VNSAs use thereafter.

I have identified 11 factors, loosely based on those used by Paul and Clarke in their report
"Mexico is Not Colombia" (in their report, the authors evaluate 10 different factors or “challenges”
faced by the state) to analyze historical cases and examine key differences and similarities with
Mexico’s security situation at the height of the drug war in the late 2000s. The factors I use are
mostly analogous to Paul and Clarke’s, while adding certain economic and organizational factors
to include these dimensions as potential triggers for VNSAs. Because these are clandestine
groups, I looked at factors that could invite or promote mobilization based on political,

economic, or structural (both relative to the group in question and the overall sociopolitical

environment) issues. Several are from seminal civil war and conflict works, like Blattman and
Miguel’s *Civil War*, which discuss pre-conditions for civil wars such as exploitable resources,

inequality, longstanding rivalries or oppression of specific groups, sudden economic downturns,

global movements, or fall or replacement of a regime.\(^\text{56}\)

Certain factors like structural poverty, inequality, and corruption were relevant but so
prevalent across all groups that they provided little analytical traction and are not included in the
QCA analysis. Another reason why I chose these factors was that they were quite general and
their presence or absence easy to discern based on the literature; more specialized factors such as
prison population, weapon availability, or youth bulge were relevant but much more difficult to
determine across cases, especially for historic cases such as longstanding mafias.

Because I am looking to determine what conditional factors may influence groups to
organize around a given strategy, I attempted to focus the study on factors exogenous rather than
endogenous to the group. For example, I considered “perception of government illegitimacy” as
a potential factor, but it appeared to be endogenous to the formation of most ideological groups.
This is logical - if they had not viewed the government as illegitimate, they would likely have
had no compelling reason to mobilize against it. While it may have been present in certain forms
in criminal groups, it tended to be more diffuse and indirect as a reasoning behind the group
formation. Because it appeared skewed towards ideological groups, I excluded it.

The factors I considered are listed below along with the threshold used for coding it present
or absent:

### Table 1. Conditional factors and Coding Thresholds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditional factors at origin</th>
<th>Coding Threshold</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence/Conflict</td>
<td>Ongoing armed conflict with significant casualties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent Regime transition</td>
<td>Significant government regime change occurring 5 years or less before group assembling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic or sectarian violence</td>
<td>Evidence of group members or specific communities suffering discriminatory violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic downturn</td>
<td>Significant economic slowdown occurring 5 years or less before group assembling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to clandestine valuable resource</td>
<td>Evidence of a valuable resource is available for capture or plunder by a group (drugs, oil, diamonds, etc. – <em>does not include extortion or drug route control</em>&lt;sup&gt;57&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in ungoverned spaces/Institutional weakness</td>
<td>Evidence of central government not being recognized as leading authority or losing monopoly of force in significant swathes of territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government political repression</td>
<td>Central government has used hard measures to suppress grievances of specific community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign power intervention/occupation</td>
<td>Foreign actor is involved in supporting government action or policy that directly affects group or community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakaway from larger group</td>
<td>The group is a new faction or iteration of a previously established group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislature with opposition parties exists</td>
<td>Legislature in country is elected <em>and</em> there are multiple parties represented (based on codes in “Democracy and Dictatorship Database” by JA Cheibub, J Gandhi, JR Vreeland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy family or clan-based structure/recruitment</td>
<td>Evidence of group originating and organizing around a specific family or clan and continuing recruitment through family ties or marriages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Case Study

**Case Selection and Overview**

The following table lists the 27 selected cases along with their year or years of inception (the time period where context is being considered), the time period(s) of their apex or peak influence, and place of origin.<sup>58</sup> While region and year(s) of origin are easy to discern from the group’s own proclamations or first appearances or activities, year(s) of peak influence is more fuzzy and can be gauged on different dimensions. Taking influence to mean “ability to mobilize human and/or material resources”, there are several metrics by which this can be assumend. For

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<sup>57</sup> While extortion or control of trade or drug routes are substantial sources of influence for many groups, they tend to be harnessed after a group has acquired some amount of influence and mobilized recruits.

<sup>58</sup> Detailed context of emergence for each organization can be found in Appendix C.
both ideological and criminal groups, a valid proxy to follow is the areas under the group’s control or where it primarily operates; this can be taken to mean that the VNSA has mobilized recruits or resources to secure control of an area, and the greater the area it controls, the more it has been able to mobilize and exert influence. In the case of organized crime groups, other metrics are number of militants or recruits, financial strength, or political influence, but these may be hard to approximate and may vary substantially from study to study. Thus, for most transnational crime organizations (TCOs) or DTOs studied here, areas of operation was the most commonly used to gauge influence. For ideological groups, the calculation may be even more direct and available, with fair approximations of militants being given by other research, correlating closely with areas under the group’s control. Ultimately, peaks of influence here are only relative to the group’s entire existence, not to any particular threshold or other comparable groups’ size or influence.

The crime-terror nexus as an academic subject is fairly recent, with the first formal frameworks and theories surrounding it being laid out in the early 2000s. The 27 cases that I use for this study have all been mentioned as prominent examples of crime-terror nexus dynamics repeatedly in crime-terror nexus literature and further details on this selection is provided in the Appendix B. Prominent cases that were left out due to repetition among sub-groups, lack of sufficient data, or balance in number of cases, but that would warrant inclusion in a subsequent iteration are Al Qaeda, EZLN (Mexico), Albanian Mafia, ETA (Basque region), RUF (Sierra Leone), D-Company (India/Pakistan).

Cases shown in red are typically classified as ideology-based (organizations that have a prominent ideology as an organizing principle – all of which are explicitly anti-establishment) whereas those in black are classified as crime-based (organizations that use criminal activities as their primary organizing principle and that do not exude a prominent ideology):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VNSA</th>
<th>Year(s) of Inception</th>
<th>Year(s) of Peak Influence</th>
<th>Country and City/Region of Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISIS</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Iraq, Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinaloa Federation</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>Mexico (Northwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shining Path</td>
<td>Late 1960</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Peru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chechen Mafia</td>
<td>Late 1980s</td>
<td>Mid 1990s</td>
<td>Russia (Soviet Union, Moscow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Familia Michoacana / Knights Templar</td>
<td>1980s (as vigilante group), 2000</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Mexico (Michoacan - Southwest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamaguchi Gumi</td>
<td>1915-1940</td>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>Japan (Kobe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Begin</td>
<td>End</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camorra</td>
<td>~1820</td>
<td>~1943</td>
<td>Italy (Naples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndrangheta</td>
<td>1880s</td>
<td>1960s &amp; 1990s</td>
<td>Italy (Calabria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Shabaab</td>
<td>Early 2000s</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Somalia (East Africa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abu Sayyaf</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1990s - 2016</td>
<td>Philippines (southwest in Jolo, Basilan, Mindanao)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Commando</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Early 1980s</td>
<td>Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, Ihlala Grande)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medellin Cartel</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Colombia (Medellin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Sri Lanka (North and East)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zetas Cartel</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Mexico (Northeast - Tamaulipas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARC</td>
<td>1964-1966</td>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>Colombia (Marquetalia and other rural enclaves, particularly in the South)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicilian Mafia</td>
<td>1870s</td>
<td>1950s, mid-1980s</td>
<td>Italy (Sicily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Mafia (Red Mafia)</td>
<td>1910s (Vory)</td>
<td>~1953, 1991-present</td>
<td>Russia &amp; Soviet Union (Moscow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hezbollah</td>
<td>1982-1985</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Lebanon (south)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provisional Irish Republican Army</td>
<td>Dec 1969</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Ireland (Northern Ireland, Belfast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Uzbekistan (Ferghana Valley)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb</td>
<td>Sep 1998</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Algeria (Northern Algeria, and spread through Sahel)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28
Kurdistan Workers Party 1974-1978 1984-1990s Turkey (southeast Turkey and Northern Iraq)

ELN 1964 1980s Colombia (Santander and other urban enclaves, particularly in the North)

Primeiro Comando Da Capital (PCC) 1993 2001-present Sao Paulo, Brazil (Piranhao Prison)

Categorization

While this study moves away from the traditional categorization of VNSAs as either terrorist or criminal by highlighting that these labels focus on the tactics most employed by each group, the case study and literature in Chapter 1 point to the fact that these tactics are driven by non-state actors’ ability to influence their environment. I posited that the two main avenues to alter the status quo are through either economic or political harness points; in other words, organizations mobilize individuals through material resources or through popular ideological or social movements. When a clandestine organization can advance its influence through resource capture and corruption, political ideology becomes a secondary mobilizing force. However, in groups where opposing the status quo is a viable and effective strategy, ideology may be a more powerful mobilizing force, with crime as a supplementary source. Thus, this study categorizes VNSAs as having two different origin outcomes: ideology-based or organized crime-based. For QCA, I treat the two types as two sides of the same coin, where criminal groups are VNSAs in which ideology does not appear prominently at the origin.

In this case study, ideology-based groups almost invariably espouse an anti-establishment ideology and all have at some point been designated terrorist groups by the U.S. government. This coincides with Jones and Lubicki’s assessment on 648 groups that operated between 1968 and 2006, which found that 35% sought regime change, 27% sought territorial change, 20% sought policy change, 11% sought social revolution, 4% sought status quo maintenance and 4% sought to build an empire.59 In other words, over 80% of these groups sought to upset the status quo directly. Organized crime-based groups may have an underlying ethos or ideology, such as the Chechen mafia’s connection to Chechen separatism, but these appear flexible and secondary to criminal operations. As I explain in Chapter 1, upon reaching prominence through economic influence, many criminal entities instead become enforcers of the status quo.

59 222 groups for RC, 176 for TC, 128 for PC, 24 for E, 74 for SR, and 24 for SQ. (Jones et al. 2008)
Case Study Highlights

While these cases are nuanced and present overlaps between ideological and criminal cases, there are several standout themes that emerge between the two categories. Below is an approximate timeline for each VNSA case with periods highlighted in red as estimated peaks of each organization:

The first noticeable trend is longevity and time to peak. Organized crime groups in this study on average take well over a decade to reach their apex, and this appears closely linked to their longevity. Long-standing Italian mafias, like ‘Ndrangheta or Camorra for example, maintain a high degree of influence in their places of origin well over a hundred years since inception – in late 2019, for example, Italian police arrested more than 330 people including politicians, lawyers, and a local police chief in connection to ‘Ndrangheta60. In several organized crime cases, it is difficult to ascertain a specific time of emergence and length of peaks, especially when groups specialize in infiltrating institutions – in several cases, the group’s influence ebbs and flows.

Ideological groups, perhaps due to their sensationalization and direct opposition to the status quo, reach a noticeable apex much sooner, and many of those remaining appear to have dwindled in influence or have shifted to more discrete strategies or less ambitious goals. Several of these cases have been known to remain dormant and flare up when conditions allow their movement to

60 Povoledo, Elisabetta “Italian Police Arrest Over 300 in Raids on Organized Crime” New York Times 2019
regain influence – this is one of the main concerns with FARC after the 2019 faltering of the peace deal or PIRA in a post-Brexit scenario.

*Crime-based*

Standout features of organized crime groups are flexibility in power structure, development of criminal codes, internal rules and procedures of governance in areas of operation, capitalization of major structural economic and political shifts (particularly post-WWII and post-Cold War) and of challenges exposing the government’s deficiencies and weaknesses (such as environmental disasters), and adeptness at gradually, but often forcibly, infiltrating the political sphere.

Often, criminal groups emerge from gangs that manage to consolidate through the systematic capture of a resource or groups that suffer from targeted marginalization (such as Chechens in Russia), and these groups may develop a complementary ideological motive which they use to justify their activities and expand their recruitment. In many cases, they develop in prisons and slums (such as the Red Commando or PCC), providing valuable social support systems and dispute resolution mechanisms during and after inmates’ time in prison.

In this manner, criminal groups can also be viewed as an alternative source of governance in legal and economic vacuums. During times of high uncertainty or in post-conflict disarray, criminal groups or influential gangs in general have tended to benefit from the lack of stable or reliable governance. These VNSAs’ resilient networks offer alternatives for dispute resolution, security provision, economic aid, among other social services which the government is unable to adequately provide. In several of these cases, they have even become utilized as security forces in service of a weakened or consolidating government.

*Ideology-based*

Ideologies covered in these cases are religious – notably, Islamist - extremism, Marxist left-wing insurgencies, and other ethno-nationalist separatist movements (though these are, for the most part, also of Marxist leanings). Historically, these categories tend to account for most reported acts of terrorism, not including state-sponsored terrorism. While far-right terrorism has risen in importance, GTI reports that “nearly 60% of far-right attacks from 1970 to 2018 were carried out by unaffiliated individuals, compared to under 10% for both far left and separatist terrorist groups.” In other words, though far-right terrorism might indeed have political or influence-building motivation, it has less of an organizational support structure and thus, tends to fall outside the purview of the study of VNSAs.

For insurgent or fundamentally anti-establishment movements, territorial control and extortion appear to be key sources of finance and influence. In several cases, the group develops as a radical wing or offshoot of a more moderate political faction representing a population that

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61 Buscaglia 2015
has faced repression from the government or systemic disenfranchisement. While organized crime tends to extort with the guise of selling protection, ideological groups extort under the guise of being the rightful authority of an area, questioning the legitimacy of the government through ideology. Because their ideological source of influence tends to run contrary to the government, their operations are geared towards weakening or destabilizing governmental influence, and indeed, they may develop incentives for more extreme ideology in certain environments.  

Although violence tends to be prevalent where ideological groups emerge, there appears to be no distinct pattern in which they emerge. In certain cases, it is the group’s challenge to authority which triggers waves of violence, and in others, the group is the result of a protracted conflict in which several factions vie for dominance.

**Commonalities:**

Virtually all studied scenarios involve a high degree of socioeconomic inequality and regional or structural poverty, particularly among the target population. Neither insurgent groups nor organized crime group necessarily developed in periods of economic downturn, and, in fact, some of them capitalized on public resentment of unequal growth during an economic expansion or were able to tap into increased economic activity in gray or black markets. All cases exhibited a widespread perception of corruption which was closely tied to inequality.

World War I, World War II, and especially the Cold War (in particular, Soviet occupation in the Middle East, and concurrent U.S. support for radicals that opposed socialist regimes), played a massive role in the conception of VNSAs throughout the world. Many radical ideological groups sprung up as a backlash to what was perceived as imposition or support of an illegitimate regime by an outside power and were supported by other outside powers as actors in proxy wars during these periods. Their rise frequently preceded a spike in local conflict or government crackdown. Criminal groups, as alternative power structures, stood to profit from the political and economic disarray that followed armed conflict and saw a rise in influence during these periods. Both types of groups, however, have appeared to profit directly or indirectly from smuggling of valuable illegal narcotics or weapons, either by trafficking these products themselves or by controlling production areas or smuggling routes and charging operating fees.

**Qualitative Comparative Analysis**

**Overview of QCA**

To analyze these trends collectively and systematically, I used Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). QCA is a data analysis technique used to determine which logical conclusions a
data support. Pioneered by sociologist Charles Ragin, it uses Boolean methods of logical comparison to represent each case as a combination of causal and outcome conditions. Data are collected for each case and assembled into a results matrix or “truth table” that is analyzed for minimum sufficient patterns or configurations that correspond to a specified outcome\textsuperscript{63} – for this study, the outcome is onset of an ideological or criminal VNSA.

**Constructing the “truth table”:**

Using the conditional factors listed above and the data collected from each case study (detailed information on this collection is provided in Appendix C), I have constructed the truth table that I run through the QCA software developed by Ragin\textsuperscript{64}. The full table is shown below. Each factor is assigned a score of 1 when it is present to a considerable degree and 0 when it is not present or appears only marginally present. Though more granularity for analyzing scores is possible by using “fuzzy” sets, I used binary scoring or “crisp” set for the sake of consistency and simplicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violent Non-State Actor</th>
<th>High political repression</th>
<th>Ethnic or sectarian violence</th>
<th>Recent regime transition (within 5 years of origin)</th>
<th>Economic downturn (within 5 years of origin)</th>
<th>Foreign power interventions/ Occupation</th>
<th>Breakaway from larger group</th>
<th>Widespread Violence/ Insecurity</th>
<th>Weak Central Government / Ungoverned spaces</th>
<th>Access to clandestine resource</th>
<th>Opposition parties in Legislature</th>
<th>Family/clan based structure</th>
<th>Group Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISIS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Shining Path</td>
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<td>Abu Sayyaf</td>
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<td>LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam)</td>
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<td>PIRA (Provisional Irish Republican Army)</td>
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<td>PLA (Kosovo Liberation Army)</td>
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<td>MKM (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan)</td>
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<td>AQMI (Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb)</td>
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<td>KWP (Kurdistan Workers Party)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. QCA Truth Table

Three factors that were found to a considerable degree in all cases and were dropped out of the QCA entirely were high rates of structural or regional poverty, socioeconomic inequality, widespread perception of corruption. This does not mean that these factors do not play an

\textsuperscript{63} Ragin 2014

\textsuperscript{64} fsQCA 3.0 was used for this analysis, but latest editions can be downloaded at www.fsqca.com

33
important role in determining these outcomes, but quite the opposite; they appear so prevalent across cases that there is no meaningful differentiation between the group outcome based on those conditions. Thus, based on data gathered from these cases, all VNSA origin outcomes involve a substantial degree of these factors, regardless of inclination.

**Preliminary results**

There are two concepts that are central to understanding QCA results: consistency and coverage. Ragin describes them as follows:

Consistency refers to the percentage of causal configurations of similar composition which result in the same outcome value. If the consistency of a configuration is low, it is not supported by empirical evidence. Therefore, it should be considered less relevant than other configurations with higher consistency.

Coverage refers to the number of cases for which a configuration is valid. Unlike consistency, the fact that a configuration coverage is low does not imply less relevance. In cases where a result occurs through multiple causal configurations a single configuration could have low coverage but nevertheless be useful to explain a set which causes a particular outcome.  

Two QCA procedures provide a general view on how conditional factors interact in all cases: necessary conditions, which produces consistency and coverage scores, and coincidence, which assesses overlap of two or more sets. Below are the results of these procedures:

**Necessary conditions**

The first takeaway from analyzing necessary conditions is that, on average, the factors examined have higher consistency and higher coverage for ideological groups than for criminal groups. Even when we drop factors that are present across all ideological groups, this is still the case (though the difference is less pronounced).

The most consistent factors for ideological groups are *regime change, high political repression, foreign intervention, ethnic violence* and *economic downturn*. For criminal groups, the most consistent are *economic downturn, weak govt or increase in ungoverned spaces, widespread violence*, and *legislature with opposition parties*. Generally, a consistency score of 0.8 indicates high consistency, which means that the same combination of present or absent factors leads to the same result.

---

65 Ragin 2000
Similarly, factors with highest coverage for ideological groups are *ethnic violence, regime change,* and *political repression.* For criminal groups, these are *family-based structure, access to a clandestine resource* and *weak government or increase in ungoverned spaces:*

**Figure 9. Coverage by Type**

**Coincidence**

This procedure highlights which factors tend to coincide for all outcomes or for either outcome. It can shed light on which factors are most linked to one another. Because many pairs of factors have a high degree of coincidence, I looked at sets of 3 or more factors that have a
relatively high coincidence score. Only two combinations of 3 factors are present in half or more cases: recent regime change, high political repression, and either ethnic/sectarian violence or foreign interference. Several other combinations of 3 factors score above a 0.4, and most of these include the regime change factor or widespread violence. The highest coinciding sets of 4 factors – none of which are present in 40% of cases or higher – tend to also include recent regime change, economic downturn, and high political repression.

**Truth Table Analysis**

The standard analysis in Ragin’s fsQCA software yields three different types of “solutions” for the specified outcome: parsimonious, complex, and intermediate. These solutions differentiate how specific or complex the combination of conditions can be to reach the outcome. The complex solution does not consider counterfactuals or provide any form of minimization, and no assumption is made on logical remainders; therefore, it tends to yield longer and more elaborate solutions. The parsimonious solution is based on simplifying assumptions and uses logical remainders to arrive at a minimized result that determines which factors are most critical; it gives a simple result and helps to identify the *sine qua non* for each outcome (for example, the two-factor combinations AB and AC can be considered subsets of factor A; if both combinations lead to the same outcome, A is considered the critical factor). The intermediate solution relies on theory-driven assumptions to generate more intricate subsets of the parsimonious solutions, but also more simplified supersets of the complex solutions; essentially, it is a mid-point between the parsimonious and complex solutions that relies on the researcher’s specified assumptions. For this exercise, I make no assumptions on whether any factor should be present or absent in prompting the emergence of either type of VNSA, and so, I look only at the parsimonious and complex solutions.

Each solution has a score for raw coverage, unique coverage, and consistency. Raw coverage gives “the proportion of memberships in the outcome explained by each term of the solution.” Unique coverage gives “the proportion of memberships in the outcome explained solely by each individual solution term (memberships that are not covered by other solution terms).” Consistency, as explained previously, provides “the degree to which membership in the solution (the set of solution terms) is a subset of membership in the outcome.” The results are provided in tables 4 and 5 below:

---

66 Ragin 2014
67 Ragin 2014
68 Ragin 2014
### Table 4. Factors that explain Ideological VNSA outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor combinations</th>
<th>Raw Coverage</th>
<th>Unique Coverage</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parsimonious solution for Ideological VNSA - All cases</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethnictviol*regimetrans</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Polrepress*breakaway</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polrepress*regimetrans~clandesres</td>
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<tr>
<td>ethnictviol*legisopp</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polrepress<em>foreignint</em>legisopp</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Complex solution for Ideological VNSA - All cases</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polrepress<em>ethnicviol</em>regimetrans<em>econdown</em>foreignint<del>breakaway*wideviol</del>clandesres*legisopp~family</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polrepress<em>ethnicviol</em>regimetrans<del>econdown*foreignint</del>breakaway<em>wideviol<del>weakgovt</del>clandesres</em>legisopp~family</td>
<td>0.13</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polrepress<em>ethnicviol</em>regimetrans<em>econdown</em>foreignint*wideviol<del>weakgovt</del>clandesres<del>legisopp</del>family</td>
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</tr>
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<td>0.067</td>
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<td>Polrepress<em>ethnicviol</em>regimetrans<em>econdown</em>foreignint<em>breakaway</em><del>wideviol</del>weakgovt<del>clandesres</del>legisopp~family</td>
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<td>0.067</td>
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<td>0.067</td>
<td>0.067</td>
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</table>
The most significant parsimonious solutions appear to confirm what is generally reflected in the case studies of groups with ideological leanings. Several combinations offer consistent solutions with over 50% coverage, but they all appear to involve similar factors: high political repression, a regime transition within 5 years before emergence, foreign interference, and the presence of ethnic or sectarian violence. For example, the first row of the *Ideological VNSA outcome* table shows that 73% of all cases where an ideological VNSA originated included factors of ethnic/sectarian violence and a recent regime transition; the “unique coverage” shows that 0% of ideological VNSA origin are explained solely by these factors, and “consistency” tells us that this solution is always a subset of this outcome. The second row shows that 73% of all cases included political repression and regime transition and foreign intervention as factors.
Factors that also appear prominently are the group being a breakaway faction of a larger group and a lack of valuable clandestine resource.

The complex solutions offering the most coverage also broadly matches the literature but covers less outcomes and can give what appear to be conflicting stories. An ideological VNSA may result amidst a combination of political repression, ethnic violence, a recent regime transition, economic downturn, foreign interference, widespread violence and insecurity, lack of accessible clandestine resource, some political opposition in the legislature, when the group is not a breakaway faction, and when the group is not based on a family structure. A comparable solution uses the same general factors, but economic downturn and ethnic violence are absent, a clandestine resource is present, and there are signs of a weak government. These differences, however, appear too specific to derive any meaningful conclusions.

In the case of criminal organizations - or groups that did not have a strong ideological leaning – parsimonious solutions seemed to be determined largely by absence of certain political factors. For example, the first row of the Criminal VNSA outcome table shows that 75% of cases where a criminal VNSA originated presented an absence of political repression as a factor; no outcomes are uniquely covered by this solution, but this factor is consistently a subset of criminal origin outcome. Absence of political repression, as well as absence of ethnic or sectarian violence and absence of a recent regime transition, or absence of a regime transition as well as a weakened government, or absence of ethnic violence coupled with economic downturn and opposition in the legislature were all solutions that covered most cases.

Again, complex solutions cover significantly less outcomes, but those with most coverage tended to include absence of political repression, absence of ethnic violence, absence of a recent regime transition, economic downturns, absence of foreign intervention, the group surging as a breakaway faction, a weakened government, an available clandestine resource, opposition parties in the legislature, and the group emerging as a family structure.

Exceptional cases:

One of the benefits of QCA as an analytical tool is it allows us to identify exceptional cases for further examination and consider other possible and potentially overlooked causes that may affect case outcomes. This also provides the basis for expanding and refining theory on exceptional circumstances.

Based on the previous QCA results, I looked at cases that appeared to be exceptional to combinations for both ideological and criminal outcomes. Of the 15 ideological cases, all but 3 had at least 4 of 5 factors that appeared common in these groups – political repression, ethnic or sectarian violence, recent regime transition, economic downturn, and foreign power intervention. Additionally, none of these 3 cases showed presence of ethnic or sectarian violence. These cases were Shining Path, FARC, and ELN. Notably, all of these groups were based in Latin America, were emboldened by the global socialist cause during the Cold War, and had fewer religious undertones than the rest.
If these exceptional cases do not have the typical characteristics that would lead to an ideological group, why did they not arise as criminal factions? While there was some evidence of collusion with drug traffickers in all three of these, these groups arose in the midst of a global socialist movement in the 1970s and were ideologically emboldened by elitist governments that had begun to enact globalist policies that disproportionately affected peasant farmers and the poorest regions. In the case of FARC and ELN, the direct involvement of the United States in suppressing left-wing dissidents further inflamed the case and allowed these groups to recruit en masse and expand rapidly.

Removing these cases from the QCA yielded the following results:

**Table 6. Factors that explain Ideological VNSA outcome when removing exceptional cases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor combinations</th>
<th>Raw Coverage</th>
<th>Unique Coverage</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>ethniciviol*regimetrans</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethniciviol*breakaway</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethniciviol*legisopp</td>
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<td>ethniciviol*~weakgovt</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complex solution for Ideological VNSA - With ideological case exceptions</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Polrepress<em>ethniciviol</em>regimetrans<em>~econdown</em>foreignint<em>~breakaway</em>~widemov*~~</td>
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<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.083</td>
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<td>0.083</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Polrepress<em>ethniciviol</em>regimetrans<em>~econdown</em>~foreignint<em>~breakaway</em>~~</td>
<td>0.083</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Upon removing these exceptional cases, the results found in the first round of QCA appear more stark. In particular, ethnic or sectarian violence, recent regime transition, absence of a clandestine resource, political repression, and the group surging as a breakaway faction are
strong predictors of the onset of ideological groups. The presence of opposition parties in the legislature along with the absence of a weak government are also characteristics found in many cases where an ideological movement resulted. Notably, foreign interference no longer appeared in the parsimonious solution.

I repeated this exercise for the criminal cases, dropping three unique cases that stemmed from criminals radicalized in prison. These groups stood out for having a significant ideological undertone despite their inclination towards criminal activities: Chechen Mafia, Red Commando, Primeiro Comando Da Capital. The reasons for these groups not tilting fully towards ideology are several. Because they radicalized in prison, these groups used ideology to organize recruits and push their criminal activities. They did not arise as result of popular mobilization to overturn the government. In all three cases, their attachment to ideology began to wane and they instead established themselves as territorial gangs running profitable schemes.

The results of this QCA were the following:

Table 7. Factors that explain Criminal VNSA outcome when removing exceptional cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor combinations</th>
<th>Raw Coverage</th>
<th>Unique Coverage</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parsimonious solution for Criminal VNSA - With criminal case exceptions</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>~ethnicviol<em>econdown</em>wideviol</td>
<td>0.67</td>
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Once again, dropping the exceptions reaffirmed many of the conclusions drawn from the first round of QCA. Criminal groups are characterized by a lack of “political factors” such as political repression, ethnic violence, or a recent regime transition, and a notable presence of economic...
downturn and widespread violence or insecurity permeating their place of emergence. To a lesser extent, the existence of a clandestine resource, opposition parties in the country’s legislature, a weak government, and a family-based structure of the organization were also predictors of a criminal formations.

Limitations

This analysis has several limitations both with regards to methodology and design. The most important limitation is that the sample selection as well as the QCA design necessitates the researcher’s judgement and may bias the conclusions. I have attempted to mitigate this by using a wide sample, both in number and variety, and by using factors and cases that other prominent studies have used. I also coded all results before running the analysis.

Also, the dichotomous categorization of organizations is an implicit assumption. It is possible that some organizations are more or less criminal or more or less ideological, but this study does not consider those degrees. Furthermore, it only considers cases where a VNSA did emerge, but there may be other positive deviants where similar conditional factors were present but no VNSA successfully emerged.

Another important limitation of this study is omitted variables. Although certain variables tilt towards certain outcomes, no one variable or factor explains each outcome perfectly, as there are several important exceptions. These exceptions may be driven by variables that have not been identified in this study, and thus, do not fully explain the difference between criminal or ideological outcomes. Importantly, this study identified few “inhibitor” variables, or variables that when present, make the case an exception despite its adherence to other predictors. Particularly in the case of criminal organizations, where data lacks specificity, finding reliable estimates for prison populations, weapon availability, or regional rates of inequality, was difficult, but these factors may well have shifted the outcome.

Although this case study of organizations is larger than most studies, the sample size remains relatively small. An even larger sample might provide different conclusions or more nuanced combinations of factors. Also, the choice of factors and their consideration as binary elements has a significant impact in conclusions reached. Because of the breadth of the topic, it is difficult to obtain data across the board for more nuanced factors, and likewise, using a non-binary evaluation of these might be more precise, but also creates more opportunities for inconsistency. Nonetheless, this could be more feasible with a smaller case study. Because this is a broader study with the purpose of determining the most salient differentiating factors that push organizations towards one approach or another, I considered the binary approach informative enough to achieve this.

QCA as a methodology reflects the data collected through the case studies and so, should generally match conclusions reached therein. It should not be viewed as a robustness check on
case study conclusions, but rather as a complementary systemic analysis of key aspects and differences among those cases.

Conclusion

The following chart displays how the factors I considered appeared to generally relate to the onset of each type of group according to the QCA (although I do not show explicit interactions):

**Figure 10. Summary of factors explaining outcomes and overlap**

**Overall results**

The QCA to identify unique factors or combinations of these at the origin of both types of groups yields the following key points:

- At their origin, ideological organizations appear to be triggered by domestic political repression, a recent regime transition, outside foreign intervention (mostly in favor of government), and ethnic or sectarian violence (mostly towards the group they claim to represent). They are often a breakaway militant faction of another group or movement - typically a political entity – that develops arguments for extremism when the government engages in forceful political repression and they tend to lack access to a valuable clandestine resource which may relieve economic pressure felt by the group.

- At their origin, criminal organizations appear to thrive when the government’s legitimacy is not necessarily contested and when no political transition has happened recently, but
when it is ineffective and leaves many spaces poorly governed, when the economy is weak, and when there is access to a valuable clandestine resource. Combinations of factors that lead to criminal organizations tend to exclude items that might ideologically mobilize specific groups or populations against the government: ethnic/sectarian violence, hardline political repression environments, or foreign interventions in favor of the government are all absent factors. Although criminal groups are known to be versatile and opportunistic, they appear to thrive under governments that are ineffective but maintain political control nonetheless.

- Widespread violence or insecurity and political marginalization of specific groups or regions are common conditional factors in the formation of either type of VNSA. These conditions seem to present opportunities of influence for clandestine actors which provide economic or political solutions to the population.
- All cases, regardless of strategic bent, involved significant levels of socioeconomic inequality, state/institutional weakness, and wide perception of corruption and misuse of power. They also tended to have opposition parties to the regime in their legislature, although the extent to which opposition parties can genuinely participate or represent is not measured. It may well be the case that ineffective opposition participation, rather than assuage grievances, may inflame tension further and promote extremist VNSAs influence, and, in particular, militant offshoots of those opposition political actors.

While every case has its nuances and no solution fully explains either category, the findings of this study point to significant systemic factors of each category which may create ideal breeding conditions for VNSAs and shape their incentives and subsequent strategies to build influence. Overall, the key difference in whether an ideological or criminal group emerged was whether factors present were political and directed against a specific community; the presence of these factors may empower ideological extremist movements. These factors were lacking when criminal organizations emerged, and those that tended to be present in criminal cases pointed to environments of generalized fragility and uncertainty in governance and/or economic outlook, but also an absence of targeted political oppression.

The common factors of inequality, institutional weakness, and widespread corruption imply ineffective or grossly imbalanced governance which VNSAs are able to assuage as alternative governance vehicles. These factors can be viewed as constant, underlying conditions that enable VNSA formation and can be used as arguments to garner public cooperation. These factors commonly kickstart the dynamic where VNSAs harness the governance gaps, expand them, and justify their presence further. From a prevention standpoint, addressing these factors is key.

Furthermore, the QCA shows a clear delineation of implicit support or rejection of the status quo to harness and extend this influence, which follows the logic of the theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 1. How these incentives and strategies change over time is a different problem which I will address in Chapter 3.
3. To Coerce or to Coopt: Exploratory Case Study on VNSA Strategic Pivots

All men can see these tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved.
- Sun Tzu, “The Art of War”

Introduction

Having examined the key characteristics that appear tied to VNSA organizing principles at their origin, this chapter will focus on the subsequent pivots of VNSA strategies and identify possible internal or external causes for these shifts. While there are plenty of examples of the crime-terror nexus existing as a converging space of criminal and insurgent activities, no single hypothesis reaches a consensus in explaining why and in what capacity or to what extent this convergence takes place. The goal of this exercise is to more explicitly characterize the nature of VNSA operational pivots and determine what they suggest about the crime-terror nexus as different studies have described it.

Hypotheses on the nature of these pivots range, for example, from the notion that VNSAs’ strategic shifts are mostly a temporary substitution of tactics when encountering heightened pressure,\(^\text{69}\) to the idea that substitution initially occurs as a result of pressure but use of different activities creates a “gateway” into a more permanent strategic realignment as the organization finds new resources, recruitment bases, and incentives to pursue the shift and less possibilities of reverting to its original strategy.\(^\text{70}\) It is also possible that recent macro conditions such as globalization and expansion of the free market have begun to allow opportunities for diversification and, as organizations take advantage of these new opportunities, more malleable all-encompassing VNSAs emerge.\(^\text{71}\) Finally, we cannot discount the possibility that some crime-terror nexus dynamics are always present across the board and their strategic shifts only seem like unique phenomena from the traditional, siloed frames of analysis of crime and terrorism. I expect this deeper study into “rigid” and “flexible” criminal and ideological cases will shed more light on whether these theories are reflected consistently across VNSAs.

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\(^\text{69}\) Supported Hutchinson and O’Malley (2007) and laid out, as a more limited possibility, by Dishman (2001)

\(^\text{70}\) Theoretically laid out by Cronin (2006) in the case of terrorist groups and exemplified by O’Brien’s (2012) study on Abu Sayyaf; also explored by Dishman (2001) as reason for limited cooperation among groups and a decent into ambiguous goals

\(^\text{71}\) Mentioned as a possibility by Makarenko (2001)
In Chapter 2, I explored the underlying conditions that prompted the rise of different types of VNSAs to illustrate how sociopolitical environments might enable distinct VNSA strategies. This laid the groundwork for the common space that criminal and ideological VNSAs share. However, to better understand the reasons for observed strategic overlaps, I now focus on conditions under which these occur. Given how initial VNSA strategies developed, I will examine conditions under which they pivoted and to what degree (from full strategic pivots to operational shifts), and I will evaluate what these shifts imply for VNSA influence. To do so, I will delve into the evolution of four of the 27 selected VNSA cases – ISIS, Shining Path (SP), Sinaloa Cartel, and the Chechen Mafia. I look at the specific type or types of crime-terror nexus dynamic the organization exhibits (in Chapter 1, I identified 5 different types of dynamics: coexistence, activity appropriation, collaboration, fusion, transformation) and analyze how these dynamics came to be and whether they evolved to others.

By explaining how VNSAs’ strategies evolve over time, we can expect to gain a clearer perspective on how and why criminal and insurgent group operate in common strategic spaces, and to discern the incentives that condition their behavior as they move throughout these spaces. I expect this analysis to shed light on underlying reasons for the manifestation of the crime-terror nexus across different cases.

Case Selection Process

In contrast to the analysis conducted in Chapter 2, this study uses only four cases because of the significant depth of analysis that goes into each. The QCA on the conditions of origin required a broader set of cases to observe patterns in a highly varied set of environments. Since this study is concerned with examining specific strategic pivots of each individual VNSA, often consisting of several complex instances in each case, I have opted for more depth and less breadth of cases. While using a wider set of cases would undoubtedly yield more detailed insights, these four cases have been selected to represent both strategically “rigid” and “flexible” or ambiguous cases for both criminal and ideological VNSAs. Apart from these inherent characteristics, I prioritized cases that allowed a richer analysis as they exhibited more nuanced pivots.

In the table below, I elaborate on the reasons for each selection:

<table>
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<th>Case Selection Criteria</th>
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<td><strong>Table 8. Case Selection Criteria</strong></td>
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<th>Ideological</th>
<th>Criminal</th>
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<td><strong>Rigid</strong></td>
<td><strong>Shining Path:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shining Path was an extremist offshoot of a Communist political party which was galvanized by</td>
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<td><strong>Sinaloa Cartel:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Sinaloa Cartel, an offshoot of the Guadalajara Cartel, appeared more disciplined in their focus on crime and</td>
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peasants’ economic grievances in the rural highlands of Peru. The movement that developed was highly dogmatic and revolved around its founder until his capture, upon which two more ideologically flexible offshoots grew. Originally though, Shining Path was ruthless in its pursuit of its ideology and, although often accused of drug trafficking, generally appeared to be careful in its dissociation from criminal activities and focused on control of territory. Another candidate for this category was LTTE.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Flexible</th>
<th>ISIS:</th>
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<td>ISIS is an unconventionally flexible ideological group given its “local” insurgent approach, its extremist appeal, and its transnational criminal face. It is an offshoot of the more dogmatic group, Al Qaeda, and similarly harnessed political grievances and ethnic violence/repression to attain influence in a highly uncertain, war-torn environment (Iraq and Syria). However, in contrast to many insurgencies, ISIS managed to establish itself as uncontested governing authority of a sizeable state through terror and aggressive recruitment, while concurrently expanding its presence abroad by establishing criminal cells to “microfinance the Caliphate”. Although it outwardly retained ideological fervor, several pivots, such as allowing women to fight and targeted use of violence as they developed an implicit favored status with the Mexican government. This allowed them to consolidate and distance themselves from more disruptive and confrontational strategies that other Mexican cartels, such as the Zetas or La Familia, appeared to follow. Other candidates for this category are the present-day Russian Mafia or Yamaguchi Gumi.</td>
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| Chechen Mafia: |
| The Chechen Mafia stood out as a flexible criminal organization because its central organizing principle, rather than profit, was ethnicity and stern defense of Chechen traditional power structures against foreign invasion. Over the years, their close-knit networks would spread to Moscow and become the basis of Chechen organized crime, which in turn supported the Chechen separatist movement led by Dudayev. As the Soviet Union crumbled, the Chechens would expand their criminal network while supporting the separatist movement materially but at a distance. While the Chechen Mafia was fundamentally connected to the Russian state, its natural links to Chechen separatist ideologists tended to be a source of suspicion of motives. Other candidates for this category were Medellin Cartel, Red |
recruiting hardened criminals, signaled its flexibility as an ideological actor. Other candidates for this category were Abu Sayyaf, IMU, and AQIM.

Hypotheses for Crime-Terror Shifts

I have identified five prominent explanations for shifts in VNSA strategy or tactics. Ultimately, these are hypotheses for the motivation behind the crime-terror nexus arising in the first place:

**H1: Temporary substitution** – VNSA changes its strategy or tactics when its core competencies face increased enforcement or pressure and its main source of influence is threatened, but reverts to its original activities as pressure eases. For example, when a criminal organization resorts to certain forms of terrorism if faced with a crackdown but reverts to business-as-usual once pressure eases, or when an ideological group ventures directly into drug trafficking to make up for lost revenue but reinforces ideological focus once it recovers. This hypothesis would be disproven in cases where the substitution is not temporary and varied operations continue.

**H2: “Wag the dog” effect** – substitution of activities leads to a more permanent change in behavior and activities as VNSA acquires new abilities and gains more influence through strategy realignment. In certain ways, this is an extension of the above hypothesis, except that the VNSA maintains the pivot as a new core operation rather than revert to its original operations. This hypothesis would not hold if the VNSA uses crime-terror dynamics temporarily and as a result of a shock, reverting consistently to a core strategy once the shock is weathered.

**H3: Opportunistic diversifying** – Rather than substitute activities, groups continuously diversify strategies and activities because of increased access to other influence-building opportunities that they perceive to strengthen their core competency. Wider systemic changes in sociopolitical factors, such as free trade or globalization, allow for such an expansion. Under this hypothesis, VNSAs appear equally likely to dabble in different operations outside their expected strategy, unprompted by shocks. This hypothesis loses traction if all changes in dynamic are the result of a specific shock and not simply an active effort to diversify by the VNSA.

**H4: Top-down internal shift** – A change in leadership brings about a different organizational approach. Under this hypothesis, the core strategy is entirely dependent on leadership and a different leader may decide to realign the VNSA’s focus altogether. This hypothesis would not hold if changes in dynamic appear to be more a result of external shocks, rather than internal realignments.
**H5: Perception bias** – With regards to some dynamics, such as activity appropriation, coexistence, or alliances, these may be present throughout the life cycle of all or most VNSAs and only *seem* like shifts from the biased standpoint that “criminal” and “terrorist” groups ought to behave in a certain way. If these dynamics are present all along, then a shift has not really occurred, and this hypothesis may provide the best explanation for our perception of a crime-terror nexus emerging.

It is important to note that these hypotheses are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In some cases, they may be sequentially linked or combined, but we are interested in identifying the initial and most significant shocks that appear to *prompt* pivots. For example, increased enforcement of drug smuggling may prompt terrorism, which is a different strategic direction, but the resulting drain in the VNSA’s finances may also push it to diversify and venture into other profit-making activities.

**Elements Considered by Case**

To develop a complete picture of how each case evolved, I have considered several key surrounding elements that may explain the group’s behavior over time. The main elements considered in analyzing each group’s strategic fluctuations are listed below:

- General background of the organization’s rise to prominence (domestic sociopolitical process)
- Relevant international/domestic political context as it affects the organization’s rise or development
- Socioeconomic context at the inception of VNSA
- Size/territorial control/influence variations over time
- Marked shifts in operations
- Truth table scores at origin (origin factors from Ch. 2)
- Crime-terror nexus dynamic(s) exhibited
- Crime-terror nexus hypotheses supported

**Case Studies**

**VNSA: Shining Path (rigid ideological case)**\(^{72}\)

**Year(s) of inception:** Late 1960s  
**Peak year(s):** 1984 – 1992

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\(^{72}\) Main sources used:  
- “Shining Path.” InSight Crime, 2019  
- “Peru Profile - Timeline.” BBC News, BBC, 2018
**Location of inception:** Ayacucho, Peru (Peru Southern Highlands)

**Background of organization’s rise to prominence:**

Peru’s political system had suffered from chronic instability due to a series of military coups since the 1940s. In 1968, a civilian government led by centrist Fernando Belaunde is ousted by General Juan Velasco Alvarado and a populist agrarian reform and several large-scale nationalizations are carried out. In 1975, Velasco is ousted in another military coup and in 1980 Peru once again returns to civilian rule under Belaunde. Although Shining Path emerged as a breakaway faction of the Peruvian Communist Party under the leadership of charismatic Abimael Guzman – a university professor heavily influenced by Maosim – the group remained a relatively dormant and localized movement in Peru’s southern highlands throughout the 1970s.

It is during the 1980 election, amid economic crisis and generalized institutional weakness, that Shining Path begins its militant phase when it challenges the Peruvian government by burning ballots the day before the election in Ayacucho. Guzman followed Maoist strategy and stressed that the popular struggle should emerge from rural areas to gradually overtake urban areas. Peru’s southern highlands, where the group originated and recruited, had been especially affected by poverty, inequality, food insecurity and drought. While military regimes between 1968 and 1980 implemented populist agrarian reforms, they were generally not very beneficial to peasantry in the southern highlands, and Belaunde’s civilian regime’s agricultural policies turned against the peasantry altogether.\(^\text{73}\) This was further aggravated by Belaunde’s trade liberalization policy which hurt many Peruvian farmers.

Among other systemic issues, McClintock cites as key reasons for Ayacucho becoming the point of origin for Shining Path that, “it is the only one of the five southern highland departments that is inaccessible, without a main road from the coast, and has a recognized university.”\(^\text{74}\) She mentions that the combination of economic slowdown, constant disillusionment in the political system, and a relatively isolated but educated peasantry provided ripe conditions for revolt. The departure of traditional political elites from the rural highlands after the agrarian reform led to reduced repressive capacity of the state. As a counterfactual, revolutionary activists of the 1960s were unable to mobilize peasantry effectively, many of which preferred to politically pressure the Belaunde government into more favorable terms.

By 1980, upon agrarian reforms failing to provide tangible benefits to southern highland peasants, political factions that existed to represent workers and peasants were deemed ineffective in promoting the peasantry’s interests. By contrast, Shining Path actually provided the promised benefits and redistribution to its supporters, often by using intimidation and violence and by taxing cocaine traffickers. McClintock states, “To recruits, Sendero has provided offered basic subsistence (probably possible as a result of Sendero’s economic levies on the drug trade).

\(^{73}\) McClintock 1984  
\(^{74}\) McClintock 1984
Sendero’s terrorist actions are also apparently perceived as daring by some Sendero recruits, a disproportionate number of whom are mere adolescents.”

The 1992 capture of Abimael Guzman and the increased embattlement of Sendero strongholds by Fujimori marked the decline of Shining Path. However, there were several other factors that seemed to undermine the cause. Sendero appeared to become less strategic about its attacks and alienated public support, it attempted to reduce agricultural production, was unable to protect its allies from attacks, and their ranks also appeared to become “less disciplined and coordinated, and may have even been infiltrated by ‘pseudo-Sendero’ criminals.”

Guzman’s later appeals for peace talks began a splintering between the group’s moderate and radical elements. Two factions stood out: one led by “Comrade Artemio” based in the Upper Huallaga region in Northern Peru and another led by “Comrade Jose” based in the Apuriac and Ene River Valley (VRAE). However, facing defections, decimation of its leadership structure, increased enforcement pressure, and even pushback from self-defense farmers in communities that had previously supported the movement, Shining Path’s numbers continued to dwindle.

While the Upper Huallaga faction continued to carry out sporadic attacks mostly on police and military throughout the 2000s and 2010s, “Comrade Artemio” was captured in 2012 and declared that the group had been defeated by the Peruvian government and called for a truce. The more powerful VRAE faction has operated independently and has been repudiated by Guzman, who has called them mercenaries. This faction, while purportedly maintaining SP ideological elements, appears to be more closely focused on drug trafficking activities but has not relented in its struggle against the government. The VRAE faction appears to attack as a response to drug seizures, as explained by newspaper La Republica, “Each time troops strike a blow against the drug traffickers, the Shining Path reacts with a counterattack. There is a direct relation between cause and effect.”

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75 McClintock 1984
76 McClintock 1984
77 Another faction based in the Apurimac and Ene River Valley (VRAE) region further south operates independently, is apparently more powerful than Comrade Artemio’s faction, and has been repudiated by Guzman who has labelled them mercenaries; some analysts claim the group operates almost exclusively as a drug trafficking organization. (Stone, Hannah. “Capture of’Artemio' Spells End for Shining Path Faction.” 2017)
78 Stone, Hannah. “Perú’s Rebel Remnants Move Deeper into the Drug Trade.” 2011
International/domestic political context relevant to group’s emergence:

Two international factors played a significant role in the rise of Sendero Luminoso. The first was the Cold War and the U.S. pushback on Marxist insurgencies in Latin America (although Peru appeared to be less of a priority for the U.S). The second is the “War on Drugs” strategy promoted by the U.S. that made drug trafficking a more profitable operation requiring additional protection and secured a profitable role for Shining Path and other militant groups in the 1980s.

In 1987, it was estimated that Shining Path was receiving about $30 million a year from drug trade fees, which was more than what was available to any other political group in Peru. Although coca growers or traders were not sympathetic to the group’s cause, they seemed to need and accept their protection.

This situation was the opposite in 1984 under the Belaunde government, since Belaunde declared the Upper Huallaga an emergency zone and had the military prioritize the fight on SP, even forbidding anti-narcotics operations in the area. Under this situation, coca growers withdrew their support and under some accounts even helped the government locate guerrillas. According to the Andean report in 1985, “The guerrillas retreated and the coca industry in the

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79 From McClintock 1984 estimates:
1980 – 200-300
1983 – 500-3000
1984 - >3000
1984-1992 – 5,000 - 10,000
2008 – 400-700

80 McClintock “The war on drugs: Peruvian case” 1988
Valley boomed”.\textsuperscript{81} Once anti-drug operations resumed, the guerrillas became active. Indeed, McClintock concludes that Shining Path’s preeminence as an insurgent force over others such as MRTA was due to Colombian drug traffickers’ support, who viewed Senderistas as better equipped to provide security and guarantee shipments.\textsuperscript{82}

\textbf{Economic context relevant to group:}

McClintock analyzed the origins of Shining Path and concluded that the emergence of a threat to peasant subsistence was a key factor in peasant revolution, especially when the peasantry places most of the blame upon unjust or neglectful government policies. Shining Path became the first major rural revolutionary movement to emerge after a sweeping agrarian reform, and this may be attributable to the negative effects felt strongly in its region of origin. McClintock explains:

\begin{quote}
In most Latin American countries, the socioeconomic gap between the middle classes and the poor has widened in the last decade, but the living standard of the poor has not declined […] However, in Peru’s southern highlands, where Sendero Luminoso emerges, the living standard had declined in the 1970s; she describes it as, “a region in a Third World country where poverty is at Fourth-World levels […] and by 1983, a year in which Sendero grew considerably, it was even worse.”\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

Why were criminal groups not as common? Although Peruvians had access to a valuable resource in coca leaves (the raw resource needed to produce cocaine), the truly explosive value of this crop was in the refinement and smuggling processes of the crop, both of which were controlled by Colombian traffickers at the time. Colombians were able to exploit these profitable avenues much more so than Bolivians or Peruvians. And although Peruvian peasants earned only 0.5% of the retail value of the final cocaine product, the crop was still considered the main cash crop available. McClintock, however, argues that “the drug industry in Peru is primarily restricted to the cultivation of the raw material by small growers in an isolated part of the country and […] is not as important to Peru’s middle classes as it is to Colombia’s, and it is not as large a share of the national economy as it is in Bolivia.”\textsuperscript{84}

It appears that the U.S.-led War on Drugs strategy resulted in creating a valuable service for protection of the supply chain which Shining Path was ready to fill. McClintock also states that, “the US and Peruvian governments’ anti-drug efforts have cemented an alliance between the coca growers and Sendero Luminoso which between 1986 and 1988 gained control of as much as 90% of the countryside in Peru’s \textit{cocalandia}, the Huallaga Valley. In this way, these activities served a dual purpose of providing revenue to feed SP’s ideological movement while allowing the group to exert authority over large swaths of territory.”\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{81} McClintock 1988
\textsuperscript{82} McClintock 1988
\textsuperscript{83} McClintock 1984
\textsuperscript{84} McClintock 1988
\textsuperscript{85} McClintock 1988
Marked shifts in operations:

During Guzman’s leadership, it appears that the group mostly focused its operations on typical insurgent operations, waging guerrilla warfare on government forces and exacting “revolutionary taxes”. A CFR report says:

Similar to other revolutionary uprisings, Shining Path funded many of its operations through narcotrafficking and forced taxes on small business and individuals in the areas they predominately operated within. At its height Sendero financed itself mainly through drug-trafficking taxes. In return, it gave peasant growers fair prices for coca crops and provided them shelter from violence from traffickers and security forces.\textsuperscript{86}

A March 1985 CIA cable mentioned that, “narcotics control will continue to receive low priority in Lima […] this could change […] particularly if the government suspected that traffickers had entered cooperative agreements with the insurgent Sendero Luminoso. Although SL leader Guzman says he opposes such arrangements, lower level leaders may find them an attractive way to obtain money for guns and operations.”\textsuperscript{87} Shining Path’s general strategy was geared towards disrupting and destabilizing the Peruvian government and destroying its reputation among the peasantry until it could be overturned and a “new democracy” could be installed.

Guzman’s style of leadership was hierarchical and authoritarian, justifying the use of violence for the benefit of the cause, even among communities that supported SP. Initially, violence was directed towards authorities, but later expanded to include wealthy Peruvians and prominent businessmen, culminating in 1992 with the “Tarata bombing”, which targeted an upscale area of Lima. This was, however, one of few “typical” terrorist actions perpetrated by SP. Upon Guzman’s capture in 1992, SP began splintering and its wider support withered.

The two much smaller factions that remain, one in the Upper Huallaga region and the other in the VRAE, have followed different approaches. The Upper Huallaga faction maintained a greater ideological inclination under the leadership of “Comrade Artemio”, following Guzman’s teachings and attacking smaller government targets sporadically while still appearing to capitalize from protection of drug trafficking. Global Security mentions that since 2003, Shining Path members have “formed alliances with coca farmers and drug traffickers in drug-growing areas of the Upper Huallaga and Apurimac valleys to provide armed protection against the government’s interdiction efforts.”\textsuperscript{88} However, Insight Crime mentions that since the 2012 capture of the Huallaga faction leader “Comrade Artemio”, they have distanced themselves from the history of the guerilla and mostly provide protection and escort service for drug traffickers in the VRAEM (Peru’s extremely poor “cocaine valley”) region. According to START, 95% of

\textsuperscript{86} Gregory, CFR, 2009
current Shining Path funding is from drug trafficking. Other methods used include extortion, kidnapping, and robbery, especially bank robberies.

The VRAE faction, which has arguably departed from SP significantly and has earned Guzman’s rebuke, remains influential. It appears to be highly criminalized and targets officials in direct response to drug interdiction efforts, much like DTOs elsewhere. However, the group has not abandoned ideological appeals altogether, as a 400-page document found in 2019 detailing SP’s long-term ambitions laid out: immediate objectives were to intensify attacks on public forces, medium-term objectives were to regain control of former territories, and the long-term goal was to take up arms and overthrow the Peruvian government. Given the focus on its drug operations, it is unclear to what degree these objectives are the driving force behind the group or a means to mobilize recruits and extend its criminal ties.

Crime-Terror Nexus Dynamic Exhibited:

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<tr>
<td>Symbiotic Collaboration</td>
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<td>Strategic Transformation</td>
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*VRAE faction

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<td>Group Type</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypotheses supported:

89 “Shining Path.” InSight Crime, 2019
Shining Path’s case has two clear phases which are largely distinguished by leadership. Guzman set up a highly dogmatic and hierarchical structure which was enforced through heavy ideological elements. As such, ideological purity was paramount in maintaining this structure. While there are certain indications that SP was associated with DTOs, it is less clear whether the organization itself was engaged in drug trafficking or similar criminal activities. For the most part, it appears that until Guzman’s capture, SP did not deviate from the insurgency strategy, even as it lost support and territory.

Upon his capture, the two factions that developed thereafter took different approaches: the VRAE and Comrade Artemio’s faction. Both were more closely tied to drug trafficking operations than its precursor - possibly due to dwindling resources and support - but while Comrade Artemio’s faction maintained the ideological struggle and made efforts to distance himself from the link to drug traffickers, the VRAE faction broke with SP core ideology and explicitly began to work with DTOs. Comrade Artemio’s shows some semblance of opportunistic diversifying (H3), though it is unclear how different this was from the original SP. VRAE however appears to have shifted due to a change in leadership – one which publically broke from Guzman’s ideology – and while still professing some form of ideology, seems to have achieved more success than Comrade Artemio’s faction and has reoriented its strategy towards crime, highlighting a “wag the dog” effect (H2). It is possible that this faction had become criminalized since the beginning and was merely using ideological elements to continue its operations; in this case, this would simply be perception bias (H5), since the offshoot group would have begun as a criminal VNSA.

VNSA: ISIS (flexible ideological case)

Year(s) of inception: 2004 as Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)
Peak Year(s): 2014 as ISIS Caliphate
Location of inception: Iraq/Syria
Background of organization’s rise to prominence:

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or ISIS is commonly considered a terrorist group, but terrorism is only one of the many operational tactics that the group has employed over time. Although it rose up with support from Al Qaeda - which professes Salafi jihadism (“holy war to
return to true Sunni Islam”) – the group significantly departed from its parent organization, both strategically and ideologically. Cronin (2015) laid out some of these key differences:

Terrorist networks, such as al Qaeda, generally have only dozens or hundreds of members, attack civilians, do not hold territory, and cannot directly confront military forces. ISIS, on the other hand, boasts some 30,000 fighters, holds territory in both Iraq and Syria, maintains extensive military capabilities, controls lines of communication, commands infrastructure, funds itself, and engages in sophisticated military operations. If ISIS is purely and simply anything, it is a pseudo-state led by a conventional army.  

While Al Qaeda traces its origins to the Soviet War in Afghanistan as mujahideen fighting Marxist Soviets looking to consolidate Muslim populations, ISIS can most adequately be branded as an insurgent group that sought to consolidate Sunni militants amid their disenfranchisement from Iraqi politics after the US Iraqi invasion in 2003. CFR notes: “Cells organized within [U.S.-run prisons in Iraq], along with remnants of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein’s ousted Arab nationalist Ba’ath party, make up some of the Islamic State’s ranks. Excluded from the Iraqi state since occupying U.S. authorities instituted de-Ba’athification in 2003, they see collaboration with the Islamic state as a way back into power.” The outbreak of the war in Syria in 2011 provided a golden opportunity for expansion as it, “pitted the ruling majority Alawites, a heterodox Shia sect, against a Sunni majority […] and attracted militant Sunnis from across the region to join the jihad against the regime.”

Unlike most VNSAs classified as terrorist and operating under the shadow of other governments, ISIS has managed to occupy and govern territory for a significant period and across state borders – mainly in Iraq and Syria but using Iraq as its primary springboard. There are four distinct periods in its life cycle which have modified its behavior, structure, and operations:

Period 1 (origin) – Oct 2002- Jan 2006

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian who radicalized in prison, develops close ties to Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda and is supported to train extremists throughout Iraq and Jordan and neighboring regions and founds Jama’at al-Tawhid wa’al-Jihad (JTJ) in 1999. In 2004, the group becomes Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) with a focus on expelling US coalition forces from Iraq, preventing a Shiite takeover of the Iraqi government, and unifying Sunni Muslims under a single nation. The main source of recruits are foreign fighters from Jordan, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kurds. By some estimates, recruitment numbers are over 1000. During this period, the group’s terrorism activities are limited, localized, and focused on sending messages to

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91 Cronin, Audrey Kurth. “ISIS Is Not a Terrorist Group.” 2019
94 Mapping Militant Organizations. "The Islamic State." CISAC
Western interventionists and Iraqi forces through publicized beheadings. Most funding allegedly comes from stolen oil resources, foreign supporters, and criminal activities and smuggling. In 2006, al-Zarqawi is killed, prompting a shift in approach.

**Period 2 (decline) – June 2006- December 2011**

Abu Ayub al-Masri, an Egyptian bomb maker with close ties to Al Qaeda leadership, rises to power and installs an Iraqi, Abu Umar al Baghdadi, as the head of the ISI. Al-Masri attempts to present AQI as majority Iraqi to attract locals. Though sectarian violence is animated, Sunni populations begin to cooperate with US-led forces and the group loses momentum as it begins to lose primacy over Sunni-insurgent movements. During this phase, the group relies heavily on outside funding. Masri and Baghdadi are killed in 2010 and US coalition forces withdraw in late 2011 with the group showing signs of decline.

**Period 3 (peak) – 2012-2014**

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi takes control of AQI and is boosted by several factors: the breakout of civil war in Syria, the ineffective governance and lack of inclusiveness of the Iraqi government, and the decreased presence of Western forces. In 2013, Baghdadi moves into Syria and undermines Nusra Front leadership by taking control of most of its forces, causing a rift with Al Qaeda leadership; this gives rise to ISIS. In 2014, it declares itself a caliphate. From 2012 to 2014, ISIS manages to capture a sizeable amount of territory and expand its financial capabilities beyond oil theft. Attacks perpetrated are of military nature or for public intimidation. However, there is a forceful countershock in late 2014 with the beginning of US-led and regionally supported air strikes against the group. 2014 marks the group’s apogee of territorial control and strength with GTI reporting as many as 70,000 ISIS fighters.

**Period 4 (decline) – Late 2015-present**

Late 2015 marks the retreat of ISIS and a precipitous decline back to an aspiring insurgent force rather than a veritable nation-state. Foreign terrorist activity from late 2015 onward, such as the attacks in Paris, Brussels, and Manchester, coincide with appeals for homegrown terror as ISIS begins losing ground. The 2017 GTI report states: “The increase in [terrorist] activity from ISIL also corresponded with the loss of a large proportion of its territory. In 2014, ISIL controlled 40 percent of Iraq. This dropped to an estimated seven percent by the end of 2016”\(^95\) (shown below). While ISIS carried out several successful terrorist attacks in Iraq, these occur as ISIS continues to lose ground; in July 2017 Mosul is liberated and in October 2017, ISIS loses control of its self-declared capital, Raqqa. Since then, several factors worked to the advantage of ISIS, such as the gradual withdrawal of US troops from Syria and the retreat of Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces. However, several others have seem to turned the tide.

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\(^{95}\) GTI 2017
against ISIS more permanently: ISIS does not seem to command the same appeal to Sunnis in Iraq, Turkish forces are more engaged in the fight against ISIS in Syria, and above all, the group has lost its leader and figurehead, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

**Figure 12: ISIS size estimates over time:**

![Graph showing ISIS size estimates over time](image)

**SOURCE:** [CISAC Mapping Militants Database – Islamic State Profile, compilation and range averages of several sources and estimates](#)

**International/domestic political context relevant to group’s emergence:**

In contrast to Al Qaeda which emerged in response to Soviet occupation during the Cold War, ISIS rose to prominence in the context of U.S. occupation in Iraq in 2003. The coupling of Sunni disenfranchisement and U.S.-led coalition support of the pro-Shiite Iraqi government led by Nouri al Maliki, bolstered by swelling extremism in U.S.-run prisons and an effective propaganda machine, made the group’s local strategy very attractive as Cronin states:

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**CISAC and GTI Data:**

October 2001: 2,000-3,000 (Center for Strategic and International Studies) This number is the total population of the JTJ training camp in Herat including family members of JTJ soldiers.

October 2004: A few hundred in JTJ (BBC).

2005: 1,000+, exact number unknown (U.S. Department of State).

2006: 1,000+ (U.S. Department of State).

2007: 5,000-10,000 (U.S. Department of State).

2011: 1,000-2,000 (U.S. Department of State).

2014: 20,000-31,500 (C.I.A.). GTI reports 70,000 at peak – Average of 48,000 used.

2016: 30,000 (U.S. Military via Council of Foreign Relations).

2018: 20,000-30,000 (United Nations Security Council) Pentagon leaders give these estimates low credibility.

2019: 18,000 according to GTI.

March 2019: 29,000 (SDF Officials) This is the number of IS members taken captive after the siege of Baghuz, although more IS members likely fled or assimilated into general population.

April 2019: 4,000-5,000 active militants in Northeast Syria (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights).

June 2019: 14,000-18,000 including both members and fighters (CJTF-OIR). CJTF-OIR defines members as individuals who pledge allegiance to the Islamic State while fighters are individuals who take up arms to actively fight for the organization.

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The United States cannot win the hearts and minds of Iraq’s Sunni Arabs, because the Maliki government has already lost them. The Shiite-dominated Iraqi government has so badly undercut its own political legitimacy that it might be impossible to restore it. Moreover, the United States no longer occupies Iraq. Washington can send in more troops, but it cannot lend legitimacy to a government it no longer controls. ISIS is less an insurgent group fighting against an established government than one party in a conventional civil war between a breakaway territory and a weak central state.97

The breakout of civil war in Syria along with the withdrawal of American troops in 2011 gave ISIS the golden opportunity it required for expansion. By 2014, ISIS controlled strategic cities in both northern Syria and western Iraq, including Raqqa, Fallujah, and Mosul. ISIS’ proclamation of the caliphate and control of territory not only granted the group international legitimacy as an insurgent actor, it provided it with access to wealth beyond that of any other clandestine organization in the form of oil, taxes, agriculture, and other criminal schemes. According to CISAC:

- The IS caliphate peaked in size in late 2014. IS controlled 100,000 square kilometers of territory, which was home to more than 11 million people.67 The funds seized from occupied territories combined with natural resources sales, taxation of local communities, and criminal activities yielded IS an estimated $2 billion in assets.68 In September 2014, experts estimated that IS’s oil revenues alone brought in between $1 million and $2 million per day, making IS the richest terrorist organization in the world.98

With its ideological flexibility, global reach, and control of resources, ISIS became a highly effective recruiter of Muslim extremists – or many other extremists – all over the world. A testament to the attraction of that prospect was the extraordinary number of foreign fighters that flocked to the caliphate when in full bloom – more than any other conflict since 1945.99

**Economic context relevant to group:**

In the lead-up to Saddam Hussein’s removal, Iraq’s economy was in shambles: “Iraq’s GDP retreated from $44.36 billion in 1990 to only $9.48 billion in 1995, before recovering to $23.73 billion in 2000 as a result of the oil-for-food program and the resumption of oil exports in December 1996 […] during the decade 1990-2000, Iraq lost around $170 billion in oil revenues. Additionally, Iraq’s GDP losses amounted to $380 billion. In a nutshell, Iraq’s GDP in the year 2000 was only 47 percent of what it had been in 1980. Iraq’s per capita GDP, which reached a high of $3.985 in 1980, declined to $1.097 in 2000.”100 Moreover, the CIA data on the Iraqi

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98 Mapping Militant Organizations. "The Islamic State." CISAC


economy states: “GDP per capita went from approximately $2304 in 1989 to $938 in 1990. From
1991 until 1996 per capita GDP never rose above $507. During this period income inequality
was a problem as the wealth was concentrated in the hands of Regime loyalists and traders while
most Iraqis subsisted on much less income.”

Marked shifts in operations:

In its initial phase, as JTJ or later AQI under Zarqawi (circa 1999-2006), ISIS primary goals
consisted of unifying Sunni militants against U.S. occupation and U.S.-backed Shia forces and
Iraqi government. They tended to force destabilization by carrying out suicide bombings or
guerrilla tactics against U.S. and coalition forces or by conducting publicized, high-profile
assassinations Iraqi officials or U.S. citizens.

During the second phase, marked by AQI’s decline up until 2012, attacks started to become
more indiscriminate, including reports of chlorine gas on civilians. This caused a rift with central
Al Qaeda command – which continued to stress a minimization of civilian casualties, especially
Muslims, and a focus on the “far enemy” of the West - and leads to the eventual creation of ISIS
as a separate entity with a markedly different approach.

The third phase is marked by an aggressive expansionary strategy, enabled by the removal of
American troops and an unpopular Iraqi government. Baghdadi’s strategy was ushered in by a
“Breaking Walls” campaign to free AQI militants from prison and create a large enough force to
seize territory. Tactics used here were marked by more “conventional” insurgent operations in
war scenario, including guerrilla warfare, bombings, and other small-scale attacks to destabilize
governments and opposing forces. IS takeovers are described as such by CISAC:

As ISIS expanded into a legitimate military force, it developed a “blitzkrieg” style strategy
designed to strike fear into opposing armies and quickly seize territory. IS siege operations began
with mortar strikes against enemy fortifications, followed by the rapid advancement of columns
of pickup trucks mounted with machine guns and heavy weaponry. Small groups of infantry
would then close in on urban areas and use the atmosphere of panic and surprise to overrun the
town. Iraqi army troops often deserted and fled cities before ISIS even arrived. The group
transitioned to more complex military strategies as it captured larger swaths of territory,
developing a mortar production initiative and a drone program.

Upon takeover, ISIS relied on captured resources and weaponry to continue its expansion. It
also occupied local governments, leaving key officials in place to expand upon these institutions
and extort millions. In other words, ISIS began conducting standard nation-building operations
typical of successful insurgencies.

With regards to terrorism, ISIS appeared to conduct most of its attacks (roughly 97% according to GTI) in the MENA region. Because ISIS is considered a “terrorist” organization, it

102 Mapping Militant Organizations. "The Islamic State." CISAC
is difficult to disentangle how many of these were acts of war or indiscriminate violence against civilians. Regarding terrorist attacks on Western powers, a 2017 study by the University of Maryland stated, “Senior U.S. counterterrorism officials said the latest attacks fit a pattern in which the group adapted to significant battlefield setbacks in Syria and Iraq, where its control of territory peaked in August 2014, by intensifying calls for attacks by individuals or small groups using whatever means possible.”

For example, in September 2014, a month after President Obama announced airstrikes on ISIS, spokesman Abu Muhammad al Adnani called for attacks on citizens of United States, France, and other coalition countries; the group began broadcasting the beheadings of captured Western journalists and aid workers. In June and July 2015, the group called for escalation of attacks abroad and included Russia, which had begun to plan airstrikes on ISIS along with the US. While the caliphate kept expanding, it appears that ISIS calls to arms were heeded. University of Maryland’s START 2017 Global Terrorism report mentioned that, “since the call to directly target many OECD countries by an ISIL spokesperson on 22 September 2014, there has been a substantial increase in terrorism in these countries.”

The upsurge of ISIS-conducted or ISIS-inspired attacks abroad, especially those aimed at the protagonists of Western interference, appeared directly linked to the group’s territorial advances or setbacks throughout the years.

There is no clear distinction between terrorism and crime use by ISIS. As Harmonie Toros argued, much of these distinctions rest on the understanding of politics that is adopted. How ISIS fluctuated in its use of organized crime tactics is especially difficult to assess for two reasons: 1) criminal operations are designed to go undetected so they become harder to assign to a particular group (many extremist groups were laundering money or smuggling people or weapons for their causes), and 2) as Toros mentions, what is considered crime is relative to the political power structure; for example, ISIS seizing oil or levying taxes on businesses or inhabitants of conquered territories was considered legitimate by the group as the leading authority, but considered thievery or extortion by ISIS opponents and by the global community who did not recognize it as a state.

Indeed, from the outside perspective, criminal behavior has been a constant since ISIS’ inception. According to Christina Schori Lang from the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, “IS had already exercised a criminal hold on Mosul long before seizing it. IS members acted like ‘mafias managing organized crime and controlling all economic resources of the province’, according to an Iraqi parliamentary inquiry into what led to the city’s fall.”

In other words, ISIS connections to the radicalized criminal underworld of Iraq and control of economic

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resources parallels the traditional, mafia-like forms of operation of criminal organizations elsewhere.

However, considering criminal operations outside ISIS-controlled territories, it appears that the group was able to expand on criminal ventures or connections to criminal organizations - particularly in Turkey\textsuperscript{107} - as it increased its influence via territorial control. Activities such as drug or human smuggling, forging, or stealing from non-believers started to be encouraged to “micro-finance the caliphate”, especially as its interests in the Middle East came under threat. However, evidence exists of former criminals converting to jihadism from the beginning of ISIS\textsuperscript{108}. The recruitment of former criminals and use of their expertise and connections was an important element in the establishment of the caliphate. There is some evidence from German police data that “politically motivated crime” occurred more frequently during radicalization than before their engagement with extremism\textsuperscript{109}, signaling that these criminals were genuinely carrying out crime for the insurgent cause rather than their own enrichment.

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\textsuperscript{107} Giglio, Mike. “How ISIS Members Fled The Caliphate, Perhaps To Fight Another Day.” 2017
Hypotheses supported:
The case of ISIS seems to be consistent with two hypotheses with regards to the crime-terror nexus: opportunistic diversifying (H3) and perception bias (H5). However, there is some evidence to suggest that its criminal cells in Europe may fall into a “wag the dog” effect (H2). As one of the most propagandized and successful insurgencies of recent times, ISIS terror tactics received most attention from the West. However, while ISIS made significant use of terrorism to achieve its expansionary goals, its criminal endeavors were in some form present all along. Recruitment was carried out in both European and Middle East prisons and smuggling and extortion were common activities that the group used to expand in Iraq. Founder al-Zarqawi himself had been a petty criminal for much of his life and spent ample time in prison, where he formed connections with other extremists.

ISIS’ more ambitious foray into organizing criminal networks in Europe began during its second and most successful phase as a caliphate under al Baghdadi. At this phase, it appears that ISIS saw the opportunity of using its propaganda arm to tout its string of expansionary success and empower criminals abroad – in Europe especially – to contribute to the insurgency. The promise of resources and power was alluring for potential recruits, and ISIS continued to motivate supporters in Europe to carry out attacks and to engage in criminal activities to help the cause at home. Thus, it appears ISIS operations were not as much a complete shift of strategy, but an opportunistic diversifying of activities it could use to propel its core strategy. It is unclear to what degree these criminal networks that ISIS ostensibly fed are still operating today and, if they are, whether or not they maintain the same motivations or direction. However, it likely that groups that were previously mobilized by ISIS and motivated by its territorial gains are now turning full-time towards criminal activities.

VNSA: Sinaloa Cartel (rigid organized crime case)¹¹⁰

Year(s) of inception: ~Late 1980s
Year(s) of apex: 2000s
Location of inception: Sinaloa/Jalisco/Northwest Mexico
Background of organization’s rise to prominence:

¹¹⁰Main sources used:
- Gutierrez, Juan Fernando “Sinaloa Cartel” Insight Crime, 2019
- “Timeline: Key Events in U.S. War on Drugs in Latin America” Reuters, 2010
- Bustamante, Jesus, “Sinaloa, La Cuna de Narcos…” 2019
The precursor to the Sinaloa Cartel was the Guadalajara Cartel, led by Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, AKA The Godfather, a former Mexican federal judicial police and family bodyguard for the governor of Sinaloa. The Guadalajara cartel was rooted in Sinaloa where much of the marijuana destined for U.S. consumption was grown. Sinaloa had been home to opium poppy fields for over a century and poor farmers would see opium plantations as a viable way of escaping extreme poverty. Upon Operation Condor in 1975 - a U.S.-led program of opium poppy and marijuana field eradication in Mexico’s golden triangle region (encompassing the states of Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and Durango) - Felix Gallardo relocated operations to Guadalajara and began to spread his organization’s reach further south.¹¹¹

Felix Gallardo was instrumental in weaving the modern network of Mexican drug trafficking organizations and connecting with Colombian cartels – including Pablo Escobar of the Medellin cartel - to set up trafficking routes through Mexico as an alternative to the Caribbean routes which had been shut down by US law enforcement in 1985. Access to cocaine trafficking allowed Mexican DTOs to expand dramatically from that point onwards, taking the role of wholesalers rather than couriers. By the end of the 1980s, the Guadalajara cartel established a corruption network and *pax mafiosa* that secured it a near monopoly on drug traffic in Mexico.

In 1989 however, Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo is arrested and gradually loses control over the industry. Felix Gallardo’s division of routes among associates laid the foundation for what were to become Mexico’s largest and most powerful cartels: the Tijuana cartel, the Juarez cartel, and the Sinaloa cartel – this last one in turn developed an alliance with the Beltran Leyva brothers who controlled the Sonoran crossings into Arizona.

Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman Loera, an ambitious young trafficker, headed the Sinaloa Cartel, and although he was arrested in 1993, he continued his control over cartel operations from prison, managing later to escape in 2001. There have been several allegations that the Mexican government and the DEA had unofficially sided with the Sinaloa cartel over its competitors.¹¹² This arrangement allegedly led to the takedown of Sinaloa Cartel’s most notorious rivals, the Tijuana and the Juarez cartel, allowing Guzman to consolidate control of the industry under the Sinaloa Federation group.¹¹³

While the organization’s peak came later into the shake-up, in Sinaloa and neighboring areas, its diverse activities have also become a focal point of economic activity. Proceso reported that, “In 2001, former governor Juan S. Millan recognized that it was an understatement to say that 62% of the Sinaloan economy was permeated by drug activity.” In a study of 5 municipalities of

¹¹¹ The Felix Gallardo Organization (Guadalajara OCG), Wilson Center
¹¹² Rama, “Mexico’s Sinaloa Gang Grows Empire, Defies Crackdown” 2011
¹¹³ Rama, “Mexico’s Sinaloa Gang Grows Empire, Defies Crackdown” 2011
Sinaloa, roughly 8% of state wealth generated in 2012 could not be explained and was directly attributable to drug trafficking.\textsuperscript{114}

Guzman proved adept not only at using violence but at anticipating the trends of the drug industry and developing complex logistics. For example, when the war in Afghanistan slowed opium poppy supply, Sinaloa expanded poppy fields to fulfill demand. When U.S. consumption of cocaine dwindled, the cartel shifted operations towards Europe and Asia while new synthetic drugs were introduced for U.S. markets. The Sinaloa Cartel’s alliances with local gangs in Central America and the U.S. were also strengths for moving its products. Beyond Sinaloa, U.S. authorities have claimed that the cartel has managed to establish a presence in over 50 countries.\textsuperscript{115} As violence intensified in the mid-2000s, the Sinaloa Cartel purportedly began to recruit highly trained ex-military or ex-FARC members in their own paramilitary wing called “Los Negros” to combat the Gulf Cartel and their paramilitary wing, the Zetas.\textsuperscript{116}

However, the most important factor in the Sinaloa cartel’s success has been Guzman’s use of Felix Gallardo’s method of pay-offs to local and federal authorities to ensure smooth operations\textsuperscript{117}: “The Sinaloa Cartel seems to have taken its cue from Colombia’s Cali Cartel by establishing strong connections to Mexico’s political and economic elite. It has successfully penetrated government and security forces wherever it operates. It often opts for the bribe over the bullet and alliances over fighting, but it is not above organizing its forces to overrun areas that it wants to control by force.”\textsuperscript{118}

Guzman was arrested once again in 2014 only to escape a year later in dubious circumstances, evidencing the Mexican state’s glaring deficiencies in security and corruption. Finally, he was recaptured in 2016 and extradited to the U.S., leaving a power vacuum in the Sinaloa organization which has purportedly been filled by his sons despite ensuing divisions of former allies. Despite the fragmentation that has followed, Sinaloa cartel’s firepower and level of infiltration in society came to full light when, in 2019, Chapo Guzman’s son Ovidio Guzman and heir apparent to his throne was captured by Mexican security forces. Almost immediately, over 700 cartel members with high caliber weapons were mobilized across Culiacan in a show of force which compelled the government to release Ovidio Guzman to avoid armed confrontation.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{114} Dávila, Patricia. “La Droga, Riqueza De Sinaloa.” Proceso, 9 Mar. 2014
\textsuperscript{115} Nájar, Alberto. “Los Secretos De La Expansión Del Cartel De Sinaloa.” BBC News Mundo, BBC, 26 Feb. 2014. See also: Gutierrez, Juan Fernando “Sinaloa Cartel” Insight Crime, 2019
\textsuperscript{116} “Narcotraficantes Mexicanos Reclutan Terroristas Colombianos y Miembros De Las ‘Maras’ Centroamericanas.” Libertad Digital, LD Agencias, 4 Aug. 2005
\textsuperscript{117} Najar, “Los Secretos de la Expansión…” BBC 2014
\textsuperscript{118} Lee et al. “Mexico’s Drug War” CFR 2019
\textsuperscript{119} Monroy, Jorge. “Sinaloa - Y La Entidad, Con Al Menos 8,000 Soldados, Policias y De La GN.” El Economista Oct 2019
By some accounts, the Sinaloa Cartel’s influence has dwindled and confined to northwestern states in more recent years. When President Calderon’s administration ended in 2012, Sinaloa began to lose its privileged status as the “preferred” cartel. A sign of this change of strategy was Chapo Guzman’s arrest in 2014 and swift extradition to the U.S. in early 2017. This left the Sinaloa Cartel weakened and its territory open to encroachment by other rising groups from the Southwest and Northeast.

**International/domestic political context relevant to group’s emergence:**

The largest outside actor in Mexico’s drug war dynamics is the United States. Both domestic and international enforcement policies have shaped the drug trafficking industry in Latin America. While U.S. foreign policy seemed to prioritize the battle against left-wing insurgencies in Latin America during the Cold War (1960s and 1970s) - indeed often enlisting the services of organized crime groups to this effect - by the 1980s drug trafficking organizations had become a significant threat. Although President Nixon ordered the creation of the DEA and declared a “War on Drugs”, it was not until the 1980s under President Reagan during the crack epidemic that the “War on Drugs” went into overdrive and the DEA started taking a more prominent role. In the mid-1980s, two significant events prompt Mexican drug traffickers to become targets of U.S. enforcement: the first, the expanded role of the Guadalajara cartel in moving drugs across the border following the success of the South Florida task force in restricting Miami as a primary

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120 Kelley, Michael B. “How Drug Cartels Conquered Mexico [MAPS].” Business Insider, Business Insider, 15 Nov. 2012
entry point, and the second, is the assassination of DEA agent Kiki Camarena, allegedly by the Guadalajara Cartel. These factors prompted a crackdown that eventually led to the imprisonment of kingpin Felix Gallardo and the breakup of the Guadalajara Cartel into smaller competing factions. Thereafter, the U.S. continued to pressure Mexican authorities to pursue a “decapitation” strategy which has led to similar dynamics of drug organizations’ fragmentation or replacement.

Domestically, the Mexican political sphere has undergone significant shocks since the 1980s. The 1980s marked the beginning of the end the 70-year long Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) regime as it started to lose its first grip on power throughout the country. It was typically believed that the PRI itself was organized like a pyramid, propped up by pay-to-play arrangements. The drug industry seemed to be no exception, and Felix Gallardo managed to capitalize on this corruption and plugged his organization into the PRI’s dynamic. However, even the PRI could not ensure cartel stability when outside pressure created instability in the industry through fragmentation of groups. As the PRI lost power, it also became less capable of enforcing agreements, which led to more pronounced violence by cartels looking to seize control of competitors’ turf. This was exacerbated in the 2000s when the PRI lost its monopoly of the presidency to the National Action Party (PAN) and several shakeups appeared to weaken long-standing groups, such as the Gulf Cartel which fragmented upon the capture of its leader Osiel Cardenas. Finally, in 2006, the “War on Drugs” became the centerpiece of newly-elected president Felipe Calderon and the country became ensnared in violence. By several accounts, Calderon’s party, the PAN, favored the Sinaloa cartel to take over the industry as it purportedly was viewed as the less violent option. While Calderon denied this, pointing to the capture of prominent Sinaloa cartel members, the data has shown that the Sinaloa cartel suffered relatively far less arrests than other groups.121

**Economic context relevant to group:**

Mexico enjoyed a “golden era” from 1950 to 1970 where GDP grew at an average of 3-4% annually and was marked by macroeconomic stability and modernization of industry. This ended abruptly by the mid-1970s with a prolonged recession in 1976, and finally, with a period of drastic decline with a series of severe economic crises from 1982 to 1995 marked by high inflation and wide austerity measures. Apart from increases in extreme and moderate poverty, economic adjustments in the 1980s brought about unambiguous spikes in inequality, particularly among urban and rural settings. An economic study of these years found that, “income distribution between 1984 and 1989 became more unequal and remained practically the same between 1989 and 1994. Between 1984 and 1989, extreme and moderate poverty increased.

121 Burnett, John, et al. “Mexico Seems To Favor Sinaloa Cartel In Drug War.” NPR, NPR, 20 May 2010
Between 1989 and 1994 both remained practically unchanged, and extreme poverty may have decreased very slightly.”122

In areas like Sinaloa, where agriculture represented a key part of the state’s economy, market liberalization came at a high cost and the area lagged behind most other Mexican states.123 Many higher-educated Sinaloans emigrated to other states where production grew under Mexico’s export-led model while the poorer stayed behind. Since the 1980s, the state has suffered from a net loss of population.

Nery Cordova, who writes on Narcoculture, mentions, “the support systems and the channels of distribution that the Mexican state has make life difficult and it seems that locals have no options but [trafficking]. The problem has expanded to the cities, where thousands of marginalized youths, with no education or resources, look for something to get by and are incorporated into delinquency. The economic system continues hurting large swaths of the population.”124

Marked shifts in operations:
The Sinaloa cartel has remained largely consistent in its overall strategy throughout its lifetime. It used violence in the context of the drug war primarily in turf battles against the Juarez Cartel and the Gulf Cartel, enlisting local gangs such as “Gente Nueva” or paramilitary units such as “Los Negros” to battle experienced criminals or rivals’ paramilitary wings. However, at its core, likely because it has been able to make effective use of corruption to exercise influence, it has largely avoided insurgent-like tactics, such as terrorism.

However, the most important threat to the state and show of force - the full extent of which remains to be seen - happened recently in 2019 when the city of Culiacan was overrun by cartel gunmen to pressure the release of Ovidio Guzman. There are several factors that influence this direct threat. Internally, the capture and extradition of Chapo Guzman at the tail-end of President Enrique Peña Nieto’s tenure caused a reshuffle of the group’s structure and alliances; it seems apparent, however, that a critical mass of the Sinaloa cartel remained under the control of Guzman’s sons, namely Ovidio Guzman. Mexico’s change in leadership and ruling party to Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has added a layer of uncertainty as the security strategy of the incoming government begins to be implemented. Lopez Obrador has sent mixed messages but has continued a discourse of social advancement over armed confrontation to undermine cartels – this despite his government’s armed mobilization into Sinaloa which later conceded to the Sinaloa Cartel’s demand to release Ovidio Guzman.

124 Córdova Solís, Nery. "La narcocultura: poder, realidad, iconografía y" mito"." 2012
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Hypotheses supported:
The Sinaloa Cartel has been quite consistent in keeping within criminal boundaries. Although it has made use of violence to defend its turf from encroachment and to spread into neighbors’ territories – even escalating intensity on par with its rivals - it appears to be more strategic in its use of violence so as to not attract government reaction. Only recently, as it has begun to face increased embattlement by the government, has it begun to threaten more direct violence in response to state actions. Given this behavior, temporary substitution (H1) appears to be the hypothesis that best explains Sinaloa Cartel’s moderate shifts (though none have been significantly manifested).

VNSA: Chechen Mafia (flexible organized crime case)\(^{125}\)

Year(s) of inception: Late 1980s

\(^{125}\) Main sources used:
- Galeotti, Mark “Brotherhoods…” 2002
- Ross, Thomas, “Wolves in wolves’ clothing…” 2011
Background of organization’s rise to prominence:

Few organized crime groups have forged as fearful a reputation as the Chechen Mafia, known in the criminal underworld for their brutality and resilience. Although the most well-known and prominent Chechen gang alliance is based in Moscow and was founded by Nikolai Suleymanov in the late 1980s, the development of these flexible and effective quasi-nationalist criminal networks can be traced decades back to Chechnya’s troubled history with Russia.

The Caucasus region was conquered by the Russian Empire through widespread massacre and deportation in the 19th century. Consequently, the Chechens fervently resisted Russian authority and constantly rebelled at the first sign of Russian weakness or distraction. As a result of the continual struggle against Russian domination, Chechen culture became deeply ingrained by “righteous banditry” and resistance activities.

The first success of Chechen resistance came upon the fall of the tsarist regime in 1918 when the Republic of the North Caucas Federation was formed. However, the success was short-lived, and the Caucasuses were taken over once again by the Red Army in 1922. In 1929, the Chechens rose up against Stalinist collectivization and while the Soviets were able to manage uprisings, the Chechens carried out sporadic assassinations and sabotage. In 1944, fearing the Chechens might support the Germans as they moved into the region to constrain Soviet oil supplies, Stalin scattered the entire Chechen population of 450,000 across Siberia and Central Asia. Over 70,000 Chechens died in this episode and it further cemented an enduring legacy of contempt and rejection of the Russian government. When Chechens were allowed to return in 1957, they found their lands settled by Russians and other peoples and were paired with Ingushetians in a new Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic.

This history of repression and external pressure from the Russian empire combined with a traditional rural economy shaped the complex and interlocking networks that underlie Chechen society and identity: clan or teip, regional, and personal allegiance superseded the state as the mechanism of order and authority. Mark Galeotti explains:

The process of Chechen ‘state building’ was, after all, hijacked by the tsarist Russian invasion and occupation of the 19th century, and since the institutions of central authority were seen essentially as tools of foreign occupation. Leaders might be sought or accepted, around whom to unite in a time of crisis, but theirs was a temporary and conditional authority, subject to the will of the clans, sometimes expressed through larger unions of teips known as tukhums….The traditional kinship structures form flexible and inclusive networks, able to operate across geographic and even ethnic boundaries, bound by common identities and a shared moral code and able and willing to incorporate outsiders able to ‘buy into’ that code and identity. This became a key asset both in their resistance struggle against Moscow and also in their organized criminality.\(^\text{126}\)

\(^{126}\) Galeotti 2002
The shared traumatic history cemented the role of the criminal subculture, often called the Chechensvkaia Bratva or Chechen Brotherhood, which embraced the figure of the abrek, or honorable outlaw, whose criminality is driven by righteous vendetta or refusal the yield to the corruption of the powerful oppressor. Over time, with a sizeable diaspora beyond the Caucuses, Chechen organized crime outgrew Chechnya and Chechens ran several of Moscow’s most powerful gangs, all loosely connected and making use of the fearsome Chechen criminal brand. Galoetti mentions that, “under the infamous ‘Khoza’ (whose real name was Nikolai Suleymanov), the Chechens had been the most active and possibly even most powerful gang alliance in Moscow following a turf war in 1988–89. Even after Khoza’s death in 1994 and a renewed turf war against slavic gangs (most notably the Solntsevo, Lyubertsy and Balashikha groupings), they were still a formidable force.”

In 1991, as the Soviet Union collapsed, Chechens overwhelmingly supported the independence platform and mafia-linked candidate Dzhokar Dudayev in the local presidential election. Despite Russian president Boris Yeltsin’s prompt to former Soviet states to “take as much as freedom as you can swallow”, Russia continued to pressure the Chechens back into the federation, and Chechens’ enduring support of Dudayev led to the First Chechen War in 1994-1996 and the Second Chechen War in 1999, ending officially in 2009.

Despite the cultural connection, the Moscow-based Chechen Mafia did not unequivocally back the independence or the Islamist movement in Chechnya. Galeotti expands on this tenuous relationship:

Many Chechens returned to fight for their homeland or supplied money or weapons, but the actual criminal organizations did not. To an extent, this may have been out of fear of Moscow, but largely reflected the fact that they had divorced themselves from their old land. Instead, they were living well in Russia, with no more than a sentimental attachment to Chechnya itself. Indeed, if anything they were opposed to Chechen independence, which might have led to the end of their lucrative operations in Russia.

Supporting government functions also seemed antithetical to Chechen gangs, which had established themselves as enforcers for the criminal underworld and mostly steered clear of governmental involvement. “Khoza” himself described the division of criminal networks in Moscow and mobilization in Chechnya as the “two Chechnyas.”

Furthermore, among those connected to the Chechen Mafia with clearer political proclivities, criminality seemed to eclipse ideology. Dudayev’s own connections to criminality led to generalized chaos and corruption when it came to governance, and he was viewed by many as an opportunist, much like criminal gangs that supported him. The dynamics and decentralized nature of Chechen criminal groups permeated and weakened Dudayev’s government, and

127 Galeotti 2002
128 Galeotti 2002
favoritism, corruption, nepotism, clientelism and localism flourished, and in many cases power remained in the hands of the teips, albeit given official sanction – Dudayev was in this respect simply another of Chechnya’s tradition of figurehead leaders.”

Clans then managed to turn their clandestine enforcers into state enforcement officers responsible to their elders or teips. This type of criminalized government had been reinforced by past dynamics, where “Violence and resistance [had] established a scenario where tribal and supra-tribal structures that resisted Russian and Soviet control were deemed, by default criminal. In this way, organic Chechen government structures assumed a decidedly criminal nature, one that would eventually lead to a merger with powerful Chechen organized crime elements.”

Despite Russians claims often lumping Chechen groups together as acting in unison, the extent to which Chechen criminal networks and separatist or Islamist movements are linked appear limited to certain instances and conditions. Although they share a common heritage and operating environment, each group’s interests upon reaching influence began to diverge and thus, their cooperation was constrained. Examples of this have been observed when Chechen godfathers in Russia rejected Dudayev’s overtures or when Al Qaeda needed to find alternate means of smuggling weapons into Chechnya rather than the Chechen Mafia, or in the case of independent Chechen guerilla leader Ruslan Gelayev who was involved in drug smuggling but also reportedly aided the CIA by apprehending al-Qaeda agents in the region. However, though Islamist and nationalist networks are distinct from the criminal, there are many opportunities for these networks to interconnect and expand when their incentives align, and there are plenty of individuals or groups like Khozh-Ahmed Noukhayev – a Moscow university student dedicated to Chechen independence that became an enforcer for the Chechen Mafia – or Dudayev himself, that operate at these intersection points.

Under Putin, the Chechen mafia operating in Moscow aligned far more closely with his new order and appear to have prospered because of it. Despite certain fears that Putin would crack down, “he was simply offering (imposing) a new social contract with the underworld. Word went out that gangsters could continue to be gangsters without fearing the kind of systematic crack-down they had feared – but only so long as they understood the state was the biggest gang in town and they did nothing to directly challenge it. The underworld complied […] Connections between these groups and the state security apparatus grew, and the two became closer to each other.”

Chechen gangs adapted to Putin’s rule and would even become instrumental in solidifying Ramzan Kadyrov’s pro-Moscow government in Chechnya.

Size estimates over time:

130 Ross 2011
131 Ross 2011
132 Curtis 2002
133 Galeotti, Mark. Crimintern: How the Kremlin Uses Russia's Criminal Networks in Europe 2017
No clear estimates of the Chechen Mafia exist over time. The focus of Chechen operations remains in Moscow and across Russia. Before the fall of the Soviet Union and during the 1990s, the Chechen mafia had a heavy presence in areas where Chechens had been resettled, in Siberia and the Far East. Former Soviet Eurasia such as Georgia and Kazakhstan also keep a heavy presence of Chechen gangs. However, over the past two decades, the Chechen Mafia has expanded its reach to Western Europe and even the U.S. A report by Mark Galeotti says that, “Chechen gangs operate in the Baltic states, Germany (especially Frankfurt and Hamburg), the Low countries and south-eastern Europe. In May 2008, a gang made up mainly of Chechens was disbanded in Bulgaria […] The Chechen community in Turkey is also being transformed by an influx of newcomers with greater ambitions and ample funds, who are beginning to engage in heroin trafficking and money laundering.”\(^{134}\)

However, Galeotti also points out that the Chechen mafia has tended to stick to its core specialty as the “protection racketeers’ protection racketeer” through the use or threat of violence. This means that while it has a larger presence, it has not grown exponentially.

**International/domestic political context relevant to group’s emergence:**

Chechen gangs appeared to be expanding throughout the 1980s as the decay of the Soviet state provided opportunities for criminal enterprises to flourish. Ross describes the environment as one characterized by, “an ever-decreasing supply of consumer goods, [in which] enterprising organizations contributed to a growing grey and black economy. [As] money played a minor role within this economic structure, those organizations that could facilitate the acquisition and transportation of tangible commodities gained prominence. The Chechens were one such group.”\(^{135}\) The total collapse of the Soviet Union only reinforced the role of criminal organizations as alternative governance and economic actors, and as states like Chechnya scrambled to exercise independence, many communities and local or aspiring governments enlisted the cooperation of these groups.

Furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet Union had an added benefit for Chechens: “classic” criminal groups that competed with them, such as Solntsevo, lost influence as their long-standing connections in the government eroded and the government became unable to protect their interests. A study by Roustam Kaliyev in 2002 mentions that, “in the 1990s, the ‘market share’ and influence of traditional, Russia-based criminal organizations in activities such as narcotics and trafficking diminished in all of the former Soviet Union.”\(^{136}\)

According to Curtis, as a result of the shakeup and the opening of Russia’s economy in the 1990s, “new businesses and reconstituted government agencies staked out parts of criminal markets, and protection payments became a lucrative source of revenue in the unregulated

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\(^{134}\) Galeotti “Blood Brotherhood…” 2008

\(^{135}\) Ross 2011

\(^{136}\) Curtis 2002
commercial environment of the 1990s […] the substantial community of Chechen businessmen in the FSU organized together to resist pressure to pay protection money. As they organized successfully to limit the influence of existing gangs, Chechen groups themselves moved into the business of protection and ultimately into other organized crime activities.”\textsuperscript{137} The flexibility of their networks allowed these gangs to add individuals of other backgrounds and nationalities, including Armenians, Georgians, Russians, and Ukranians, and to expand their presence throughout Europe at an accelerated rate.

**Economic context relevant to group:**

Tsarist Chechnya was characterized by unrest and high inequality, and social programs undertaken by Alexander II in the 19th century did little to assuage these conditions. Alexander III’s subsequent repression negated any progress his predecessor had achieved and finally, Tsar Nicholas II faced an environment of heightened tension and instability. As a result, the *teip’s* were the *de facto* foundation of support and local governance in Chechnyan society.

Marginalization was exacerbated under Soviet Chechnya and when Chechens returned from forced deportation after World War II, they found their lands taken over by Russians and their borders shifted to include other populations. Chechens were largely excluded from the political system, denied any leadership positions and prominent social roles. According to Curtis, “There was no influential Chechen position in the region’s petroleum industry, partly because of low education levels, but also from more deliberate exclusionary practices. These factors resulted in another dispersion of the Chechen population, this time for economic reasons.”\textsuperscript{138}

The structural exclusion set up prime conditions for criminal structures to address Chechen population’s needs. As Ross states, “they were able to survive because they continued to develop strong non-traditional governance structures, ones that reached back to religious and tribal predecessors and had assumed a growing criminal nature. The Chechens were able to extend their familial networks throughout the Soviet Union. This would be a critical asset in forming and sustaining a nascent independent Chechnya.”\textsuperscript{139} These networks then began to profit from the opening of opportunities that the decline of the Soviet state provided. Moreover, their effectiveness in competing against Russian gangs and infiltrating other states allowed them to attract members from many different nationalities.

**Marked shifts in operations:**

The Chechen Mafia’s connection to the Chechen independence movement provides perhaps one of the clearest examples of the limits of a joint criminal-insurgent effort. While the expansion of the *Obschina* – or “community”, the Chechen mafia based in Moscow – may have

\textsuperscript{137} Curtis 2002
\textsuperscript{138} Curtis 2002
\textsuperscript{139} Ross 2011
been propelled by a connection with the independence movement, it is more likely that the opposite was true, making criminal activities the principal source of influence behind the movement. Not all elements tied to the Mafia were committed to the cause and most seemed to keep a safe distance. Even in the case of those who moved to support Dudayev’s independence movement, Ross argues that while there was material support to set up his government in Chechnya, criminal practices prevailed and the Chechen government became almost a separate criminal group. While there appeared to be some semblance of a symbiotic relationship, this was temporary and limited to certain capacities.

As far as the Obschina, much of their success seemed to be attributable to the consistency of their brand and reliability as hardened criminals. With a specialty in the use and threat of violence, Chechen gangs flourished through extortion, financial crime, and protection racketeering, even offering their protection to a network of other criminals and client gangs. According to Galeotti, “Chechens are more true to their bandit roots and also less prone to the sort of transnational deal making at which Russians excel.” Galeotti also states that while their ruthlessness is widely referenced, Chechens typically apply violence with precision, unlike Russian mafias which have been known to use car bombs or more indiscriminate killings.

Chechens have also apparently made significant inroads in drug trafficking across Europe, making effective use of corruption: “The dominant role of Chechen groups on the Russian end of the Central Asian narcotics routes was confirmed by the unidentified Tajik drug trafficker interviewed by Yuriy Spirin. Asserting that he sold most of his merchandise in Russia to Chechens rather than to Russians, the trafficker said of the former, ‘The ones I cooperate with are very strong gangs involved in robberies, bank scams, and legal business. They have great connections among the police and among functionaries at all levels. Thanks to those connections, the Chechens can save you from any kind of trouble.’” Additionally, Chechen organized crime has spread beyond Russia, to the Baltic States, Romania, Germany, Netherlands, the U.S., Turkey, and even Argentina.

The link between these activities and the Chechen independence movement is tenuous, especially in more recent years. Although there appear to have been substantial material contributions to the Chechen government under Dudayev during the First Chechen War, most funding came from tapping of oil lines and a variety of other rackets. During the Second Chechen War, this link all but evaporated. Influential Chechen criminal figures were sidelined and Moscow, now firmly under Putin’s control, was apparently successful at persuading gangsters not to support the rebels under threat of retribution. In 2011 during State Duma elections, these gangs were even used to disrupt opposition campaigns and get out the vote,

140 Galeotti 2002
141 Galeotti 2002
142 Galeotti 2002; Little 2019
143 Galeotti 2017
solidifying the Chechens as an actor more closely aligned to the criminalized Russian status quo under Putin.

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**Hypothesis supported:**

The Chechen Mafia are an atypical criminal case in the sense that the members share a strong cultural affinity, a shared traumatic past that has provided some form of ideological drive behind criminal activities, and a “hostile” setting of growth given that Russia was viewed as an enemy by most Chechens. However, the Moscow-based Chechen Mafia should not be viewed as one with the Chechen separatists, and much less with Chechen Islamists. While there has been coexistence of their networks, and symbiotic collaboration to push each other’s goals at certain points, the Chechen Mafia has mostly kept its distance and prioritized its own profit schemes in Russia and elsewhere. Early on, they offered help opportunistically to the separatist movement, when there was uncertainty over post-Soviet Chechnya’s future and disarray in the Russian Federation. In the latter years, under pressure from Putin and a more forceful Russia, the Chechen Mafia kept itself at the margins altogether. Thus, the Chechen Mafia’s behavior or shifts can be mostly described as opportunistic diversifying (H3).
Analysis

A major factor worth highlighting in the four cases studied is that only the Sinaloa Cartel presents a VNSA that has developed largely supported by the status quo. Even the Guadalajara Cartel, which was the precursor to the Sinaloa Cartel, enjoyed tacit support from the Mexican federal government. As such, it has deeply enmeshed itself into Mexican political institutions and its fluctuations as a criminal organization have been less pronounced to this day. All three other cases managed to consolidate and expand based on their rejection of the government that they claimed systematically oppressed them and their communities. A summary of the crime-terror dynamics exhibited in each organization, as well the hypothesis that best explains these shifts is shown below:

Table 9. Summary of Crime-Terror Nexus Dynamic by case and Hypotheses supported

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime-Terror Nexus Dynamic</th>
<th>ISIS</th>
<th>Shining Path</th>
<th>Sinaloa Cartel</th>
<th>Chechen Mafia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coexistence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Appropriation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0/1*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbiotic Collaboration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Fusion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Transformation</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>0/1*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime-terror Hypothesis supported</td>
<td>H3 (H2/H5)</td>
<td>H3 (H2*/H5*)</td>
<td>H1</td>
<td>H3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Offshoot factions

The first key observation is the coexistence of criminal and ideological underworlds. Much of this dynamic is observed in prisons, where criminals are recruited into radical groups or vice versa. However, in some cases, like the Sinaloa Cartel, recruitment of insurgents took place only later as violence escalated with rival cartels. Even in this case, the government and U.S. agencies appeared to be enlisting cartel members for their own anti-insurgent or other political purposes, tapping into the criminal underworld for their own purposes.

Secondly, activity appropriation seems to occur only when alternative activities do not interfere with the core strategy of the group – in particular, if the strategy appears to be working. In the case of ISIS, for example, recruiting former criminals was incorporated into the greater strategy of territorial control and this proved effective towards that purpose not only as a source of finance, but as a way to threaten outside powers with terrorism in case they intervened. Shining Path, led by Abimael Guzman, had a strict ideology so it appeared to not deviate into

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144 H1: Temporary substitution, H2: “Wag the dog” effect, H3: Opportunistic diversification, H4: Top-down internal shift, H5: Perception Bias
criminal endeavors and relied solely on territorial control and taxes on cartels; however, its offshoot factions moved into profitable schemes with drug traffickers upon Guzman’s capture. The Sinaloa Cartel used the threat of violence against the state and civilians (although it constantly claimed not to) as it began to lose control of its turf – it has not, however, made ample use of terrorism thus far. The Chechen Mafia developed a fearsome reputation as an enforcer of enforcers, and decided against generalized violence, even as it operated within Russia.

With regards to collaboration among different types of groups, these appear to have happened in some capacity for most – again, except for Sinaloa Cartel which saw little benefit and more liability in alliances with ideological groups as it maintained an arrangement with the Mexican government. However, these collaborations appear largely opportunistic and material without any real ideological alliance or allegiance. For example, Shining Path granted protection to traffickers in its territory in exchange for taxes, but these same groups would prefer to collaborate with the government when it could ensure their business more effectively. The Chechens removed their support from the separatist movement when pressured by the Russian government during the Second Chechen War. For similar reasons, no organizations showed any proclivity to join or pledge allegiance to other organizations of different strategic inclination.

Finally, the only true strategic transformations that may have occurred were in offshoots of ideological groups which arose in quite different conditions than their parent organizations. ISIS had criminal networks working on its behalf, but it is unclear whether these are still operational. If so, they may have been recruited by other criminal gangs or continued carrying on other criminal schemes, such as smuggling or drug trafficking. For Shining Path, the VRAE faction which is still operational appears to possess ideological elements, but mostly lives off of criminal activities and ties to drug trafficking.

The processes followed by these 4 distinct VNSAs yield slightly different conclusions as far the hypothesis that best explains the crime-terror nexus. The hypotheses apply only to the crime-terror dynamic exhibited by the VNSA. The most observable is that both ideological and criminal VNSAs behave opportunistically (H3), diversifying their activities insofar as it benefits their influence; this naturally happens more in ideological groups venturing into crime rather than criminal groups venturing into terrorism. In the case of the Chechens, while the Mafia had ties to the insurgent movement, it did not engage directly in insurgent activities and supported the movement only until it was convenient. Of particular note is that the “wag the dog” effect (H2) appeared to explain the pivots carried out by offshoots of declining ideological groups. This lends support to Dishman’s argument that, “Terrorists and guerrilla groups who view their cause as futile, might turn their formidable assets towards crime—all the while under a bogus political banner. Other groups might turn to organized crime if their raison d’être evaporates in the face of negotiation or peace.”

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In the ideological cases, there is also a significant amount of perception bias which catalogs ideological groups as separate from criminal activities. At least when it comes to coexistence, it seems likely that these groups have always shared a common space of interaction and that this is not a new phenomenon.

With regards to the Sinaloa Cartel, which was the only group whose interaction was partly explained by “temporary shift” (H1), it only threatened with violence or terror as an ultimatum to the government. However, shifting to an insurgent-like stance if the government cracked down on it might eventually lead the group to other dynamics. At least upon examining these cases, it appears that the “temporary shifts” hypothesis does not entirely explain why groups overlap or undertake these dynamics. Leadership changes (H4) may have enabled certain pivots to continue, but did not seem entirely determinant of drastic shifts but rather, the result of a preceding trend (though one could argue that Shining Path shifted towards drug trafficking when Guzman lost leadership and new factions encouraged criminality as a core operation).

Conclusion

Criminal and ideological VNSAs do indeed appear to develop far different incentives as they evolve. In both criminal cases observed here, the groups became attached to the status quo and were disinclined from appropriating insurgent-like behavior or from associating with groups that threatened government authority. Criminal VNSAs have been a double-edge sword for the “host” governments. On the one hand, criminal VNSAs owe their influence to tacit government support, so they become disinclined from challenging its authority and using terrorism or other destabilizing tactics – indeed, the government has often used them as extra-judicial enforcers. But on the other, criminal VNSA are enormously persistent and versatile as they become threaded into society and government, which makes them enormously difficult, and dangerous, to ever subdue. While ISIS and Shining Path have become shadows of their former selves, both the Sinaloa Cartel and the Chechen Mafia remain highly influential.

In the ideological cases, the rigidity of the ideology and its relative success on drawing support determines how strategically flexible the group can be. ISIS gained strategic flexibility when it broke off from Al Qaeda, and through this process it managed to build and access criminal networks that improved its influence and even reshaped its ideology. As with the Chechen government led by Dudayev, however, criminal support may have also played a significant role in its downfall as the quality of recruits deteriorated and the ideology lost potency. However, an important observation is that crime, either directly or indirectly, appears to be a viable option for growth for ideological groups. Thus, as Makarenko observes, terrorism and radicalization should not be disentangled from crime studies.
Chris Dishman laid out why long-term interactions between ideological and criminal groups were unlikely to happen with his analysis of EZLN in Mexico and the Russian Mafia. The EZLN refused to engage in potentially lucrative opportunities with organized crime while the Russian Mafia would not cooperate with politically motivated subversive groups. While the author mentions these “rigid” examples, he explains that “other groups do not share the same concerns of the EZLN or Russian Mafia, who were fearful that involvement in an activity outside their normal realm of operations—stealing and transporting CBRN ingredients, or growing or refining marijuana, cocaine, or heroin—would stoke a strong response from federal authorities.”

He concludes that instead of focusing on cooperation or alliances between the two types, “analysts should be cognizant of a transformation of political motivations and ends. Criminal motives, spread deep and wide throughout a terrorist group, will transform the aims and motivations of its leaders.”

This observation tracks closely with hypotheses of diversification and the “wag the dog” effect.

While each case is different and has its own layers of complexities, the hypothesis that best explains the crime-terror nexus in these cases is that VNSAs take advantage of diversification opportunities as they benefit their core strategy and source of influence. These options appear to be readily available for most groups, but there are several examples of VNSAs refusing to engage in potentially profitable operations for the sake of maintaining their core strengths. In the case of groups in decline and where the core strategy is threatened or leadership weakened, it seems more likely that permanent shifts towards a different strategy may take hold.

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146 Dishman 2001
147 Dishman 2001
4. Filling the Gaps: Mapping VNSA Behavior in Framework and Determining Policy Implications

In a world of complex threats, our security and leadership depends on all elements of our power – including strong and principled diplomacy.

- Barack Obama

Introduction

Beyond sporadic interaction between criminals and terrorists interactions, the crime-terror nexus may be more accurately described as a “crime-insurgency” strategic space where non-state actors dynamically adapt, realign, and diversify their operations based on challenges or opportunities they are presented with. Criminal groups presumably have the influence to wage war or use coercion against the state, but they mostly do not or are more selective about their use of violence because of how these operations damage their core strategy; similarly, ideological groups can have the power to focus on criminal endeavors or corruption to gain influence, but doing so can undermine their ability to mobilize the masses. Despite the differences of these general trajectories, overlaps can and often do exist.

While a crime-insurgency space is nothing new, recent attention by scholars and policymakers to this relationship has highlighted how the threat posed by VNSAs requires more flexible and nuanced approaches. When it comes to preempting VNSA activities and countering their influence over the longer term, policymakers should focus on harm reduction and evaluation of threat trade-offs to that end. The state must consider how countering VNSAs – both in choice of actor and method to counter - can undermine its capabilities to govern and mitigate threats in the longer term. As de Boer and Bosetti discuss, “policymakers and practitioners need to know how to influence these dynamics, including by making short-term strategic trade-offs between fighting criminality and achieving justice, democratic reforms and peace.”148 A significant part of this includes assessing the nature of links that are formed between criminal, ideological, and hybrid groups rather than casting them all as equally threatening.

The lack of coordination of approaches to address extremism and criminal organizations has made managing threat trade-offs exceedingly difficult. The result has been disjointed or myopic enforcement solutions with significant long-term consequences, government agencies acting in

148 de Boer and Bosetti. “Examining the Interactions between Conflict and Organized Crime.” 2015
cross-purposes, unpredictable and volatile reactions by VNSAs, and in many cases, an erosion of democratic institutions and public security, all of which ultimately benefit VNSA goals.

In Chapter 1, I have explored how criminal and ideological groups are theoretically related and why they diverge and laid out a framework that captures the nature of their relationship. In Chapter 2, I used qualitative comparative analysis to determine conditions present at the onset of different types of VNSAs and identified key difference and commonalities of these environments. In Chapter 3, I looked more closely at the “crime-terror nexus” dynamics of four different VNSA cases to assess which competing hypotheses best explained the reasons for these interactions. This chapter takes the findings of the chapters 2 and 3 and connects them to the theory in chapter 1 to determine how governments and society can more effectively manage and defuse the threat posed by VNSAs.

Research Summary

Journalists, academics and policymakers have for years described VNSA relationships that exemplify how a crime-terror nexus is manifesting, but the largest theoretical gap I have attempted to fill with regards to the crime-terror nexus has been explaining why it manifests and arriving at the specific mechanisms that enable it. Interactions between criminal and terrorist groups have been repeatedly observed in different capacities, and there are several theories as to how those occur or fail to occur, but a key question is why these groups exist in the same plane to begin with. Unraveling this relationship is essential to understanding the emergence of “hybrid” VNSAs - organizations that have tactical overlaps or may use elements of both insurgent ideology and organized crime to reach their goals – and assess the severity of their threat.

VNSAs can be viewed as alternative systems of governance that provide mechanisms of advancement or access to power and resources in environments where governments fail to provide them or actively block opportunities to reach them through legal channels. Regardless of strategy, we can consider all VNSAs as clandestine organizations looking to influence the status quo either by upsetting it through ideological-insurgent mobilization or cooptation through organized criminal operations. They emerge not only in poorer, conflict-ridden environments, but in pockets of faulty governance of more developed countries, where wide swathes of the population and certain communities have many unmet needs and few legal channels to address them: prisons, slums, ungoverned border areas, and war-torn countries are frequent hotspots.

Despite what appear as fundamentally different trajectories, VNSAs may engage in strategic pivots or “borrow” tactics opportunistically as their environment allows or in defense of their core strategies. To explain how these pivots work, this dissertation has gone through several theoretical building blocks:

- deconstructing and revisiting the key differences between “criminal” and “terrorist” groups by examining organizations’ unifying goal – namely, power or influence,
• examining how conditions at groups’ origin relate to diverging strategies for influence, either through harnessing sociopolitical liabilities or material/economic deprivation,
• examining how distinct methods or operations – some working to upend and others to coopt the status quo - achieve or negate expansion of VNSAs’ influence,
• operationalizing the “crime-terror nexus” by laying out five possible dynamics of interaction between organizations of different strategic focus (coexistence, activity appropriation, collaboration, fusion, strategic transformation),
• examining factors that have influenced organizations of different strategic focuses to engage in these dynamics and pivots, and testing different hypotheses set forth to explain these interactions,
• designing a framework that illustrates these organizational trajectories and pivots through the concepts of social influence, relation to the status quo, and strategies or operations as they relate to these concepts.

The research process undertaken to answer the main research questions are illustrated below:

Figure 14. Dissertation Research Design

I have used case studies to illustrate how “crime-terror nexus” theory is reflected on the ground. Specifically, I jointly looked at the origin story and environment of groups typically classified as “terrorist” or “criminal” – in particular, groups that have been studied as examples of the crime-terror nexus in action - and examined the key differences and similarities surrounding their emergence. Moreover, for four special cases, I delved deeper into if and how they deviated from their typical or expected behavior over time, exploring factors that may have influenced their strategic pivots.

The Qualitative Comparative Analysis of 27 VNSAs showed that in all origin cases, regardless of the type of VNSA that emerged, socioeconomic inequality, widespread corruption, and poverty were overwhelmingly present. The key difference in whether an ideological or criminal group emerged was whether factors present were highly political and directed against a specific group or community; the presence of these factors appeared to empower ideologically
extremism and insurgent movements. For example, systemic political repression, a recent regime transition that promoted unfavorable policy, ethnic or sectarian violence against a minority were present where ideological mobilization took place. These factors were lacking when criminal organizations emerged, and those that tended to be present in those cases pointed to environments of relatively less political oppression but overall weakness and uncertainty in governance and/or economic outlook – presumably, many of these weaknesses have allowed opportunities and breathing space for criminal groups to mobilize and fill in the gaps. These results reinforce the view that ideological groups organize in opposition to the status quo while criminal groups mobilize to infiltrate and coopt the existing order.

The exploratory case study of ISIS, Shining Path, the Sinaloa Cartel, and the Chechen Mafia yield several observations on crime-terror nexus dynamics. The most significant is that coexistence of criminal and ideological milieus is present in all cases. This appears to happen in a shared “underground market” that connects potential recruits or clandestine service providers with interested clandestine groups of any type. Such an environment seems natural not least because both types of groups have an interest in keeping their activities under a low profile.

“Activity appropriation” or prolonged collaboration of groups appeared to have much more limited application by groups, and only occurred in certain instances where it proved beneficial to their longer-term strategy – as with the Chechens supporting the newly installed Chechen government during the First Chechen War after the Soviet Union fell or with Shining Path taxing cocaine traffickers as they attempted to assert authority over disputed territory. Even when a certain group decided to venture into activities not typically aligned with its core strategy – such as a criminal group using small-scale terrorism - these activities appeared more calculated and limited in scope and did not expand to become the core competency of the group. For instance, the Sinaloa Cartel and Chechen Mafia showed restraint when the government went against their interests but when they still enjoyed significant influence. ISIS and Shining Path showed substantial interactions with criminal networks and engaged in low-level criminal activities, but they inwardly justified those actions to maintain credibility and focus on ideology.

As reflected in the origin case study, criminal organizations do indeed align more closely and work to preserve the status quo as they became more influential within it. Ideological organizations also appeared to lose ideological “purity” or legitimacy when they became directly associated with or adopted criminal connections. Less influential offshoots of these organizations, some of which broke to follow a different strategy altogether, appeared more likely to dabble in diversified activities and less concerned about ideological purity or criminal structure stability.

In any case, although there may have been several shifts prompted by direct pressure to a VNSA’s core strategy - for example, a cartel whose business is threatened engaging in terrorism, or an ideological group losing control of territory engaging in smuggling - many shifts and interactions occurred well before pressure was applied, as organizations saw opportunities to diversify and when new activities were not contradictory to their core strategy. ISIS, for
example, began recruiting criminals early on, and these criminals justified smuggling and extorting as part of a greater strategy. The Sinaloa Cartel hired ex-FARC or paramilitary recruits to wage war with other cartels, presumably with tacit support of the Mexican government. This signals that diversification of crime-terror activities might occur even without direct government pressure to a VNSAs’ core strategy. In both these cases, however, these expansions had the added advantage of providing readily accessible avenues of influence when a VNSA’s core strategy seemed compromised.

Criminal-Insurgent Group Dynamic Framework

The findings from the Chapter 2 QCA and the Chapter 3 select case studies on crime-terror dynamics give empirical support to two central notions that underpin the theoretical frame I have laid out in Chapter 1: 1) that a key differentiator between ideological groups and criminal groups is the former’s rejection of the status quo and operations it undertakes to upend it, and the latter’s gradual cooptation of the status quo and operations it undertook to infiltrate it and support it; and 2) that as VNSAs acquire influence towards their respective aims, they develop opposing incentives to stray from their core strategies, whether in the form of alliances (for example, an ideological group allying with a drug traffickers or vice versa) or high-level operations (for example, a criminal group engaging in widespread terrorism). These two notions conform the axes of the proposed theoretical framework (with the horizontal axis being rejection or support of status quo and the vertical axis being level of social influence).

These criminal-insurgent dynamics, based on observations of how criminal and ideological VNSAs emerge and how they evolve and interact, have been introduced into the framework proposed in Chapter 1:
This framework also looks to capture the incentives that motivate ideological-insurgent and criminal VNSAs to pivot towards different growth strategies or tactics. The most salient observations illustrated here are the following:

- There are core competencies that criminal and ideological VNSAs harness. Because their success implies a different nature of threat to the status quo, this sets them on diverging pathways (as shown by the arrows flowing upward), despite the common underlying goal of influencing the status quo.

- Along these paths, there are progressions of tactical intensity. As we move up, increased influence and capacity allow VNSAs to use more forceful, disruptive, and invasive tactics. For insurgent-ideological groups, these are roughly as follows (from least to most invasive): political mobilization/civil disobedience › small-scale attacks on authorities › selective terrorism › terrorism/wide propaganda development › guerilla warfare/insurgency tactics. For criminal groups, they are as follows (least to most invasive): profit-scheme development › diversification/extortion › corruption of high-level officials › diversification/extortion › territorial expansion, especially coercive › political system capture (using intimidation).
• As criminal VNSAs rise in influence, their ability to coopt the status quo increases, which also naturally leads to adherence or preservation of that compromised status quo. Conversely, as insurgent VNSAs gain influence, they develop the capability of using coercive tactics to challenge or upend the existing order and enforce their will, achieving insurgency status. This sets them in more direct rejection and competition vis-à-vis the status quo.

• VNSAs that have garnered significant influence and achieved prominence by following a core strategy have limited incentives of engaging in activities that might undermine that core strategy. However, in pursuit or defense of their core strategy, they might diversify their activities at a tactical level, “borrowing” lower-level tactics of the opposite side. This is where we see crime-terror nexus dynamics most at play, highlighted in the orange box as the crime-ideology interaction space. An influential criminal group might carry out small-scale attacks or practice selective terrorism with the purpose of maintaining or increasing their grip on power. An insurgent group might engage in criminal profit-schemes that help the cause without compromising it. A direct threat to their core strategy might lead VNSAs to develop these diversifications at a more extensive level.

• VNSAs at lower levels of the progressions appear to have more flexibility in tactical approaches, but also have more difficulty consolidating. This may be precisely because they lack a clear strategy or visibility, and their uncoordinated operations may further dilute the goals of their organization. This is also where coexistence appears most common, activity appropriation happens more often (partly because groups are not necessarily committed to a specific strategy), some semblance of temporary or conditional alliances might also occur, and strategic shifts may take place easier (again, because groups are uncommitted to a strategy, there is less momentum in any direction).

• At the foundation of many groups lies a vast underground of individuals with inadequate political representation or scant legal access to resources, which seek alternative avenues of influence. Many of these are part of an underground market where loose, relatively unstructured gangs operate in prisons, slums, and conflict-ridden areas and function as go-betweens of material and human resources for influential, organized groups with more sophisticated operations.

Implications for Security Strategies

The criminal-insurgent group dynamic framework highlights four key areas that deserve special attention by policymakers: 1) the gang-ridden lower levels which are breeding grounds or recruiting targets for larger organizations, i.e. the underground markets, 2) the crime-ideology strategic interaction space, which functionally brings all types of organization together, 3) the insurgent VNSA trajectory and progressions, and 4) the criminal VNSA trajectory and progressions. Security approaches for each of these may overlap and ideally should work in conjunction with the rest. In the following sections, I delve into policies or approaches that have shown some results or could be applied to each area, though each of these would benefit from a much more in-depth analysis.
Underground markets

The “underground market” space is where prevention strategies can be most effective in drying out human and material resources for existing VNSAs and preventing the rise of new ones. Security strategies should consider ways to undercut the harness points that VNSAs seize to kickstart their influence. We can visualize how different factors might be promoting the rise of each type of organization in each area by overlaying the results from the VNSA origin case study (Chapter 2) onto the framework:

Historical cases often show that extreme ideological groups rise as offshoots from more moderate opposition political factions that have not adequately or sufficiently been incorporated into the political sphere or that have been marginalized altogether. These situations create a gap of political representation and a rise in public resentment that ideological groups harness. Moreover, the failure of opposition groups to be taken seriously and achieve results in the political fray tends to discredit the political process and legitimize extremist and militant factions.
within those groups. This has been the case for 9 of 15 organizations examined in this study (Shining Path, Al-Shabaab, Abu Sayyaf, LTTE, FARC, PIRA, PKK, KLA, Hezbollah). Sociopolitical inclusiveness is, thus, key to countering violent extremism in fragile areas. This is backed up by International IDEA Burcher and Perotti’s research on peace and democracy:

Inclusive post-conflict transitions are more likely to result in resilient democracies. Inclusiveness in this sense doesn’t just mean giving all groups a place at the table. It requires giving them real decision-making powers, particularly at the local level. That, in turn, involves everyone in the outcome of the process and creates institutions well calibrated to respond to their needs. This is a key ingredient of conflict prevention. It is also crucial that the modern conflict prevention agenda hone in on the disruptive role of organized criminals and violent extremists. Here, too, ensuring the inclusiveness of democratic institutions and processes – chiefly elections, political parties and local administrations that give voice to those typically excluded – would go a long way to remove the seeds that allow these groups and networks to grow.¹⁴⁹

Criminal groups, similarly, capitalize on services or goods that the government cannot or will not provide and use profits from those activities to access and thread themselves into the political structure. In a certain way, organized crime represents a viable avenue to forcibly break into the political system through economic empowerment, and can be highly effective in market-capitalist systems. Their promise of access, which they regularly manage to fulfill, attracts other marginalized individuals into their ranks. This is a dynamic observed repeatedly with major ethnic mafias, as Francis Ianni explains in a 1973 Department of Justice report:

As more Irish came to American cities and as the Irish gangsters became successful in organized crime and therefore money began flowing into Irish-American communities, the Irish began to acquire political power. As they eventually came to control the political machinery of the large cities, the Irish won wealth, power and respectability by expanding their legitimate business interests and gaining control of construction, trucking, public utilities, and the waterfront. The Irish were succeeded in organized crime by the Jews...The Jews quickly moved into the world of business as a more legitimate means of gaining economic and social mobility. The Italians came last and did not get a commanding leg up the ladder until the late thirties.

Our data have exposed relationships between ethnicity and organized crime. They indicate with some clarity that every major ethnic group—the Irish, Jews, Italians and, most recently, the Blacks and Puerto Ricans—have faced the same basic dilemma: How do you escape poverty through socially approved routes when such routes are often foreign to the ghetto life? Crime resolves the dilemma because it provides a quick if perilous route out. Thomas Pettigrew, in an article entitled “Negro American Crime” has said, “...as with other minority groups who find discriminatory barriers blocking their path toward the mainstream of success-oriented America, many Negroes turn to crime. Crime may thus be utilized as a means of escape, ego-enhancement, expression of aggression, and upward mobility. “Ethnic consciousness and ethnic solidarity are

enhanced by organized crime since it pits the ethnic group against the establishment and reinforces the contra-culture.\textsuperscript{150}

Their study goes on to conclude that, “organized crime [is] an organizational entity which (as we were to discover) is symbiotically rather than parasitically associated with American society […] If we are to control and hopefully eradicate organized crime, there must be a reconnection between the community out of which that crime grows and the criminal justice system, and some attempt will have to be made to influence and refocus our social attitudes toward prevention of organized crime.”\textsuperscript{151}

At the individual level, the parallels between extremist recruits and gang members are striking. Robert Alvarez comments on the work of anthropologist Scott Atran conducted studies across six continents on individuals drawn to violent action for a group and its cause, including ISIS recruits, and concludes that, “context aside, the description also fits the typical profile of gang members in El Salvador and LA [and] points to common causes for radicalization: socially and/or economically marginalized groups, in search of purpose or to be part of something larger than themselves, socio-psychological trauma, and limited or non-existent opportunities for achieving the ideals of success as outlined in the hegemonic vision.”\textsuperscript{152}

Inclusionary politics and counter-messaging to vulnerable communities, however, are not enough. States must work to progressively plug the gaps in vulnerable environments which are commonly targeted by violent extremists, and governments must develop programs and services to offer alternatives to criminal activity and violent extremist ideology. These must be especially tailored to the four hotspots of governance gaps (shown below and explained in further detail in following section):

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{figure17.png}
\caption{The 4 Main Governance Gap Hotspots}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{150} Ianni Ethnic Succession in Organized Crime U.S. Department of Justice – National Criminal Justice Reference Service, 1973
\textsuperscript{151} Ianni 1973
In prisons of both developed and developing countries – which are a focal point of activity for VNSAs - this means that monitoring and security of inmates must be enhanced to diminish the lure of gangs; educational options should be tailored to deradicalization and should be offered to inmates to counter the appeal of negative influencers (most often within prisons themselves). For released prisoners, reintegration programs that offer employment options and mental health services should be further implemented and made readily accessible. In slums, access to key services - such as education, housing, employment, health, security, dispute resolution – must be bolstered to facilitate communities’ integration into the larger social fabric, and in other targeted communities, credible and sustained messaging against extremist behavior must be built from the grassroots through effective alliances and support networks with community leaders and community-based organizations.

Many “Countering Violent Extremism” programs have now been re-focused to use wrap-around services embedded within communities rather than undertaken by enforcement officials. With regards to enforcement, programs such as “Community Safety Partnership” (started in Los Angeles in 2010) which rely on building alliances between law enforcement and community members through personal presence and outreach have shown success in reducing gang violence and creating “breathing space” for development of the wider community.153

Crime-ideology interaction space

The “crime-ideology interaction space” brings together consolidated criminal organizations using “lower-level” ideological activities, consolidated ideological groups using “lower-level” criminal activities, unconsolidated hybrid groups using diverse activities that may not be tied to any specific strategy, and gangs or underground market liaisons which facilitate interactions and provide recruitment bases to all VNSAs.

Analysis of VNSA cases in this domain points to pervasive coexistence of criminal and ideological clandestine organizations. However, disentangling this link may be unrealistic because of the covert nature of operations that both types of VNSAs habitually undertake. A more realistic approach is to restrict the strategic value of tactics or operations by exercising more effective control of “ambiguous governance” environments where connections and interactions occur, rather than focusing on groups themselves. In any case, in the short term, “lower-level” criminal activities seem relatively more benign and manageable than deeply-rooted extremism that may quickly spiral out of control. The UN University mentions that, “UN and other actors need to better understand when criminal agendas undermine peace and when these actors can be motivated to support it.”154 This view is echoed by Keen and Moiseienko:

153 “Mayor Garcetti Announces New Expansion of Community Safety Partnership.” Office of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti 2017
154 De Boer and Bosetti 2015
There is merit to trying to disrupt these operations via strategic prosecutions, or otherwise ensure that criminals feel that cooperating with terrorists is, in the words of Douglas Farah, ‘the line that most [criminals] won’t cross because … the price would be very, very high for them’. Achieving this aim is easier said than done; yet this is an area where a discussion of the crime/terror nexus adds value to counterterrorism and anti-crime efforts.155

Much like slums or prisons, insecure spaces are complicated to control and require increased coordination between states because they often lie at the intersection of several borders. They resemble what Tamara Makarenko refers to as “black holes” – environments where the “accumulation of wealth, control of territory and people, freedom of movement and action, and legitimacy” are contested and represent usable power; power to allocate values and resources in society.”156 Examples are the tri-border area in South America, the Northern Triangle in Central America, the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia, or the borders between Nigeria-Niger-Chad-Cameroon, among others. These environments are ripe for the development of illicit economies and will continue to provide enormous opportunities and focal points for both ideological extremists and organized crime. Shaw and Mahadevan highlight this dynamic:

Governing insecure space is often about linking social knowledge with violence. Here the activities of terror, militia-style and criminal groups reach a convergence: the development of protection economies wherein trade and business are taxed. Since insecure spaces are often points of production or pass-through, it is the illicit economy that generates the most “taxable” income.157

As Shelley notes, “in many conflicts, the shadow economy is the only functioning economy.”158 The list of nexus spots where this reality is most prevalent and that Shelley and Picarelli emphasize in their report includes:

- Regions where the central state has lost control over some of its territory, as in Colombia, Georgia, the Sumatra peninsula of Indonesia, portions of Sri Lanka and Myanmar, Chechnya, the breakaway states of Georgia such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the trans-Dniester region of Moldova;
- Regions straddling several national borders or jurisdictions such as Pakistan’s North West Frontier, the Tri-Border Area of Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina, the Pamir Mountains in Tajikistan, and certain Balkan regions;
- Conflict zones where separatists are fighting government forces, such as the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka, and most of Nepal;

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155 Keen and Moiseienko, Much Ado about the Nexus: Why Does the Crime/Terror Nexus Matter? 2018
156 Makarenko, Tamara The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Organised Crime and Terrorism 2004
157 Shaw and Mahadevan When terrorism and organized crime meet 2018
- Areas of countries that otherwise have a strong rule of law, but weak control over certain neighborhoods and slums, such as certain diaspora neighborhoods of cities, such as the outskirts of Marseilles, the northern sections of Naples, the favelas in Brazil;
- Penal institutions where correctional authorities are more concerned with maintaining order rather than probing the crime-terrorist interactions within their institutions.\footnote{Shelley, Picarelly Methods and Motives 2005}

Reducing governance ambiguity in these areas requires joint coordination by international organisms and states involved. In the Tri-Border area, joint security efforts by Argentinian, Brazilian, and Paraguayan security forces showed some results in temporarily constraining these activities, but their efforts were frustrated by corruption in their police, faulty criminal justice systems, lack of government agreement, poor pay, insufficient training and equipment, and poor organization in general.\footnote{Hudon Terrorist and Organized Crime Groups in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of South America 2003} These joint efforts were not sufficiently sustained.

Especially because many fringe ideological groups in this domain are not highly consolidated or are breakaways from larger groups, overreaction by the state may end up feeding into their goals of raising their profile or promoting destabilization while also raising the strategic value of those very operations. At these stages, the main goal should be to regulate environments and interrupt or prevent consolidation which can create a longer-term problem. Jones et al. conclude in their report that, “When a terrorist group becomes an insurgent group, it does not go easily. Half of insurgent groups have not ended (seven of these were Iraqi, four were Palestinian). The data show that, when insurgent groups have ended, nearly half of the time, they negotiated a settlement with the government.”\footnote{Jones et al. “How Terrorist Groups End” 2008} Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that rebel or terrorist groups with access to contraband funds last longer than those that do not.\footnote{Fearon, Why do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer than Others? 2004}

By the same token, smaller criminal gangs may become much more resilient when they rise from simple underground operations to well-connected, economically potent networks with ability to manipulate the state. This opportunity is available where inadequate governance and widespread corruption exist, and where the state itself invites clientilism. Given enough organizing impetus and access to resources, criminal groups can take advantage of governance weaknesses to expand. Often, hard enforcement strategies have the unintended effect of raising the value of products or services criminal groups offer making them more attractive recruiters, or of increasing incentives for corruption within government institutions.\footnote{Andreas, "The Political Economy of Narco-Corruption in Mexico," 1998} Strengthening judicial and law enforcement institutions is key in this regard, while working to plug areas of opportunity that smaller gangs use to consolidate.\footnote{Buscaglia, “Dispute Resolution Mechanisms…” 2015} Measures to this effect are, for example, improving
security in prisons and treatment of inmates to undercut gang appeal, enhancing social programs and education opportunities in impoverished communities, or professionalizing police by using data-driven approaches and de-escalation training.

**Consolidated VNSAs**

Once a VNSA builds up influence, suppressing the threat through force can aggravate underlying conditions which propelled the VNSA in the first place. In a RAND report, Seth Jones concludes, “Military force usually has the opposite effect from what is intended: It is often overused, alienates the local population by its heavy-handed nature, and provides a window of opportunity for terrorist-group recruitment.”\(^{165}\) In the case of disarticulating criminal groups by force, the Mexican experience highlights the perils of this strategy. A CRS report mentions that, “since 2006, many sources maintain that Mexico experienced roughly 150,000 murders related to organized crime… the violence now associated with drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) is of an entirely different scale. Violence is not only associated with resolving disputes or maintaining discipline but also has been directed towards the government, political candidates, and the media.”\(^ {166}\)

Harder enforcement measures should be utilized judiciously to prevent violence, and in proportion to the threat upon having disseminated information on “rules of engagement”. This is tied to the aim of reducing uncertainty in this environment, both for affected communities as well as for VNSAs. As AH Kydd mentions:

> The problem of terrorism is not a problem of applying force per se, but one of acquiring intelligence and affecting beliefs. With the right information, the proper application of force is comparatively straightforward. The struggle against terrorism is, therefore, not usefully guided by the metaphor of a “war on terrorism” any more than policies designed to alleviate poverty are usefully guided by the metaphor of a “war on poverty” or narcotics policy by a “war on drugs.”
>
> The struggle against terrorism can more usefully be thought of as a struggle to collect and disseminate reliable information in environments fraught with uncertainty.\(^ {167}\)

Consolidated VNSAs operating in the crime-ideology interaction space may be diversifying to gain a strategic edge or to make up for losses elsewhere. In dabbling in activities that undermine their strategy - particularly for ideological groups where messaging and legitimacy is key – they create opportunities for governments to develop counternarratives in vulnerable communities. An ideological group filling its ranks with criminals who do not adhere to its codes and abuse their power can undermine the movement, or criminals themselves may be a poor fit for insurgent life, as revealed by a study on ISIS defectors:

> Across 58 cases [of defectors] the narratives were very similar: [one] narrative was about corruption – not so much systemic, but the actions of individual fighters and emirs. There were

\(^ {165}\) Jones and Lubicki 2008  
\(^ {166}\) Beittel "Mexico: Organized crime and drug trafficking organizations." 2015  
\(^ {167}\) Kydd and Walter, “Strategies of Terrorism”, 2006
also broader complaints about unfairness, inequality, and even racism… the fourth narrative is basically about being disappointed in the experience, the quality of life, and the combat experience. A lot of people wanted a kind of ‘gangster jihadism’.  

Exploiting inconsistencies in extremist ideology may turn public opinion against the group or inflame internal divisions. However, this counternarrative is only as effective as the alternative being offered, which is where prevention and reintegration strategies are again crucial. Similarly, criminal organizations depend on social capital to operate. Highlighting brutality or indiscriminate use of violence can erode some of their appeal, but ultimately, drying out their source of influence requires plugging governance gaps and offering alternatives to those most vulnerable.

Authorities should thus, consider ways manage the threat, and take full advantage of “breathing spaces” they create in doing so, as de Boer et al. suggest:

Policymakers then need to take advantage of these openings by creating the conditions for negotiating longer-term violence reduction and security arrangements. These longer-term interventions should aim to tackle the root causes of conflict and crime by promoting trust between divided communities, reducing social, political and economic inequalities and enhancing accountability and justice.

It is important to consider that successfully constraining a VNSAs core strategy can lead to an increase in these crime-ideology interactions, either because the organization attempts to diversify when facing important losses or because it has degraded to a “hybrid” organization without a clear strategy. These pivots may, in fact, be indicative of waning influence and it is important to use these declines to reinforce messaging and probe for weaknesses or control fractionalizing within each group.

Costs and benefits of activity diversification to VNSAs are tied to how effective prevention strategies are (raising the cost of recruitment, for example), how attractive alternatives are (paying security and government officials better wages and offering more effective training), and how policy affects the value of illegal activities (setting tacit agreements and managing information in these areas may lower the profits from smuggling). For example, reducing the value of drug trafficking can be accomplished through decriminalization policies or certain legalization measures or “safe spaces” that reduce uncertainty in certain environments and limit black or grey markets; increasing the value of “buying” corruption can be accomplished by professionalizing law enforcement and by developing and monitoring independent corruption metrics. Closing off viable avenues of influence makes organizations less able to deliver on their promises to recruits, and thus, less attractive.

It becomes clearer that the most effective bodies for tackling these issues are law enforcement and community-based organizations or community-level stakeholders. Coordination or alliances between the two would make the spread of influence of clandestine groups more

168 Beauchamp “‘Reality Is Setting in: Why Some ISIS Fighters Are Packing up and Going Home.” 2015
difficult, as the spread of information makes VNSA activities more predictable and control over vulnerable environments make their appeal less widespread.

**Consolidated Crime-based VNSAs**

Consolidated criminal organizations are notoriously persistent. Certain mafias like the Italian Camorra or Japanese Yakuza can trace their origins back to several hundred years. These organizations have woven themselves so deeply into the political and economic fabric of society that their presence may be difficult to even distinguish. With regards to drug trafficking organizations in Latin America, Farer explains:

> Modern narco-elites in Latin America, in fact, behave politically very much like traditional economic elites. They fund political campaigns (often spreading contributions among opposing candidates), sponsor party-building and get-out-the-vote activities, and lobby legislatures for passage of laws favorable to narcotics business interests.\(^{169}\)

Many organizations even use their profits to invest in legitimate activities while continuing their long tradition in illicit activities such as extortion, smuggling, theft, among others. Additionally, globalization has opened new opportunities for transnational crime which are more difficult to detect and counter.

Consequently, there is no simple or short-term solution to criminal organizations. Many of the most successful approaches are limited to managing the rise of these groups, preventing them from engaging in their more harmful activities, blocking their corruption and infiltration of key institutions through better accountability and professionalization of law enforcement agencies, and allowing the state to phase them out as democratic and judicial institutions mature and governance capacity is enhanced. In other words, the state must outgrow criminal organizations both economically and politically until they become manageable and less threatening. This process, however, can be compromised by criminal actors’ very activities which prevent government maturity and makes this a difficult balancing act and one that takes time to show results.

Japan, which boasts one of the lowest murder and crime rates in the world, has had a unique approach in keeping Yakuza influence in check:

> The Yamaguchi-gumi celebrated 100 years in business in 2015 and then split apart the same year. Their traditional revenue came from gambling, racketeering and labor dispatch. For a long time, the goal of the Japanese government has not been the elimination of the yakuza but rather keeping the some 22 organized-crime groups under control and out of sight. It’s all about “balance.” The Yakuza are not secret societies and aren’t banned by the government […] They are regulated.\(^{170}\)

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\(^{169}\) Farer 1999  
\(^{170}\) Adelstein, Jake. “Opinion | Japan's Yakuza Aren't Disappearing. They're Getting Smarter.” 2017
Overall, Japan has been successful at reducing gang numbers since their height in the mid-1960s – reaching over 200,000 members - and keeping more violent gangs at bay.\(^{171}\) Their latest development, now that members have dwindled to several thousands, has been to enact laws which hold gang heads directly accountable for their underlings’ actions and prohibit legitimate businesses from dealing with gangs. So far, these policies have shown results, but there are fears that policies attacking Yakuza’s lifeblood too directly may have begun to drive these groups underground, risking an uptick in gang violence and a return to more harmful activities. This backlash, however, has not yet been borne out.

Elsewhere, the typical approach against organized crime has been the gradual dismantling of the structure of each criminal organization through capture and “flipping” of lower-level members, which may provide access to top members. The focus is on “beheading” these organizations, and going after the leaders of organizations, leading to splintering or “balkanization” into smaller, less influential groups. However, while these approaches may very well weaken or destroy the larger organization in question, they depend highly on strong institutions and they tend to leave power vacuums which other groups step in to fill – often, far more violent and damaging groups, such as the Zetas in Tamaulipas. Moreover, aggressive dismantling of organizations has the effect of spreading violence among the rest of society, leading to important social costs, as criminal organizations lash out to discourage the state.

In Mexico, the “balkanization” strategy led to an increase in violence not just among cartels but throughout the country, including areas that were once considered safe. One Princeton study showed that, “while most of the effects on DTO-related violence are found in the first six months after a leader’s removal, effects on homicides affecting the rest of the population are more enduring, suggesting different mechanisms through which leadership neutralizations breed violence.”\(^{172}\) More than 10 years after this approach was applied in full force, Mexico’s murder rate is higher than ever before and continues to rise.\(^{173}\)

Similarly, according to the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the Colombian strategy which was touted a success, “came at a high cost in lives and resources, only did part of the job, yielded diminishing returns and left important institutions weaker […] and though they saw security gains, the ‘Plan Colombia’ and ‘Democratic Security’ years were marked by a worsening of Colombia’s already stark social inequalities.”\(^{174}\) This is not to mention that Colombia’s security gains largely came at the expense of Mexico’s security, as the Council of Foreign Relations notes: “As drug violence in Colombia has declined, it has increased

\(^{171}\) Stucky and Adelstein “Where have Japan’s Yakuza Gone?” 2014
\(^{172}\) Calderon et al. “The Beheading of Criminal Organizations and Dynamics of Violence in Mexico” 2015; Angel, Arturo. “Grupos Criminales Crecieron 900% Durante La Guerra Contra El Narco De Calderón.” 2017
\(^{173}\) Stewart “Tracking Mexico’s Cartels in 2019: Turf War Clashes Will Rage on” 2019
\(^{174}\) Isaacson, Don't Call It a Model, report (Washington DC: Washington Office on Latin America, 2010)
significantly in Mexico. This has resulted, in part, from Mexico’s growing importance as a trafficking route and increasing competition among different trafficking organizations.”

On the other hand, the consequences of allowing criminal organizations to fester can be severe and eventually lead to a “criminalized state”, or worse, to a “criminal state”. A criminalized state is one where levels of corruption are extensive and deeply entwined with the state processes of governance, but the state’s core activity is not (examples are Russia, Ukraine, and other post-Soviet states). It is one where, “much, if not most, state activity has been ‘privatized’; that is, where either those in power or those with leverage over those in power use state agency to advance their private interest at the expense of the broader public good.” A criminal state is one where even the core activity of the state is criminal and where the state depends on return from illicit trade and finance; it not only protects criminality but conducts it (examples are Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Transdniestr in Moldova, and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan). These types of states present challenges akin to those of insurgent-contested territories, where rule of law is lacking and democracy is a distant prospect.

Siniawer makes the case that in pre-WWII Japan, the state’s use of Yakuza as extrajudicial enforcement allowed them to prosper and cause long-standing damage to democratic institutions:

That the state operated in this ambiguous zone of legitimacy had consequences for Japanese politics, especially in the 1920s and 1930s. For the state’s willingness and ability to work with nonstate violence specialists like the yakuza ultimately contributed, however indirectly and modestly, to the dismal fate of democracy in interwar Japan. This transformative shift from democracy to militarism was pushed gently along by those Japanese at the time who questioned the legitimacy of political violence.

Even more worrying is that, as criminal organizations gain influence and leverage over the political system, their ability to consolidate is also enhanced, making them that much more difficult to roll back. Studying the dynamics of the highly influential ‘Ndrangheta in southern Italy – notorious for its mafia-coopted state processes – Alex Perry concluded that, “the mob thrives on chaos. It likes to be the alternative authority that you go to because you can’t get anything done through the legitimate state. For that very reason, there’s no doubt that it promotes that chaos. It likes civic distrust. It likes cynicism. It can profit from that […] at the heart of that is a hole in the heart of Italy, where there should be a center and established certainty and facts. There’s a vacuum.”


177 Rotberg 2009

178 Siniawer, “Befitting bedfellows: Yakuza…” 2012

When it comes to criminal organizations, leaving them uninterrupted for the sake of stability is not a good option but acting too forcefully can lead to worse outcomes. A strategy which allows the authorities to clearly signal limits of criminal organizations’ activities might be helpful in deterring violence and diminishing the “value” and extensiveness of corruption, providing breathing space for institutions to gradually mature. After all, criminal organizations find most value and incentive for corruption when the state uses its assets to counter their operations. A gradual encasing of these limits – much like Japan’s approach - might be most successful and realistic in phasing out criminal organizations’ influence over time, allowing institutions to expand their reach and enhance prevention strategies while keeping criminal VNSAs in check. An example of such measures is given by Edgardo Buscaglia, who finds that “greater compliance with the human right to access justice through a more effective judiciary represents not just a way to enhance punitive/deterrence state capacity against armed criminal enterprises but also a policy to reduce the social sphere used by armed groups as a protection strategy within the most deprived segments of the population.”

**Consolidated Ideology-based VNSAs**

An ideological VNSA that has consolidated into an insurgency and achieved a substantial following is difficult to counter. More importantly, underlying it is usually a widespread perception of government illegitimacy, corruption, or injustice. However, rather than politically addressing these fundamentally political issues, the typical reaction of states when faced with these types of movements is to apply overwhelming force, feeding into the message of extremists, overstating their threat, and breeding more instability. Moreover, GTI mentions that, "'The most common context for the onset of terrorist violence is within an ongoing conflict,' About 70 percent of the fatal terrorist attacks recorded in the Global Terrorism Database between 1970 and 2013 took place in countries with serious ongoing conflicts.” Conflict, which complicates governance and inevitably breeds other abuses and injustices, tends to present critical growth opportunities for extremists.

The use of criminal connections to complement the ideological movement is not uncommon, but perhaps the most threatening angle is the potential to enhance legitimacy in a contested governance setting. Part of the strategic value of ideological groups engaging in smuggling or extortion of elites is not only in terms of profit, but “also related to the political capital that these groups gain by providing public goods that the state is incapable or unwilling to deliver. The consequence can be a further erosion of the state and the entrenchment of dual sovereignties that compete for allegiance and legitimacy among the population.” This is not helped by

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180 Buscaglia 2015
182 De Boer and Bosetti “Examining the Interactions between Conflict and Organized Crime” Sept 2015
totalitarian approaches against ideological movements which often cite inequality and unjust poverty as a mobilizing grievance.

As Kydd highlights, research suggests that affecting beliefs is at least as important as the correct application of force to counter the spread of extremist VNSAs. Jones et al. conclude in their analysis of terrorist groups that, “Terrorist group end for two major reasons: Members decide to adopt nonviolent tactics and join the political process (43%), or local law-enforcement agencies arrest or kill key members of the group (40%). Military force has rarely been the primary reason for the end of terrorist groups (7%), and few groups since 1968 have achieved victory (10%).”183

In the cases of Shining Path and ISIS, both groups saw huge reduction in legitimacy and influence when their internal abuses became more evident. The capture of figureheads further sowed internal chaos within these groups, but continued state abuses of these populations or failure to reintegrate defectors or prisoners led to new challenges and splintering movements. To avoid these scenarios, relative gains must be complemented with concerted efforts to reintegrate the less extreme elements into the political process (additionally, this confers a legitimacy status to the state in the eyes of the population), to undercut extremists’ influence by enhancing conditions in affected areas through community interventions and trusted actors, and with restorative justice approaches to heal divides. UN University states:

Policymakers and practitioners need a range of tools that include violence interruption strategies that provide “breathing space” through the introduction of truces/cease-fires. The role of skillful mediators in this context is essential. Policymakers then need to take advantage of these openings by creating the conditions for negotiating longer-term violence reduction and security arrangements. These longer-term interventions should aim to tackle the root causes of conflict and crime by promoting trust between divided communities, reducing social, political and economic inequalities and enhancing accountability and justice.

Despite the influence of heavily consolidated insurgent VNSAs, they are not monolithic actors and often have significant fractures beneath the surface. However, if the use of force against them is haphazard or perceived as unjustly directed against a certain group, it may well provide them an impetus for internal unity and external rallying to the cause. On the other hand, in many extremist movements, these threats have been minimized by expanding internal fractures through several mechanisms: promoting the perception of ineffective leadership (Shining Path, Boko Haram), approaching for negotiation and sowing internal division among extreme and moderate elements (PIRA, Hezbollah), or capitalizing on loss of legitimacy caused by strategic blunders (ISIS, FARC).

Both Audrey Cronin’s study on Al-Qaeda and Seth Jones et al’s study on terrorist groups since 1968 identified the most common transitions out of terrorism to be either towards

183 Jones and Lubicki 2008
legitimate political processes, criminality, or full insurgency.\textsuperscript{184} Indeed, while the use of criminal activities has provided extremist organizations with steady sources of financial support, an over-reliance on crime which undermines or supplants the ideological drive of the group or damages the quality or reliability of recruits can also lead to internal fissures or external loss of legitimacy among potential supporters. This is likely why many popular ideological groups competing for legitimacy – such as Shining Path, FARC, KLA, Taliban - have insistently dissociated themselves from direct involvement in drug trafficking or other forms of criminality and rebutted accusations by opposing governments. In several cases, less influential offshoots of ideological groups have more openly engaged in criminal activities while maintaining a thin veneer of ideology – this has been the case for Boko Haram, Abu Sayyaf, ELN, Shining Path, FARC, and others.

\textit{Globalization and Transnational Insurgents and Criminals}

The greater problem of transnational crime and actors, which presents a wider set of governance vacuums that criminal enterprises aim to fill, requires increased sharing of information and security cooperation among international organizations and states. Not only has globalization expanded the underground market and made interactions more complex, but technology has made it easier for groups to interact over the dark web. Shelley states:

New transnational crime groups thrive in the chaos of war and enduring conflicts. They have no interests in the endurance of the state; rather, their profits are made by destabilizing the state and its structures. The declining importance of the nation-state in recent decades has fostered these new forms of transnational crime groups. These are important reasons why the new types of transnational crime share common interests with terrorists. The terrorist-transnational crime relationship extends beyond a marriage of convenience that generates profits or provides logistics: it goes to the very heart of the relationship between crime groups and the state.\textsuperscript{185}

The framework I have proposed helps explain why transnational crime groups may be more amenable to relationships with insurgents in other countries and how this trend can be countered. Transnational crime changes the incentive structure that national borders have traditionally maintained for both criminals and ideological actors. For example, historically, states may negotiate and “accommodate” powerful criminal groups for the sake of governance. Over time, criminal groups develop incentives – both in the form of sticks and carrots – to work within the rules of the government, maintain the status quo, and defer from dealing with insurgent actors lest they undermine their own strategic goals. However, globalization changes this calculus in the sense that supporting or doing business with insurgent groups in another state – often unrelated to the “host state” – is not necessarily at odds with the criminal organization’s

\textsuperscript{184} Cronin 2006; Jones and Lubicki 2008

maintenance of the status quo and overall strategy. The same applies to insurgencies harnessing criminal relationships at the global level to benefit their local strategy, the way ISIS did with European criminal cells.

Indeed, there are many documented occasions where organized crime groups have even been used as state appendages for interfering in other states’ democratic processes, propping up or clamping down rebel groups abroad or at home:

There has been an even more extensive history of collaboration between criminal organizations and corrupt government officials and intelligence operatives, not to mention components of ‘respectable’ financial institutions, which have extensive dealings with the world’s ‘underground economy’. Among the numerous well-documented examples of the ‘government-criminal nexus,’ Bates cites the collaborations between elements of French intelligence and the Corsican Mafia; between elements of the Italian political establishment and security services with the Sicilian Mafia, the Neapolitan Camorra, or the Calabrian Indrangheta; between components of the Turkish military and intelligence services and the Turkish Mafia; between both the Guomindang and the Chinese communists and various triads; between the Pakistani military and intelligence service and Pakistani and Afghan criminal networks, including opium growers; and between U.S. intelligence agencies and the Cosa Nostra (against Castro), Burmese opium growers, and other drug traffickers in their Cold War struggle against communism.\(^\text{186}\)

A troubling addition to this is that states themselves can and do promote criminal organizations to conduct covert operations abroad, such as the Russian state’s use of cybercriminals to wage virtual wars in Georgia and Ukraine and to crack into foreign governments’ systems.\(^\text{187}\)

Thus, at the global level, states should begin enforcing these incentive structures by coordinating or collectively monitoring with other states to do the same and actively pushing back on corruption domestically. Transnational VNSAs benefit from the ambiguity of governance in the global setting and the lack of coordination between states. However, if links are exposed and a VNSA faces increased scrutiny at the local level because of these ties, and states themselves view any collusion with criminal organizations as a geopolitical liability, then the calculus over the value of connections to clandestine and subversive groups abroad would likely be reconsidered.

**Summary of Key Insights**

- The ecosystem of criminal and ideological VNSAs consists of four interrelated areas: the underground market (the root environment where either type of group recruits and builds up), the crime-ideology interaction space (where groups interact and we see


“crime-terror nexus” dynamics at play), the insurgent VNSA strategic space (which departs from criminal strategies), and the criminal VNSA strategic space (which departs from ideological strategies).

- Political and economic inclusion of marginalized groups is key to plugging governance gaps and addressing underlying conditions which propel the rise and spread of VNSAs. Use of force should be sparse and highly targeted to avoid aggravating these conditions. Addressing underlying conditions through social programs and embedded security is the only all-encompassing, sustainable way to prevent VNSAs from taking root.

- Interactions between criminal groups and ideological groups may be signs of dwindling influence and loss of strategic focus. These should be monitored and limited if possible, but above all, harnessing these movements – especially through counter-messaging – should be a priority.

- States should develop long-run strategies for countering criminal entities and disseminate information on terms of engagement with these groups. An approach like Japan’s with Yakuza, which roped them in gradually and kept their influence in check until the state’s institutions outgrew them might be more effective than aggressive crackdowns.

- States should work to harness divisions among extremists. Negotiating with more moderate factions and bringing them into the political process often works not only towards giving legitimacy to the state, but in driving a wedge with the more radical elements.

- Transnational insurgents and criminals have an expanded environment in which to conduct operations. To plug these gaps, it is important to more adequately surveil, coordinate, and police “grey zones” – like the Tri-Border area in South America – through international efforts, but also to have states become enforcers of the local factions of a transnational group to discourage interactions abroad.

- Security strategies to counteract VNSA threats are only as strong as the prevention measures underlying them. We can think of these strategies as building blocks in a pyramid, where there is a progression of measures that governments’ can use, starting with prevention, to management, to disruption, and finally, suppression. This progression along with examples for each level is shown in the figure below.
Conclusion

A helpful way to look at the problem of violent non-state actors is from a public health lens. Ultimately, success in countering VNSA influence, regardless of strategy or operations, relies heavily on long-term prevention strategies to stave off the onset of a greater malaise. These include promotion of political inclusiveness, social development programs, and economic opportunity. Prevention strategies should be specifically designed to address the spaces where underground markets are most prominent and where convergence of ideological, criminal, and hybrid organizations tends to occur and among populations that VNSAs tend to prey on: economic “grey zones”, conflict-ridden areas, prisons, impoverished and/or marginalized communities (especially where there is long-standing history of marginalization or discrimination). The spread of “lower-level” criminal or ideological tactics can also be mitigated through these approaches.

When these have failed, it is important to “do no harm”, which often means to use avenues other than force to contain the spread of the VNSA. These avenues can be in the form of effective countermessaging through community-based actors or embedded organizations, spread of information in areas of ambiguous governance, agreements or negotiations to limit violence, embedding well-qualified law enforcement in vulnerable communities, and enhancing coordination with other security agencies. As Shaw et al. say, “Closing the space for violent en-
entrepreneurs to operate requires a combination of diplomatic, development, economic and law enforcement tools."^188

The threat presented by VNSAs is especially relevant to emerging democracies around the world. The path towards democratization which many countries have begun to undertake is a tumultuous one, fraught with instability and opportunities for VNSAs to consolidate. It was only until the early 1990s with the fall of the Soviet Union that a majority of countries around the world became electoral democracies^189, some more swiftly or completely than others. Several have been beset by corruption and demagoguery, backsliding into criminalized states or authoritarianism. In cases studies for this dissertation, many organizations gained prominence in the aftermath of the Cold War, which left states weakened as they democratized and created ambiguity and widening inequalities in the remaining social order. Democracy expert Catalina Uribe mentions:

In emerging democracies, weak institutions and political and economic exclusion stand out as important drivers of conflict. They fuel violent extremists and organized criminals, both of which present increasing challenges to conflict prevention. Violent extremists are particularly problematic because, even though they pursue political agendas, their radical tilt allows little space to negotiate realistic solutions.

Organized criminal networks, for their part, pursue financial agendas rather than political ones, making them immune to the kind of political avenues normally used to deal with traditional armed actors. Most worrisome, crime groups thrive in contexts of state fragility. Their talent for corruption, which they use to buy elections and infiltrate political parties, further hollows out government institutions.^190

Incipient democracies also present a security challenge to surrounding neighbors, as political actors readjust to the new order and non-state actors use corruption, crime, or terrorism to harness influence among weak institutions. Despite certain relapses, the democratization process is well underway in many countries around the world; larger and more powerful countries such as Russia and China may also undergo full democratic transitions in the not-so-distant future. Areas of weak governance undergoing transitions – often targeted by criminal or terrorist organizations - will continue to create significant security and political challenges for the United States and the world. Instability in these countries might also lead to outmigration and refugee crises that will only be stemmed with the stabilization of those nations’ political environment.

The prescription for these countries ties closely with how VNSAs are best countered. According to a Brookings report, governments should, “pursue evidence-based policies to reduce inequality and maintain fair and effective criminal justice systems based on a combination of rehabilitation, retribution, deterrence, and incapacitation (for repeat offenders). They should also adopt customized strategies that concentrate law enforcement and social services resources on

^188 Shaw and Mahadevan When terrorism and organized crime meet 2018
people and places with the highest levels of violent crime. Finally, they should foster inclusive
democratic processes at all levels of government and actively promote societal values of human
dignity.”

Important areas of research relating to this topic exist in the realm of democratization and
transitioning governments (mechanisms to ease transition), innovative methods for control of
corruption (including financial crimes) and law enforcement professionalization, economic
inequality and democratic representation, enhancement of judiciaries and access to justice,
immigration and refugee programs, enhancement of international cooperation in intelligence and
law enforcement, and innovation in managing threat trade-offs and neutralizing violent non-state
actors.

Although the “crime-terror nexus” field of study has become more specialized, it is important
to note that interactions between clandestine groups propelled by extremist ideologies or criminal
operations are not a new phenomenon. Although globalization has added a layer of complexity,
mafias such as Camorra or the Irish Mafia have supported or hindered insurgencies to serve their
interests for centuries, just as insurgencies or extremist groups have used criminality to
accomplish their goals or, in some cases, even shifted to criminal operations altogether as their
movements lose steam. Beyond interactions, the “crime-terror nexus” highlights that neither
criminality nor ideological extremism exist as siloed subversive approaches used by non-state
actors to expand their influence. Their interconnectedness warrants specific policy that addresses
how groups draw influence from one or the other at each stage of development: the underground,
the consolidation phase, and the consolidated phase, as well as the decline phase. Failing to
account for this greater dynamic allows VNSAs to adapt and fill more strategic spaces as others
are closed, often leading to more damaging, unmanageable outcomes.

Standout examples of this have occurred in the contexts of long-standing conflicts inflamed
by the “War on Drugs” and the “War on Terror”. The former has seen multiple violent DTOs rise
to replace fallen “business-oriented” ones, while exacerbating the bleak social realities that
underlie DTO influence in transit and production areas and expanding underground economies
enabled by prohibition policies. In the latter case, while there have been some advances in terms
of terrorism incidence (according to the latest GTI figures), there continue to be areas of fragile
governance – including Afghanistan, where a ceasefire with the Taliban has been declared – that
risk flaring up as long as political and economic imbalances prevail.

It is important to remember, as I have stated throughout this dissertation, that VNSAs do not
emerge or operate in a vacuum. They result out of an unbalanced system – a compromised
“organism” - and are often able to promote themselves as restorers of balance to those who seek
it. Rather than considering them isolated, sporadic, and monolithic threats, as governments are
prone to, this study has aimed to clarify biopolitical motives that explain VNSAs and their
behavior with the hope that it will motivate more nuanced and sustainable solutions. When it

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comes to VNSAs – whether they use crime or extremist ideologies to promote themselves – it is not sufficient to address the symptoms, policies must continuously work to correct the imbalance.
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## Appendix A – Truth Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violent Non-State Actor</th>
<th>High political repression</th>
<th>Ethnic or sectarian violence</th>
<th>Recent Regime transition (within 5 years of origin)</th>
<th>Economic downturn (within 5 years of origin)</th>
<th>Foreign power intervention/Occupation</th>
<th>Breakaway from larger group</th>
<th>Widespread Violence/Insecurity</th>
<th>Weak Central Government/Ungoverned spaces</th>
<th>Access to clandestine resource</th>
<th>Opposition parties in Legislature</th>
<th>Family/clan-based structure</th>
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</table>
# Appendix B – Sources for Ch. 2 Case Selection

*Highlighted in bold are cases used in study. Italics are cases that fit the selection criteria but were not included in final analysis (Al Qaeda, EZLN, Albanian Mafia, ETA, RUF, D-Company)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Cases Discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benedikt Seemann – Bandits or Terrorists? (2016)</td>
<td>Abu Sayyaf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergei Boeke – Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Terrorism, insurgency, or organized crime? (2016)</td>
<td>AQIM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishman – Terrorism, Crime, and Transformation (2001)</td>
<td>Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), FARC, LTTE, PKK, ETA (Spain), Hezbollah, Chechen Mafia, Medellin Cartel, Burmese insurgents in Golden Triangle, Shining Path – Counterexamples: Russian Mafia, EZLN (Mexico)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Parliament Directorate General for Internal Policies – Europe’s Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between terrorist and organized crime groups in the European Union (2012)</td>
<td>AQIM, KLA, Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Abkhazia Rebels/Separatists, Al Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Camorra, Corsican Organized Crime, DHKP-C (Turkey), Dissident Republic Groups in UK, Ireland, Colombia, N17 (Greece), ETA, FLNC (France), FARC, GIA (or AQIM), Iraultza (Spain), INLA (Ireland, UK), IMU, UCPMB (Serbia and Montenegro, LVF (UK), GICM (Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group), MEK (France, Iran, Iraq, US), Macedonian UCK (linked to KLA), ‘Ndrangheta, NIPR (Italy), PKK, Sacra Corona Unitita, White Legions and Forest Brothers (Georgia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterterrorism Monitoring by EU – Examining the Nexus between Organized Crime and Terrorism and its implications for EU Programming</td>
<td>AQIM, Boko Haram, Al Shabaab, Taliban and Haqqani network, PKK, ISIS, KLA, IRA offshoots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Title and Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>O'Brien – Fluctuations Between Crime and Terror: The case of Abu Sayyaf’s Kidnapping Activities (2012)</td>
<td>FARC, Taliban, Haqqani network in Afghan-Pakistani border, criminal groups in Mexico, Abu Sayyaf</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sala and Alda – Links between terrorism, organized crime and crime: The case of the Sahel Region (2014)</td>
<td>AQIM (previously GIA and GSPC)</td>
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<td>Ballina – The crime-terror continuum revisited: a model for the study of hybrid criminal organizations (2011)</td>
<td>La Familia Michoacana, Abu Sayyaf, Al Qaeda, Taliban</td>
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<td>Cornell – Narcotics and Armed Conflict: Interaction and Implications (2006)</td>
<td>Hezb-e-Islami, Taliban, Sura-I-Nazar (Afghanistan); United Wa State Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, Kachin Defense Army (Burma); FARC, ELN (Colombia); Hmong Insurgents (Laos); EZLN (Mexico); Mojahir Quami Movement (Pakistan); Shining Path (Peru)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bjorgo - Counterterrorism as crime prevention: a holistic approach (2016)</td>
<td>Taliban, Al Qaeda, Hamas, ISIS</td>
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<td>Phillips, Kamen/ Phillips, Valasik – Entering the black hole: The Taliban, Terrorism, and Organized Crime (2014)</td>
<td>Taliban, Al Qaeda, FARC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hutchinson, O’Malley – A Crime-Terror Nexus? Thinking on some of the links between terrorism and criminality (2007)</td>
<td>FARC, LTTE, Al Qaeda, KLA, IMU, Hezbollah, Taliban, PKK, Abu Sayyaf/MILF, Yakuza, Medellin Cartel, ELN, EZLN, PIRA, Hamas, Shining Path, Palestinian PFLP-GC, M19 (Colombia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard, Traughber – The nexus of extremism and trafficking: scourge of the world or so much hype? (2013)</td>
<td>AQIM, Al Qaeda, Italian Mafias, Brazilian criminal groups (Red Commando), Mexican drug cartels, Pakistani Taliban, al-Shabaab, PKK, LTTE, Chechen extremists, Russian Mafia, FARC, Hezbollah, Zetas DTO Region: Tri-border zone in Latin America</td>
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<tr>
<td>Felbab Brown – Shooting up: counterinsurgency and the war on drugs (2009)</td>
<td>Taliban and Northern Alliance, FARC, AUC (Colombia), M-19, ELN, Shining Path and MRTA, IRA, KLA, Hezbollah, PKK, ETA. Author uses other more disperse cases as well, but mostly focused towards involvement in narcotic trafficking. Regions: Andean countries of Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia; Mexico; Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia in the Golden Crescent; Myanmar and Laos in the Golden Triangle; and Morocco.</td>
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</table>

Appendix C – 27 QCA Case Studies (General Summaries and Main Sources)

*Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)*
   - Covered at length in Chapter 3.

*Shining Path*
   - Covered at length in Chapter 3.

*Boko Haram*
   - *Origin years:* 2002-2009
   - *Peak year:* 2009-2014; 2019 (as ISWAP)
   - *Location of origin:* Nigeria (Maiduguri, Borno – northeast)
   - *Summary:*
     - Boko Haram, whose official name is Jama’at ahl al-sunna li-da’wa wa-l-qital (“people committed to the propagation of the prophet’s teachings and Jihad”) was officially founded in 2002 and was focused on opposing Western education. There are two distinct formation periods for Boko Haram. The first is its initial appearance as a political-ideological movement by Mohammed
Yusuf. Yusuf was not a fierce advocate of armed struggle against the government, but his anti-establishment discourse, condemning the excesses and corruption of the Nigerian government, the rampant inequality and systemic segregation of Muslim Nigerians in Borno, resonated widely. Despite being the largest economic power in Africa, over half of the population live below the poverty line. "Poor people identified with this [Yusuf's] discourse because they were promised paradise. They promised an Islamic state with Shariah, which is a form of social justice. Then the rich would no longer siphon off public money. They joined this group because they believed it would improve their lives through the more rigorous practice of Islam," explains Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos, professor at the French Institute of Geopolitics.

The second period of the organization - its militant phase - began in June 2009, when a federal government task force opened fire on a group of Boko Haram members riding motorbikes in a funeral procession. Amid these escalated tensions, hardliners led by Abubakar Shekau gained relevance as they called for revenge, and the group occupied Maiduguri for over a week. This prompted an unrestrained response from the Nigerian military which ended in hundreds of casualties, including Yusuf who was executed extrajudicially. As Montclos explained, "Yusuf was the dove of Boko Haram. Once he was killed, you have killed the dove. You have killed the structuring element of the group, which would disintegrate into small autonomous cells and clandestine groups. The vultures immediately took power after his extrajudicial execution in 2009."\(^{192}\)

This was the immediate trigger for the militant factions of Boko Haram. The summer of 2014 marked the group’s territorial expansion, in which Boko Haram seized several towns in the northeast of the country, particularly the south of the state of Borno. In August 2014, leader Abubakar Shekau declared a caliphate in areas under Boko Haram’s control, with Gwoza as its capital. Shekau formally pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and broke ties with Al Qaeda.\(^{193}\)

An international coalition organized by France and welcomed by President Goodluck Jonathan formed to counter the group’s expansion and Chad and Niger were given the right to pursue Boko Haram into Nigerian territory. In December 2015, newly elected president Muhammadu Buhari declared the group technically defeated, as the coalition managed to drive Boko Haram from the large cities in Borno. The ideology, however, maintained support, as Elodie Apard, French Research Institute for Africa, mentioned, "They may crush the movement, but they won't kill the ideology, which is based on the gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria. The

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\(^{192}\) Al Jazeera

ideology it brought, that Yusuf started, can spread everywhere. Even if the movement has been crushed, maybe in two or three years’ time we will have to see what they do and where it will re-emerge”.194

In August 2016, the group split into two factions. One faction also known as ISWAP is formally recognized by IS and is headed by Yusuf’s son, Abu Musab al-Barnawi. ISWAP controls territory on the shores of Lake Chad and collects taxes in north-east Nigeria (GTI 2019) and is purportedly gaining support from Lake Chad locals thanks to its provision of economic opportunities and moderation compared to its parent organization.195

Another faction is headed by the more extreme Abubakar Shekau - now disavowed by IS - and considers all Muslims not following him as potential targets. Shekau’s group is now commonly referred to as Boko Haram. These rifts may be responsible for Boko Haram relatively lower lethality, down 42% in 2018 compared to the previous year and 89% compared to their peak in 2014. According to Crisis Group, ISWAP has an estimated 3,500-5,000 members, whereas Boko Haram has 1,500-2,000. As far as territorial presence, Crisis Group reports that “ISWAP has not strayed beyond Boko Haram’s traditional territory. Within that territory, areas of militant control are fluid but – according to aid organisations that have sought to delineate zones where the two factions hold sway – the border between ISWAP and JAS zones seems to run through the Mafa, Dikwa and Kala Balge local government areas. It is now generally agreed that ISWAP’s reach extends well beyond the lake area, into northern Borno state, in the Alagarno forest and along the Komadugu Yobe river, and into eastern Yobe in the Farooq forest. ISWAP is present around Maiduguri, notably in the Konduga local government area. Some observers think that ISWAP operates in the north of another north-eastern state, that of Adamawa, more than a hundred kilometres south of Maiduguri. ISWAP has also carried out some attacks against Cameroonian security forces in the district of Logone-et-Chari in Cameroon.”196

According to CFR, “Boko Haram has been linked to the deaths of more than thirty-seven thousand people since 2011, according to CFR’s Nigeria Security Tracker, which monitors political violence in the country. About half of those killed were suspected Boko Haram militants, while roughly 45 percent were civilians and 5 percent were security forces.” However, currently, according to Crisis Group, “Neither of the two successor factions controls nearly the territory that Boko Haram once held. Their sway is limited to the

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marshland around and islands of Lake Chad, parts of the Mandara hills on the Nigeria-Cameroon border, and the inaccessible forests of Borno and Yobe states – terrain that provides cover from Nigerian and allied air power.  

_CRISIS Group Maps and Tables:_

_Nigeria -

![Map of Nigeria and Lake Chad](https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/273-facing-challenge-islamic-state-west-africa-province)

_Boko Haram Faction Areas of Influence -

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Monthly Fatalities Associated with Boko Haram conflict, 2011-2019: Civilians vs. Soldiers -
Main sources:


Al-Shabaab

Origin years: 1996-Early 2000s
Peak year: 2011
Location of origin: Somalia (East Africa)
Summary:

Somalia’s multi-party democratic government ended in 1969 with a bloodless military coup led by Siad Barre, who forged close ties with the Soviet Union and outlawed the clan system. However, in 1980, the Barre regime became more dominated by the leader’s own Marehan clan and increasingly repressive to other clans. Barre’s authoritarianism incited a largely clan-based armed resistance that marked the intrastate conflict that continues today. During the 1980s, groups engaged in guerilla warfare in an attempt to overthrow the regime, and towards the end of the decade, combined forces to successfully oust Barre in January 1991. This led to a violent power struggle that pushed the state towards collapse. As the central government lost authority, the north-western region self-declared itself the independent Republic of Somaliland – to this day, Somaliland is ruled autonomously though it is not formally recognized as a sovereign nation. The long civil war left Somalia’s economy, infrastructure, and public institutions devastated and its human capital depleted.198

Al-Shabaab was preceded by al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) that peaked in opposition to and after fall of Said Barre regime in 1991. Al-Shabaab, or “the Youth”, emerged as a younger, more hardline group that splits from AIAI, seeking to extend its mission and

198 https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2019/10/02/somalias-path-to-stability/

Established in the late 1990s, the Somali-based terror group seeks to establish a fundamentalist Islamic state in the country that it hopes will ultimately expand to encompass the whole Horn of Africa. Al-Shabab controls much of the southern Somalia region and small pockets in Kenya and Ethiopia along the Somali border. In areas under the group’s control, al-Shabaab imposes its strict version of sharia (Islamic law), prohibiting activities like listening to music or shaving one’s beard. The group predominately conducts attacks targeting the Somali government and the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM).”

In June 2004, the ICU, a coalition of eleven sharia courts, emerged and in October 2004, the internationally backed transitional federal government is formed, comprising of representatives from the country’s largest clans.”

Al Shabaab, together with ICU (Islamic Courts Union) seized control of Mogadishu in June 2006 but was countered by invading U.S.-backed Ethiopian forces. Al-Shabaab, galvanized by the invasion, moved southward to organize counterattacks, and develops in 2007 as a powerful guerrilla group rather than a rebel group, well-funded and thousands strong. In 2009, Ethiopian troops withdraw and are replaced by UN-backed African Union Mission in Somalia forces (AMISOM), consisting of troops contributed by the governments of Burundi, Djibouti, Ehtiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Sierra Leone. In August 2011, al-Shabaab is pushed out of Mogadishu and in 2012 and AQ announces its integration in the jihadi network.

Its reincorporation into the AQ network expanded its terrorism capabilities: “Following the group’s pledge of allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2012, al-Shabab began executing a score of violent attacks in Somalia’s neighboring countries, including the September 2013 Westgate Mall attacks in Nairobi, Kenya, which left 68 people dead and 175 wounded. The group is also responsible for the April 2015 Garissa University attacks, wherein five al-Shabab fighters stormed the Kenyan university, killing nearly 150 people. Since then, the group has continued to attempt and conduct terrorist attacks outside of its stronghold in Somalia. In al-Shabab’s first attempt to attack Western targets, an assailant detonated a concealed laptop bomb on a Daallo Airlines flight leaving Mogadishu for Djibouti City on February 2, 2016. The explosion, which killed only the attacker, was not strong enough to down the plane. Al-Shabab reportedly killed more than 4,200 people in 2016, making it the deadliest Islamic terror group in Africa. In October 2017, al-Shabab was credited with the worst terror attack in Somalia to date—a truck bomb that killed over 300 people in Mogadishu.”

199 https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/al-shabab

200 CFR Backgrounder

201 https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/al-shabab
foreign troops has not improved security for civilian population, and despite persistent attacks, AMISOM plans to withdraw troops leaving Somali military forces to fully take over by 2021.

According to a Brookings report, although Al-Shabaab had seized large swaths of territory, in 2016, 150 armed groups were active – three times as many than in 2010. This is due to the proliferation of “clan” militias, propelled by a 67% youth unemployment rate. Al Shabaab has several cells spanning across Somalia, and has varied in unification over the years. In 2017 they appeared more unified, and in affiliation to Al Qaeda. 2017 was the group’s deadliest year on record (GTI 2017), although its numbers declined by 56% in 2018. The decrease can be partially attributed to an African Union-led peacekeeping mission.

Al Shabaab attempts to control territory and exact taxes on services and residents. They counter foreign governments’ activities through terrorism in their territories, as has been the case for Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda (or in Somalia, primarily Mogadishu). In 2010, when Al-Shabaab first struck outside of Somalia in the Ugandan capital of Kampala through coordinated suicide bombings, the group’s spokesman said, “We are sending a message to every country who is willing to send troops to Somalia that they will face attacks on their territory.” The group has also clashed with other Islamist groups such as Hizbul Islam and the more moderate Ahlu Sunna Waljamaaca, and internal struggles have caused spikes in violence, as in the case of the splinter group Aaro Aaro. In 2015, Abdulqadir Mumin, a commander and influential cleric defected from the group and pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. However, this cell’s presence remains relatively small and has received pushback from Al-Shabaab.

Al-Shabaab has purportedly funded itself through several sources of income, including other terrorist groups, piracy, kidnapping, and extortion of locals, farmers, and aid groups.

Main sources:

- Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) - General information on Somalia context
- UCDP - Somalia Civil War profile

202 https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2019/10/02/somalias-path-to-stability/
203 UCDP Somalia Civil War
204 CFR Al-Shabaab profile
Taliban

**Origin:** 1994

**Peak year(s):** 1996; fell in 2001, resurfaced in ~2019

**Location of origin:** Afghanistan (border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan – south areas of Afghanistan)

**Summary:**

The Taliban, which is Pashto for “seekers”, was founded in the mid-1900s as a Sunni Muslim group that had the goal of overthrowing the corrupt Afghan government led by rival Mujahideen warlords that took power after the Soviet withdrawal. The central aim of the Taliban was to restore order by installing an Islamic state ruled by sharia law. Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban who held the title “Commander of the Faithful”, was known for living in austere conditions and leading the fight against corruption and abuse by leaders that had ruled the country since the Soviet fall.

The Taliban was constituted by the local elites of the Pashto tribes, and they had often fought together in different Mujahideen factions and studied in Islamic schools, including its chosen leader Mullah Omar. It began its spread by countering control of local warlords in the south of Afghanistan, capturing Kandahar in 1994, but it was not until 1995 that they began confronting the government of Afghanistan outside Kabul. The Taliban attracted many young recruits who felt betrayed and disillusioned by the Mujahideen after the abuses and fighting that followed Soviet troop withdrawal. The Taliban became a successful insurgency force that established itself as the new status quo authority in around September 1996, and fell back to insurgency status after 2001 once UIFSA regained control of the government under Karzai.

The Taliban faced invasion from U.S. forces and retreated to Pakistan after refusing to hand over Al Qaeda operatives to the U.S. post-9/11. They regrouped in Pakistan’s tribal areas and in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Despite its retreat, it maintained de facto authority in many Afghan provinces throughout the conflict (in fact, the Taliban had never been recognized as de jure government by any state other than Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and UAE). In 2003, the group organized armed struggle against the government, proclaiming war against the tens of thousands of troops that had been deployed to support the new government. Ashley Jackson explains how the Taliban has maintained a foothold in Afghanistan despite ISAF’s efforts against it:

For the Taliban, control of people – rather than control of territory or popular support – is the priority. They seek to control the population, mainly to prevent people from informing upon them or acting against them. They use governance to keep the population at least marginally satisfied, and this, in combination with their coercive power, helps secure the population in areas under their influence or control. As such, the provision of public goods and strict regulations on personal behaviour are driven by ideology, but are also designed to control the population. The Taliban use outright violence against those they perceive as a threat, which in turn sends a message to the
rest of the civilian population about what happens to those who might act against them. As Hirose et al. find in their study of Taliban targeting, the Taliban exhibit ‘an impressive, if imperfect, ability to monitor civilian attitudes, one that is likely more sophisticated and extensive than ISAF’s efforts’ (Hirose et al., 2017).

The group funds itself mainly through opium poppy cultivation and narcotics, as well as taxes it levies on commercial activities such as farming and mining. Many sources allege that it maintains a close symbiotic relationship with Al Qaeda and it actively fought against its rival, the Islamic State. Estimates of the group’s strength since resurgence vary from as low as 5,000 to as high as 15,000.

Since 2018, the U.S. has agreed to peace talks with the Taliban in a clear sign of the group’s prevailing influence in Afghanistan. Terms of the agreement include guarantees that the Taliban will not provide a safe haven for terrorists and calls for negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government. In its 2019 report, the UN Taliban monitoring team claimed that the Taliban leadership maintained the group’s overall unity despite its being based outside the country. The leadership council, known as Rahbari Shura makes decisions for political and military affairs of the Emirate, and the leader is currently Mullah Muhammad Yaqoub, Omar’s son, and Sirajuddin Haqqani, acting head of the Haqqani Network (a militant group in Afghanistan’s southeast and Pakistan’s northwest with ties to Taliban, al-Qaeda, and Pakistan’s ISI). Despite thousands of losses over the years, experts say the group is stronger now than at any point in the last eighteen years, with an estimated 60,000 full-time fighters. Despite this, a 2019 survey found that only 13.4% of Afghans had sympathy for the Taliban and a vast majority believed reconciliation with the Taliban was possible.

According to the Global Security Review, the economic situation of Afghanis, especially in areas of high Taliban support, remained highly unequal and dire:

The poverty and inequality indicators (poverty rate, depth of poverty, the average consumption of the poor, per capita monthly total consumption and the Gini coefficient) of southern Afghanistan are almost several times higher than those in the northern sectors of the country. In addition, due to persistent insecurity in the southern and eastern regions of Afghanistan, the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment report (2012-2013) shows that the percentage of vulnerable population groups at high risk of poverty, malnutrition, and disease (female-headed households, children, women, addicts, and the elderly) are almost double those in northern and western Afghanistan. This intra-regional and provincial inequality, coupled with a lack of access to essential services and economic opportunities,

205 Ashley Jackson - Life under the Taliban Shadow Government

206 CFR – Taliban profile
is cause for serious alarm […] Afghanistan’s economy is increasingly moving towards a narco-mafia model where a few families throughout the country control the private sector and public offices both at the national and subnational level.207

**Main Sources:**
- CFR Background on the Taliban in Afghanistan (https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan)
- UCDP Profile - Afghanistan Background
- UCDP Profile - US Coalition conflict
- Foreign Affairs – Helmand’s Flower that Threatens Us All (https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2019-03-21/helmands-flower-threatens-us-all)

**Abu Sayyaf**

*Origin:* 1991

*Peak year(s):* 1990s-2016

*Location of origin:* Philippines (southwest in Jolo, Basilan, Mindanao

*Summary:*

Abu Sayyaf began as a radical Wahhabi faction of the “Bangsamoro struggle” – the Muslims’ in Mindanao, or Moros’ (5% of the population) struggle against the Philippine government to assert their cultural identity and self-rule - and gained influence due to the historical and systematic marginalization and minoritization of the Islamized ethno-linguistic groups throughout the islands. Its leader and founder Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani had studied in the Middle East and became radicalized after traveling to Saudi Arabia, Libya, and other Muslim countries. He reportedly met Osama bin Laden in Pakistan and possibly fought alongside him during the

Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Janjalani returned to Philippines with the mission of transforming southern Philippines into an Islamic state.

In February 1986, the fall of President Marcos’s 21-year rule was marked by a precipitous decline in real GNP, down 17% from its high point in 1981. His successor, Corazon Aquino – wife of assassinated exiled Senator Benigno Aquino, undertook an economic recovery process led by technocrats, a powerful business community, and international creditors. In 1989, Aquino rightly noted that the poor had not benefited from the economic recovery, as inequality had widened and child malnourishment increased. Corruption continued during Aquino’s tenure and her government faced several coup attempts, the most serious of which was staved off when a flyover of US jets deterred mutinous soldiers in December 1989.

This backdrop gave opening to several militant groups, such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, in poorer areas like Mindanao. In the 1980s, ASG – an alternative to MILF - received financial support through Al Qaeda. Groups like MNLF and MILF distanced themselves from ASG and its violent tactics, which strengthened the group’s relationship with Al Qaeda through Janjalani. In 1998, Philippine police forces killed Janjalani, and the group splintered into two factions – one led by Janjalani’s brother, Khadaffy Janjalani, and the other led by commander Galib Andang.

As that funding source expired, the group turned to extortion, provision of security for illicit marijuana cultivation and trafficking, and most importantly, kidnapping-for-ransom (KFR). Additionally, as ASG’s popularity waned through attacks that received increased scrutiny and rejection from the Philippine population, ASG’s primary allure for recruits became financial gain rather than ideological fulfillment. This break, however, led to increased fragmentation and deterioration of the group’s commitment to its central aims under Janjalani.

Galib Andang was captured in 2003 which purportedly decreased fragmentation of the group, and once ASG was able to consolidate, they were able to carry out major attacks once again in the early 2000s. One of these was ASG’s deadliest attacks, the 2004 Superferry 14 bombing in Manila Bay that killed 116. Counterterrorism efforts resumed in earnest and Khadaffy Janjalani was killed in 2006, leading to another bout of decentralization which resulted in less mass bombings, more small-scale attacks, and more kidnapping for ransom.

On 2014, Isnilon Hapilon, the ASG leader, pledged allegiance to IS. However, there have been no reports of material or financial support between the two organizations. In 2017, the group launched a series of attacks in Marawi, a Muslim majority city in Minanao, following government forces’ attempt to capture Hapilon. In October 2017, after a series of crackdowns and U.S. support, the Philippine government declared Marawi reclaimed. In total, the battle for Marawi resulted in 1,000 deaths and the displacement of 200,000 people. Several reports maintain that the group has once again been broken into decentralized factions with deputy leaders.
carrying out disjointed operations. On July 2018, the Phillippine House of Representatives passed the Bangsamoro Organic Law which would establish a new autonomous region in the south. MILF representatives were present and declared their support.

O’Brien analyzed fluctuations in kidnappings carried out by terrorist group Abu Sayyaf (ASG) from 1991 to 2001 by focusing on four factors: leadership, structure, membership and grievances, and linkages to other actors. The author details ASG’s notable shifts in the group’s aims and tactics since its inception. ASG is made up of some 400-600 combatants, and from 1991 to 2011 have perpetrated 137 kidnappings and raised over $35 million.

The main takeaways from the initial frames the author uses are:

**Leadership** - ASG follows two leadership patterns: leadership vacuum or consolidation and “bandit” leaders. “Bandit” periods (1998-2002, 2006-2012) were marked with spikes in KPR, while leadership consolidation periods (1991-1998, 2002-2006) had an ideological tilt and higher focus on terrorism.

**Organizational Structure** – Since ASG is a loose and decentralized organization, its operations tend to shift from period to period. As cells are disperse and not particularly unified, they must rely on their own actionable financing mechanisms, i.e. kidnapping and crime.

**Membership Frame** - In periods of higher kidnapping activity, membership attracts younger individuals motivated to cash in on the group’s reputation. The author describes the group as an “identity entrepreneur” offering status and belonging above small gangs.

**External linkages** – Also when leadership focuses on criminal activities, ASG shares more prominent links to other criminal leaders or organizations. These links have perpetuated ASG’s role in the underground criminal world and granted it access to valuable connections, funds and resources, particularly drug and arms trafficking. Most notably, during criminal peaks, ASG appears to neglect its links to other ideologically focused organizations such as Jemaah Islamiya.

As Audrey Cronin posits in one of her seven reasons on how terrorist group ends, ASG might be transitioning from a terrorist organization to a criminal one. This is defined as “a shift away from a primary emphasis on collecting resources as a means of pursuing political ends toward acquiring material goods and profit that become ends in themselves” (Cronin 2006). O’Brien further posits that ASG might lose legitimacy and support as an ideological group considering its perception as a purely criminal entity, although he does not delve into the possibility of ASG’s potential pivot back to ideological radicalism in such a scenario of waning power and increased government pressure to its criminal activities.
Main sources:

- CISAC (https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/abu-sayyaf-group)
- The Diplomat - Current state of ASG - (https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/is-abu-sayyaf-really-defeated/)
- Facts and Details Profile - Philippines Economic Data – (http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Philippines/sub5_6g/entry-3916.html)
• Anushka D. Kapahi and Gabrielle Tañada, The Bangsamoro Identity Struggle and the Bangsamoro Basic Law as the Path to Peace, 2018

_Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)_

*Origin years:* 1976
*Peak year:* 1984
*Location of origin:* Sri Lanka (North and East)
*Summary:*

Upon Sri Lanka’s independence in 1948, there was concern that nationalist politics of Sinhalese majority would not give adequate protection against discrimination of Tamil population. In 1972, the constitution stipulated the primacy of Sinhala and Buddhism, language and religion of Sinhalese majority. As backlash to these policies, Tamil militancy emerged in early 1970s. Evolving from an earlier group called Tamil New Tigers (formed in 1972), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) received support from India at inception (India is home to more than 60 million of the world’s 77 million Tamils and India, under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, would host Tamil training camps in Tamil Nadu from which LTTE emerged) in form of arms and training, as well as safe havens and political support. LTTE was formally established in 1976 as a part of the political platform of the Vaddukoddai resolution (calling for the establishment of the separate state of Tamil Eelam covering northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka) under the leadership of Vellupillai Prabhakaran, but was from origin a military outfit pushing for separatism through violence. Ideologically, the group was predominantly nationalist but leaned towards socialism.

Fighting between the government and LTTE did not break out until 1983 following an LTTE ambush that killed 13 Sri Lankan soldiers. This led to rioting in the central parts of the county, where retaliatory attacks resulted in the killing of between 500 and 2000 Tamils. The complicity of Sri Lankan forces led to a boost in Tamil militant group recruitment. Thus, the group reached prominence in 1984, developing an operative alliance with three other Tamil opposition groups, forming the Eelam National Liberation Front. However, LTTE left the coalition in 1986, and began to counter its political rivals by force, leading to intense internecine fighting among these groups. LTTE succeeded in maintaining its primacy over Tamil militancy and developed one of the world’s most sophisticated militant rebel forces, the Black Tigers. The group continued to receive aid from the Tamil-led government of the Indian
state Tamil Nadu and the significant Tamil diaspora across the globe. In a January 2008 report, CRS reported that LTTE continued to raise an estimated $200 million to $300 million per year from Tamils abroad.

According to CFR, LTTE had between 7000 and 15000 armed combatants and is notorious for suicide bombings, conducting over 200 of them since the late 1980s. The LTTE purportedly invented the suicide belt and pioneered the use of women in suicide bombings. They are also accused of engaging in abductions and extortion, as well as high-level assassinations.

After the 2008 elections and once the government succeeded in taking control of the country’s east through military campaigns against LTTE, the governing coalition of Sri Lanka forged a partnership with the pro-government splinter of the LTTE, Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) and installed the leader of the party as chief minister of the Easter Provincial Council. This model was purportedly set to be recreated in the north.

In April 2009, Human Rights Watch reported that while rebels were preventing over 50,000 trapped civilians from abandoning the last strip of land they held, government forces shelled the area. This has prompted claims of significant human rights abuses and civilian casualties from both sides. The conflict with LTTE was declared officially over in May 2009 when the Sri Lankan government claimed to have killed its leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran. Experts cautioned that LTTE could continue its struggle as a guerilla faction, especially if the Sri Lankan government continued to marginalize the Tamil population. By some accounts, certain LTTE cadres in the Northern Province were still a threat, but because there have been some political inroads with Tamil leaders, the conflict has not reached the level of volatility it did during the 1980s.208

Main sources:

- UCDP - Profile of LTTE (https://ucdp.uu.se/actor/320)
- UCDP - Profile of Sri Lanka (https://ucdp.uu.se/statebased/776)

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

Origin years: 1964-1966
Peak year: 1970s, early 1990s
Location of origin: Colombia (Marquetalia and other rural enclaves, particularly in the South)
Summary:
The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was formed by members of the Colombian Communist Party as a self-described “peasant army” and began fighting a guerrilla war since 1964 to overthrow the Colombian government. Although the group has typically had a well-defined structure and line of command, it has evolved throughout the years to adapt to phases of conflict. The geography of Colombia has made it harder for central command, known as Secretariat, to exercise control over the whole organizations, and the group instead has developed a vast network of logistical experts in bombing, transportation, kidnapping, arms trafficking, etc. and manages militias throughout. There were purportedly over 70 of these relatively autonomous units capable of carrying out insurgent or criminal activities in different areas.

The origins of the FARC have deep historical roots. The assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan in 1948, a popular left-wing politician led to a wave of violence between right and left-wing militant groups during the 1950s and 1960s known as La Violencia. Over 300,000 people died as a result of the civil war, and it prompted the rise of several left-wing movements and militant outfits, including FARC, ELN, and 19\textsuperscript{th} of April movement.

In its attempt to restore the economy after the war, the national government promoted industrialization and prompted the eviction of thousands of farmers and, consequently, ignited a long-standing conflict with communist-leaning agrarian communities. Several of those who fled organized their own militias known as “self-defense” units, and combined efforts from unions and student organizations. Among these was FARC, led by Manuel Marulanda Velez of the Communist Party, which declared one of these communities, Marquetalia, autonomous and escaped to the mountains when government forces attacked in 1964. While the government offensive cleared rebels from the area, it provided the spark to formalize the party’s armed group known as the Southern Tolima Bloc (Bloque Sur de Tolima). In 1966, the group adopted the name FARC.

The expansion of the illegal drug industry in Colombia propelled FARC’s rise. In the mid-1970s, the group changed their bylaws to collect taxes from marijuana growers and later expanded the mandate to include coca leaf plantations. They also began kidnapping for ransom and extortion of large and small businesses. In the early 1980s, they began to tax cocaine laboratories operating under areas they controlled. The drawback of this approach was a de facto alliance between powerful traffickers and the government to counter FARC influence both politically and militarily, such as through the paramilitary outfit MAS (Muerte a Secuestradores).
Farmers, businessmen, and small shop owners also began to turn on rebels because of excessive taxation or kidnapping. The United States labelled FARC a terrorist organization and provided Colombia with billions of dollars in assistance to combat the guerrillas. FARC eventually also benefitted from the support of Venezuela under President Hugo Chavez who sought strategic benefit against Colombia and the US.

FARC has been involved in on-off peace negotiations with the government since 1984 when it set up a political party called UP or Patriotic Union. In 1986, the UP won several seats in Congress and its presidential candidate garnered more votes than any leftist candidates, and additionally, it secured a substantial amount of mayor and city council posts throughout the country. The political avenue, however, was undermined by a series of assassinations carried it out against UP members by right-wing paramilitaries. Over 3,000 UP members were killed in a six year period and FARC once again retreated to the mountains. By 1988, FARC had doubled the size of their forces as many gave up on the democratic process through the UP.

In the mid-1990s, the rebels carried out a series of attacks on government forces, capturing hundreds of Colombian soldiers and policemen who became leverage in negotiations with the government. After a prisoner swap, the government ceded a swath of territory the size of Switzerland in the southern departments of Caqueta and Meta to FARC. The group used the territory to regroup, recruit, train, and launch attacks on nearby towns. The group also continued kidnapping and overseeing coca plantations.

Negotiation talks fell apart in 2002 when FARC hijacked an airplane and when guerillas kidnapped Green Party candidate Ingrid Betancourt and her campaign manager. This coincided with the election of hardliner President Alvaro Uribe who campaigned on a platform of defeating the FARC. Uribe welcomed US intelligence and assistance and inflicted significant military losses on FARC. At this point, FARC also suffered from desertions due to disillusionment by the group’s involvement in drug trade.

After the death of Marulanda in March 2008, the group focused less on controlling territory and more on guerrilla warfare as well as building up urban networks and increasing political outreach. Marulanda was replaced by Alfonso Cano, and in July 2008 the Colombian Army rescued 15 of FARC’s high profile hostages, including Ingrid Betancourt, further weakening FARC. Cano was shot and killed in November 2011, and in 2012, the group entered peace talks with newly elected Juan Manuel Santos and reached a bilateral ceasefire deal in June 2016. The agreement included demobilizing in certain concentration zones across Colombia and reintegrating members into society, as well as tackling drug trafficking and criminal groups. Although FARC have officially withdrawn, not all members have complied with the agreement and continue their criminal activities.

Main Sources:
CISAC - FARC profile - https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/revolutionary-armed-forces-colombia-farc#text_block_17686

**Hezbollah**

*Origin years:* 1982-1985  
*Peak year:* 2008  
*Location of origin:* Lebanon (south)  
*Summary:*

Literally meaning “The Party of God”, Hezbollah formally announced existence in 1985 but began to be formed in 1982 as a secular, yet Shiite, Amal movement in the aftermath of the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982. It opposed Israeli invasion of Lebanon in a relatively moderate stance initially (Shiites were second-class citizens in Lebanon at the time) and was backed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard – it has enjoyed close ties to the Shiite leadership of the Iranian government since. It is considered “a state within a state” due to its extensive security apparatus, political organization, and social services network.  
Hezbollah traces its origins back to the long-lasting conflict between Israel and rebel groups operating in the Lebanon to end Israeli occupation. Lebanon was a multi-confessional state when it received independence from France in 1946, and it held a finely-balanced political environment between Sunni, Shia, and Maronite religious communities. This balance was upset over time, particularly with the influx of Palestinian refugees following the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflicts and worsening socioeconomic conditions, and conflict erupted between the years 1975-1990.  
After stabilization in 1989 with the Taif Accords, Southern Lebanon was predominately inhabited by poor Shia Muslims, Palestinian refugees, and minority of Christians living along the Israeli border. These groups had been historically disenfranchised, as political and economic power was held disproportionately by the Maronites and the richer, urbanized Sunnis. The main Shiite group in the region was Harakat Amal, a religiously defined and left-leaning political group that used militias against Palestinian refugee fighters during the civil war. The situation remained tense due to the influx of refugees as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel had battled the PLO since 1971 and had supported its ally in the region, the Christian South Lebanon Army. After repeated offenses, Israel managed to establish a security zone in Southern Lebanon claimed by both Syria and Lebanon occupied by Israeli-supported SLA and Israeli soldiers and making up 10% of Lebanese territory. Initially, Amal held a neutral stance to Israeli presence since it opposed Palestinian militants, but Israel’s increased grip on the region increased pro-freedom Shiite activism, and Amal and
the Lebanese National Resistance shifted their stance to actively opposing the occupation. Hezbollah took shape from the Lebanese National Resistance and dissident members of Amal in 1982.

Hezbollah’s 1985 manifesto declared its goals to be the destruction of Israel and the United States, resistance towards Western imperialism, the formation of an Islamic state in Lebanon (without use of force), and the removal of Israeli occupation from southern Lebanon. As Israel solidified its grip on the region, the group began to emerge as a more militant and fervently religious faction of Amal and based on the teachings of Iranian leader Khomeini. It is known to have training camps and cells throughout the Middle East, the U.S., and Western Europe, and is also boasts a vast network of socioeconomic charities. One report revealed that in its early days, Hezbollah relied on family and clan networks to recruit new members and to build motivated, cohesive, and effective units.

As Israeli forces withdrew, rivalries over Shiite loyalty in Lebanon led to open warfare with Amal in 1988-1990, killing hundreds. In 1990, all militias but Hezbollah were demobilized, which left Hezbollah as the only armed non-state group, supported by Syria. Although Hezbollah waged small-scale skirmishes against Israel, these occasionally flared up into larger conflicts, such as in 1996 and 2006. Since 2000, the group grew both politically and militarily, even outweighing the Lebanese army in strength by 2006. The group shifted its attention towards internal Lebanese affairs after internationally certified withdrawal of Israeli forces in 2000. However, Hezbollah views several pieces of land as Lebanese and considers the withdrawal insufficient.

Although Hezbollah has repeatedly been labelled a foreign terrorist organization by the US, the group has been involved as a political faction in both domestic and international Lebanese affairs. The group has been a fixture in Lebanese politics since 1992, holding several Parliament seats and cabinet positions. The party was effectively integrated into mainstream politics in 2009 when it updated its manifesto with less Islamist influence and called for “true democracy.” A 2014 report from Pew Research Center found that 31% of Christians and 9% of Sunni Muslims held positive views of the group. In 2019, however, economic woes in the region triggered mass protests calling for the political elite of Lebanon, including Hezbollah, to give up power to more technocratic leadership.

There is evidence of Hezbollah operations in Africa, the Americas, and Asia, and the group continues to be supported by Iran by more than $700 million per year, and it received hundreds of millions from legal businesses, international criminal enterprises, and the Lebanese diaspora. In 2011, as Syria descended into civil war, Hezbollah sent thousands of fighters to support Bashar al-Assad’s regime. Experts claim that Hezbollah’s international network is growing, but that the group is not seeking direct confrontation with Israel or the United States; the group appears to opt for covert operations rather than terrorism.

Main sources:
Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA)

*Origin years:* December 1969

*Peak year:* 1972

*Location of origin:* Ireland (Northern Ireland, Belfast)

*Summary:*

The PIRA, also known as the “Provos”, were a Belfast-based outgrowth of the older Irish Republican Army (the Dublin-based splinter were the less militant and more politically-focused “officials”). The IRA successfully challenged the British government for control of Ireland and, in exchange for independence, it allowed six northern counties to remain under British rule in 1921. These were reconstituted as Ulster or Northern Ireland. Elements within the IRA rejected the partition and launched a civil war. The old IRA maintained a low-level campaign of violence and although efforts continued to reunite Ireland, these had largely dwindled by the 1960s.

According to the CAIN Project, discrimination and inequality as well as rejection of civil rights movements to end them were key drivers of “The Troubles”, the violent period that would begin in the late 1960s:

In the North, the Catholic minority, many of them with "republican" or "nationalist" sympathies, found they faced discrimination for jobs, housing, and in their treatment before the law. On the other side, Protestant "unionists" held sway, controlled the patronage that doled out government jobs, and remained fiercely loyal to the British crown. Throughout much of the 20th century, Northern Ireland’s shipyards, linen mills, and other manufacturing hubs played an important role in the economy of the British Empire. Catholic residents, however, largely were excluded from this prosperity, and when the conflict the Irish call "the Troubles" erupted in 1969, the Catholic unemployment rate in some parts of the province topped 30 percent.

In the mid-1960s, a non-violent civil rights campaign began in Northern Ireland. It comprised groups such as the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), the Campaign for Social Justice (CSJ), the Derry Citizens' Action Committee (DCAC) and People's Democracy,[61] whose stated goals were:
• an end to job discrimination – it showed evidence that Catholics/nationalists were less likely to be given certain jobs, especially government jobs
• an end to discrimination in housing allocation – it showed evidence that unionist-controlled local councils allocated housing to Protestants ahead of Catholics/nationalists
• one man, one vote – in Northern Ireland, only householders could vote in local elections, while in the rest of the United Kingdom all adults could vote
• an end to gerrymandering of electoral boundaries – this meant that nationalists had less voting power than unionists, even where nationalists were a majority
• reform of the police force (Royal Ulster Constabulary) – it was over 90% Protestant and criticised for sectarianism and police brutality
• repeal of the Special Powers Act – this allowed police to search without a warrant, arrest and imprison people without charge or trial, ban any assemblies or parades, and ban any publications; the Act was used almost exclusively against nationalists

In the late 1960s, the old guard of the IRA declined in Northern Ireland, and IRA militancy grew in response to violent crackdowns on Catholic civil rights marchers by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. 1969 marked the beginning of the period known as “The Troubles”, as tensions rose with the deployment of the British military to provincial streets and the IRA split into two factions: the Dublin-based “officials” who advocated for a united socialist Ireland through peaceful means, and the Belfast-based “provisionals” who used violence as means to unification.

Initially, the PIRA carried out targeted terrorism on British authorities – sniper attacks, assassinations, and small bombings – with little public support. Its activity soared in 1972 when British troops opened fire on a Catholic rally in Londonberry, obscuring the official wing of the IRA. This led to a fierce campaign of bombings in Northern Ireland and Britain targeting both British military and civilians. In reaction, “Loyalist” groups who supported British rules took up arms, and over 3,600 would die before peace accords were reached in late 1990s.

According to UCDP, the PIRA was organized into traditional military structure with different tasks for units; to prevent infiltration, it was restructured into isolated cells in the late 1970s. It used guerilla tactics to carry out attacks and bombings, but it also engaged in crimes such as racketeering for financial support as well as vigilantism to police communities under its control.

The IRA’s political wing, Sinn Fein – which had been banned in the UK until 1974 – followed a strategy of abstention where its candidates stood for elections but did not take up their seats. This evolved into a “armalite and ballot box” strategy, where the group

209 CAIN Project (https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/crights/nicra/nicra78.htm#contents)
pursued political and military action simultaneously. The party opened talks with the British government in the mid-1990s and agreed to a cease-fire in 1997, and eventually a peace pact in 1998 where a new Northern Ireland legislative body was established and cross-border ties were increased. Although there had been several setbacks, British and Irish governments verified that the IRA had, in their view, put their weapons beyond use and believed that the group had ceased centrally organized criminal activities. Sinn Fein continues to have influence in the British political system and the Northern Irish government and have largely carried out disarmament of the militant factions.

Main sources:

- CAIN Project - Ireland (and Northern Ireland) Economic Data (https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/crights/nicra/nicra78.htm#contents and supplemented with Wikipedia Entry for “The Troubles”)

Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)

Origin years: 1992-1996
Peak year: 1999
Location of origin: FR Yugoslavia – Kosovo and Macedonia
Summary:
Although the KLA first appeared in 1992 in Macedonia, it was not until 1995 that the beginnings of armed resistance to Serbs emerged and until June 1996 when the group publicly assumed responsibility for a series of acts of sabotage against Serb authorities.

The 1980s in Kosovo were marked by economic crisis and nationalist unrest, as well as rising tensions between the Serbian and Albanian populations. Kosovo was the poorest entity of Yugoslavia. A key precursor to the KLA was the People’s Movement of Kosovo (LPK) which traced back to 1982 and argued for armed struggle. The Kosovo Liberation Army stemmed from independence demonstrations in the early 1980s by Kosovo’s Albanian majority, many of whom claimed to be Marxist-Leninists in alignment with their ethnic brothers in communist Albania. The demonstrators aimed to rid Kosovo of Serb rule, and Serb authorities arrested
hundreds of protesters in responses, several of whom would later become Rambouillet delegates (the Rambouillet Agreement was a proposed peace agreement between Yugoslavia and the Albanian majority of Kosovo drafted by NATO, but later rejected by Yugoslavia in opposition to Kosovo’s autonomy).

The KLA formed in the early 1990s after Belgrade, under the leadership of Slodoban Milosevic, abolished the autonomy the province had enjoyed since 1974 and purged ethnic Albanians from civil and state institutions, including the military (many Albanians had been trained in the Yugoslav army). Ethnic Albanians would move on to create a shadow government led by Ibrahim Rugova in 1992 under the Democratic League of Kosovo. The disenfranchisement of Albanian Kosovars from the state and economy would have significant implications for future movements, as Kayongo et al.’s analysis notes:

Other discriminatory legislation included prohibiting Kosovo Albanians from purchasing land from Kosovo Serbs, even though illicit transfers occurred. Social and economic inequalities abounded between Kosovars of Albanian and Serb ethnicities. The growing political economic disparities coupled with Serbia’s nationalistic policies inflamed Kosovo Albanian nationalism. This eroded support for moderate politicians and created a rich recruitment pool among the unemployed young for the KLA, an Albanian ethnonationalist militia. Ethnic fighting was not economics-driven, but Milosevic used economic control as a weapon against the Kosovo Albanians, which ultimately led to high unemployment that helped feed the ranks of the KLA.

Economic conditions drove Kosovars to informal and criminal economies in order to make ends meet, a problem that persists to this day. There were three primary factors that caused the emergence of these gray and black markets. The first were the employment policies discussed above that created high unemployment. Second, international sanctions on Yugoslavia as a result of previous ethnic wars compounded the damage already done. Third, Kosovo Albanians established a parallel state to the official Serbian apparatus, including taxes, government, education, and health care. The shadow government of the “Kosovo Republic” was born of economic and social-services necessity, not merely an act of defiance against Belgrade. The “parallel” government employed an estimated 24,500 Kosovo Albanians to provide social services, particularly in the health and education sectors. The KLA was able to finance its weapons purchases through drug trafficking and money laundering — the economic base for the group was fundamentally illicit. This outcome is ironic: Serbia’s actions were counterproductive. Economic oppression from Belgrade forced the creation of an illicit economy so Kosovo Albanians could, at least at first, provide social services. However, this led to more criminality that helped arm the KLA in its fight against Serbia. The effects of this coupling of Kosovo Albanians and illegal economies persisted throughout the intervention and continues today.\textsuperscript{210}

Rugova had persuaded Kosovars to remain nonviolent to garner international support for the province’s autonomy, but in 1995 the Dayton Accords ended the war in Bosnia without restoring Kosovo’s autonomy, discrediting the LDK’s peaceful methods and bolstering the more militant factions within the group. These factions called attention to Yugoslavian minorities that had taken up arms to successfully achieve independence.

In 1995, the KLA carried out its first attacks on Serbian police and in June 1996 appeared publicly for the first time, assuming responsibility for acts of sabotage against police. Serb authorities responded by labelling the KLA a terrorist organization. The KLA began funding itself heavily through Albanian diaspora funds through an organization called “Homeland Calling”, and the European press alleged that the group held connections to Albanian drug traffickers. This was also echoed by U.S. Congress briefs which claimed that “30 to 50% of the KLA’s money comes from drugs.” KLA-linked heroin traffickers began using Kosovo as a major supply route and it was estimated that 80% of Europe’s heroin was controlled by Kosovar Albanians. Although ethnic Albanians were primarily Muslim, the Kosovo independence movement was not heavily influenced by Islamic fundamentalism, and there was tacit understanding that assistance from Muslim fundamentalists would limit support toward the Kosovo Albanian’ cause in the West.

In 1997, as Albania’s government collapsed, the country’s military depots were looted and small arms poured into Kosovo, allowing the KLA to step up its attacks and kidnapping of Serb officials and Albanian collaborators. The KLA operated as a guerilla movement consisting of lightly armed fighters, functioning in small compartmentalized cells rather than a single movement. Because many recruits had received extensive training in the Yugoslav army, the group maintained highly professional underground operations. Its strength grew from 500 active members at the beginning of 1998 to at least 1000 men (though some estimated are as high as 20,000). As the KLA stepped up its attacks on Yugoslav authorities, Serb paramilitaries began campaigns of retribution against KLA sympathizers and political opponents, killing up to 2000 civilians and KLA fighters.

The Drenica massacre of March 1998 which received international condemnation propelled KLA support and led it to engage in a wider scope of actions. Larger-scale operations consisted of defending strategically positioned villages and to disrupt local police and Army units in east and west Kosovo. Over the summer of 1998, large-scale fighting broke out and resulted in the displacement of 300,000 people. Hardliner Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic increased the level of violence, estimating that he could quickly wipe out the KLA, until a ceasefire was implemented in October 1998. In May 1999, it was estimated that the KLA had increased by as much as 10,000 combatants and its support had also risen. In February 1999, NATO brought delegations from the Serbian government into truce negotiations, and the Kosovar delegation was persuaded to sign the treaty, but the Serbian delegation refused. In June, after a NATO air campaign on Serbian targets, Yugoslavia agreed to terms of peace. The UN sent a multinational peacekeeping force to the region and, after Serbian and Yugoslav forces were removed, the KLA was demilitarized and disbanded. Several KLA
figures – some of which were tried for war crimes in The Hague - moved on to play major roles in Kosovar politics, and Ramush Haradinaj, a KLA commander, is the current Prime Minister of Kosovo.

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    (http://pksoi.armywarcollege.edu/default/assets/File/Kosovo%20issue%20paper.pdf)

**Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)**

*Origin years:* 1998  
*Peak year:* 2001  
*Location of origin:* Uzbekistan (Fergana Valley)  
*Summary:*  
IMU originated in 1998 in Uzbekistan Fergana Valley, Namangan and it is based in Tavildara Valley, Tajikistan. The formation of IMU is distinguished by several periods: the precursor group that arose from radicals returning from fighting in Afghanistan against the Soviets called “Adolat” (which translates to “Justice”) in 1991, a gradual consolidation of Islamists and connection with the Afghan Taliban and other radical Islamists in the Tajik Civil War during years 1992-1997, and its formal creation in 1998 in Uzbekistan as opposition to the Karimov regime.

The founders of IMU were Uzbek paratrooper and Afghan war veteran Jumaboi Khojayev (later adopting the nom de guerre Juma Namangani) and local Islamic ideologue Tohir Yuldashev. Namangani returned to Uzbekistan’s Fergana Valley radicalized by his experience in Afghanistan and, together with Yuldashev) established a radical Salafi Islamist group they called Adolat. Amidst the instability following Uzbekistan’s independence in 1991, Adolat established a degree of order and security through Sharia Law which became enforced by the group’s vigilante cadres and proceeded to demand the imposition of Sharia Law throughout Uzbekistan by newly elected president and former leader of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, Islam Karimov. Karimov consolidated authority in Tashkent and instead outlawed Adolat, reestablishing control over the Fergana Valley.
Yuldashev and Namangani fled to Tajikistan where civil war had erupted following a coup by neo-communist Emomali Rahmonov in 1992. In Tajikistan, the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) made up of a loose coalition of democrats and Islamists and led by Said Abdullah Nuri of the Renaissance Party of Tajikistan were battling neo-communist forces. Namangani was entrusted with IRPT active units in the Tavildara Valley region and led a successful military campaign. Yuldashev left Tajikistan to develop contacts with fellow Islamist groups and was based in Peshawar, Pakistan from 1995 to 1998 where he developed connection with Osama Bin Laden.

Rahmonov and Nuri signed a peace agreement to share power with IRPT which brought the civil war to an end. Namangani and Yuldashev returned to Uzbekistan disillusioned by concessions made by Tajik Islamists and formed IMU with the goal of developing a militant opposition to Karimov. Namangani maintained his base in Tajikistan’s Tavildara Valley and was able to recruit from disaffected youth in Fergana Valley, where economic hardship and religious persecution continued under Karimov. According to a report by “World Organization Against Torture”, the underlying disparities provided an ample recruitment base for IMU:

The causal connection between government policies that fail to provide protection for economic and social rights and increasing violence was identified with clarity in a 2003 United Nations Development Group report: ‘The wealthier sectors of the population appear to have benefited disproportionately from the economic growth while other parts, notably the more vulnerable, have not benefited from growth and are burdened with most of the hardships resulting from the transition […] The national authorities, international development practitioners and the economists have so far paid little attention to the social implications of the transition and have instead prioritized economic and institutional development, thus exacerbating existing political, institutional, and economic problems.’

…When social disparities become more pronounced, opportunities potentially exist for extremist groups to capitalize on the perception of growing inequality, as resentment about perceived social injustice blinds some to the shortcomings of alternatives. For example, Namangan province is often cited for its high number of sympathizers for radical Islamic movements, but support in this region may be rather the result of disappointment over socio-economic disenfranchisement than true passion for radical Islam […] Sympathy for militants seems to be linked to the lack of possibilities to express discontent within the current institutional framework.211

By 2001, IMU and the Taliban had established a close relationship, with Namangani being appointed Deputy Defense Minister in the Taliban government. The IMU suffered heavy casualties fighting alongside the Taliban following 9/11 and, in November 2001, Namangani was killed by a U.S. airstrike. Despite tensions with the locals, the IMU became active in Afghanistan in 2007 and continued to expand its presence into northern Afghanistan in 2010, several of them integrating into Taliban’s shadow government. However, in 2014, the group declared its allegiance to ISIL, while continuing to cooperate closely with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Over time, the relationship would continue to break as more IMU leaders declared their allegiance to ISIL and its Afghanistan branch, Wilayat Khorasan.

According to START, the group’s main financing sources have been extortion, smuggling and trafficking – especially of opium and heroin in Central Asia for Taliban patronage – charities and donations, and kidnap-for-ransom.

**Main Sources:**

**Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)**

*Origin years:* Sep 1998  
*Peak year:* 2007  
*Location of origin:* Algeria (Northern Algeria, and spread through Sahel region)  
*Summary:*  
AQIM is an Algerian Salafi-jihadist rebel group that emerged in September 1998 as a breakaway faction of the radical Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA), and pushed for targeted violence and limited armed struggle –it had been known as “Groupe Salafiste pour la predication et le combat” or GSPC until early 2007, but announced itself as AQIM in Sept 11, 2006. It was led by former GIA member, Hassan Hattab, and operates in the Sahara and Sahel.

The 1990s were a tumultuous period in Algeria, where conflict and political disarray sowed instability and deepened inequality:

During the 1990s the civil conflict in Algeria cost the lives of some 200,000 people and displaced more than one million, increasing pressure on towns and cities (Norwegian Refugee Council 2004). Political leaders, intellectuals and ordinary people, many living in remote villages, lost their lives and the whole population lived in fear and insecurity. At one level the conflict was between radical Islamists and the existing authorities, but if we probe deeper it becomes clear that the conflict was over political legitimacy, exacerbated by mounting social inequalities. In part, then, the conflict has been about people’s efforts to make sense of their identities, gain control over their lives and the direction of their society. Challenges to authority and questions of identity have deep roots in Algerian history but
they have become acute in the post-cold war period, precipitated by the economic failure of successive governments and hastily imposed economic liberalization and rapid democratization.\textsuperscript{212}

AQIM’s precursor, GIA, had begun as an armed insurrection after Algeria’s French-backed military pushed cancelled a second round of elections in 1992 when the Islamic Salvation Front was poised to take power. The political pushback saw ISF’s moderate, political elements lose internal legitimacy and its militant wing rise in influence. GIA viewed civilians as legitimate targets, and in 1998, several commanders grew concerned that brutal tactics such as beheadings were alienating their Algerian constituency and broke away to found GSPC, later AQIM.

In the 2000s, the group aligned with Al Qaeda, mostly as a strategic propaganda move, but maintained most of its focus on battling the “near-enemy”, the Algerian government. Recruits have been characterized as highly opportunistic, contributing to both terrorist plots as well as criminal endeavors. The group operates as a decentralized number of local groupings, some of which surrendered to the Algerian government that offered them amnesty in 2006. However, 2007 marked the height of AQIM suicide attacks and violence in Algeria. In December 2007, AQIM bombed a regional UN headquarters and the Algerian constitutional court, killing 33.

Similar to other Salafi groups, AQIM’s objectives are to rid North Africa of Western influence and overthrow governments deemed apostate, including Algeria, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, and installing sharia law. According to the State Department, the group has about 1000 members in Algeria, and smaller numbers throughout Sahel. Like IMU, many of its members are thought to have received military training in Afghanistan battling the Soviet occupation, and many returned to the MENA region radicalized. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin E. Dempsey likewise characterized AQIM as “a syndicate of groups who come together episodically, when it’s convenient to them, in order to advance their cause. Sometimes their cause is terrorism. Sometimes it’s criminal. Sometimes it’s arms trafficking.”

The groups tactics include guerilla warfare, assassinations, and suicide bombings of government and civilian targets, as well as kidnappings. The group is funded through KFR and trafficking of arms, vehicles, cigarettes, and persons.

According to a study by Ghanem, “AQIM is rooted in the social and economic fabric of many Sahelian communities and tribes. The group uses marriages and kinship to strengthen its ties with communities. For instance, Mokhtar Bel Mokhtar—an Algerian jihadist veteran and one of AQIM’s most prominent figures—spent a decade forging relationships, gaining influence with the Azawad desert communities, proselytizing especially among the Arabs, and intermarrying. In fact, he married three times with local women.

\textsuperscript{212} Cathie Lloyd \textit{Multiple Causes of Conflict in Algeria: National Identity, Inequality and Political Islam} (https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230502376_8)
Marriage helps build and expand alliances, and further serves to protect those jihadists wed to tribe members, thus making it a powerful antidote to defections.\textsuperscript{213}

Currently, there are two prominent offshoots of AQIM: one in the North characterized by an ideological focus on battling the state and overturning Western influence, and one in the South which has links to Boko Haram and is mostly focused on criminality and taking advantage of governance gaps. The chaos that followed the Arab Spring has been advantageous for various groups fighting to establish footholds, including AQIM offshoots.

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  \item Cathie Lloyd “Multiple Causes of Conflict in Algeria: National Identity, Inequality and Political Islam” (https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230502376_8)
\end{itemize}

\textit{Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)}

\textit{Origin years:} 1974-1978  
\textit{Peak year:} 1984-1990s  
\textit{Location of origin:} Turkey (southeast Turkey and Northern Iraq)  
\textit{Summary:}

The Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK after its Kurdish name (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan) had Marxist-Leninist roots and grew out of a political movement led by Kurdish students in Turkey in 1974. The group sought to create an independent Kurdish state in southeastern Turkey and other Kurd-occupied territories, and it was motivated by a fusion of revolutionary socialism and Kurdish

nationalism to counteract oppression of Kurds by Turkey and capitalism. The Kurdish population is often described as the world’s largest stateless population, with roughly 30 million Kurds linked by ethnicity and language hailing from Kurdistan – a region that spans eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, western Iraq, and parts of Syria and Armenia. By 1974, the use of Kurdish language, dress, folklore, and names were banned in Kurdish-inhabited areas. Following a military coup in 1980, the Kurdish language was officially prohibited in public and private life.

The group harnessed public resentment over the suppression of Kurdish language and culture in Turkey and began to rely on terrorist tactics in the mid-1980s as a means to pressure the entering civilian government towards concessions and to mobilize the Kurdish population. Full-scale insurgency began in August 1984 when the PKK announced a Kurdish uprising. They also carried out kidnappings of foreign tourists in Turkey, suicide bombings, and attacks on Turkish diplomatic offices in Europe. Currently, however, the group’s goal has somewhat shifted towards reaching greater civil rights and some level of autonomy.

In 1999, after an intense military crackdown by the Turkish state, PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan was captured and this led the remaining fighters to withdraw to northern Iraq and its leadership to end armed struggle and reconstitute PKK as a political party. As a measure of rebranding, it observed a 5-year ceasefire, but in 2004, failing in these efforts towards peace, it called off the cease-fire and returned to guerilla warfare. Spikes in violence in 2007 led the Turkish state to crack down and vow to take revenge. However, in 2013, the PKK declared another ceasefire and began withdrawing fighters to northern Iraq as part of a solution between the Turkish state and Kurdish minority. In July 2015, the PKK announced the ceasefire was over, providing Ankara’s balking on promises as a reason, but shortly after claimed that they would accept ceasefire with Turkey under US guarantees.

The phases of the PKK can be subdivided as follows: political movement from 1978 to 1984, armed rebellion from 1984 to 1999, ceasefire from 1999 to 2004, resumed insurgency from 2004 to 2012, peace process from 2013 to 2015, and battle against IS in Syria from 2014 onward. Although the PKK’s attention had shifted to combating ISIS, it was often embattled by Turkish forces and in March 2016, the PKK helped launch the People’s United Revolutionary Movement with other Kurdish and Turkish revolutionary left-wing groups that had the aim of overthrowing Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s government.

The PKK is believed to be funded through social events and publications, as well as legitimate businesses owned by the organization in Turkey, Russia, Iraq, Iran, and Western Europe. It is supported by other sympathizer organizations such as the International Kurdish Businessmen Union. According to EUROPOL, the organization also collects money from its members, and there are indications that the PKK is involved in money laundering, illicit drug trafficking, and human trafficking as well as illegal immigration. Although there are claims that the PKK is connected to drug trafficking, other agencies such as Germany’s domestic security agency maintain that there is no evidence that the organizational structures of the PKK are directly involved in drug
trafficking. According to research by journalist Aliza Marcus, although PKK accepted the support of smugglers or smugglers who forged connections through the PKK, it did not seem that the PKK as an organization directly produced or trafficked illegal narcotics.

Research by Mahmut Aytekin found that the five key recruitment tactics that PKK had followed in Turkey and the Middle East were through family and kinship, charismatic figures and local institutions, marriage, indoctrination camps, and printed materials.

Main sources:
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National Liberation Army (ELN)

Origin years: 1964
Peak year(s): 1980s
Location of origin: Colombia (Santander and other urban enclaves, particularly in the North)
Summary:
The assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan in 1948, a popular left-wing politician led to a wave of violence between right and left-wing militant groups during the 1950s and 1960s known as La Violencia. Over 300,000 people died as a result of the civil war, and it prompted the rise of several left-wing movements and militant outfits, including FARC, ELN, and 19th of April movement.

In its attempt to restore the economy after the war, the national government promoted industrialization and prompted the eviction of thousands of farmers and eventually, a long-standing conflict with communist-leaning agrarian communities. From 1967 to 1980, the Colombian economy grew in sustained fashion, but began to flounder in the early 1980s as a result of a global recession. A report in US Library of Congress mentions that although Colombia managed reasonable growth compared to other Latin American nations who experienced crisis, Colombia’s distribution of income was highly skewed and rewards of production were concentrated in the hands of a minority. Colombia also experienced chronic inflation and unemployment throughout the 1980s and the economy seemed unable to absorb workers to push unemployment below 10 percent.

ELN was formed in 1964 in Northern Colombia (Santander) by 16 members of urban middle-class backgrounds. Ideologically, it was based on Marxism-Leninism and tied to Liberation theology, a Catholic philosophy based on social awareness and justice. Unlike FARC, it was focused on urban centers, labor unions, and student movements, and much of its development during the 1970s was
marred by internal struggles between rural/peasant members and urban/working class leadership. In 1973, the government had largely succeeded in reducing ELN militarily. In 1980s, however, the group regained strength through the leadership of Manuel Perez, a Spanish priest. It was also boosted around this time by the discovery of oil in its areas of operation and created a source of income through the extraction of rent payments from oil companies. Another large source of funding was kidnapping and ransom, and ELN was reportedly responsible for more kidnappings than any other armed group in the country.

To a lesser extent, the group extracted rent from the drug trafficking industry. A study by Rensselaer Lee and Patrick Clawson points out the reason for this limited association:

The Colombian example of a narco-guerrilla connection thus leads to the conclusion that the likelihood of alliance or convergence of objectives between traffickers and guerrillas seems greatest when traffickers are weak, disorganized, or under severe pressure from the authorities. Cooperation was sought when the guerrillas could substitute for the cartels' weakened capability to commit terrorist acts. Thus, in Colombia, where drug traffickers and guerrillas share the same territory, occasional alliances of convenience seem to be almost inevitable. (Clawson, 1996, p. 190)\(^1\)

The chart below, from a RAND report by Jack Riley, highlights the key differences in status and tactics used by major armed groups in Colombia during this time, noting that ELN’s key tactic was attacks on oil companies:

McDougall also notes three factors that determine the success or failure of civil war in Colombia and ideological militant groups: 1) state weakness provides the political opportunities for rebellion, 2) growth and evolution of Colombia’s armed groups are directly related to their ability to loot exportable natural resource commodities, and 3) conditions of civil war lead insurgent groups to mimic some of the basic functions and attributes of statehood. As such, “Colombia’s conflict is more than just a manifestation of popular frustration, it is also a form of state-building.”

A small faction of ELN dissidents formed CRS (Social Renewal Current) and entered into negotiations with the government in the early 1990s culminating in a peace agreement in 1994. However, the majority of ELN continued their armed struggle and expanded. At its height in the late 1990s, ELN was believed to have about 5,000 militants. By 2007, competition with other armed groups and government caused the group to shrink down to an estimated 2200-3000 fighters, mostly deployed in north and northwest provinces. Manuel Perez led ELN until his death in 1998 and was replaced by Nicolas Rodriguez Batista. The group teamed up with the FARC to counter the Colombian military’s crackdown, but constant military setbacks that began in the late 1990s caused it to lose ground to paramilitaries and the military and pushed it to negotiate a settlement with Alvaro Uribe’s government despite opposition of many

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215 Alex McDougall (2009) State Power and Its Implications for Civil War Colombia, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 32:4, 322-345, DOI: 10.1080/10576100902743815
members. When the talk failed, the group developed more internal and external division, and over the years the group’s modus operandi centered more on smaller autonomous factions with more criminal rather than ideological aims.

According to Insight Crime, many rebels abandoned the belief that drug trafficking would destroy the country and became active participants in the industry. However, the ELN continues to attack economic infrastructure, and in particular, oil pipelines and electricity pylons. The group continued to hold peace talks with government in 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2018, but all have been ultimately unsuccessful. The ELN National Directorate has 23 members and a central command made up of five commanders, each in charge of a different area: military, political, international, financial, and communications. By several accounts, as FARC has dwindled and signed peace accords, ELN has been able to establish or strengthen its presence in areas formerly under FARC’s control and absorb dissident FARC elements.216

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Sinaloa Federation*

Group particularities covered at length in Chapter 3.

Mexico “War on Drugs” general context:

International/domestic political context relevant to group’s emergence:

The largest external actor in Mexico’s drug war dynamics is the United States. Both domestic and international U.S. enforcement policies have shaped the drug trafficking industry in Latin America. While U.S. foreign policy seemed to prioritize the battle against

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216 https://www.insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/eln-profile/
left-wing insurgencies in Latin America during the Cold War (1960s and 1970s) - indeed often enlisting the services of organized crime groups to this effect as exemplified by the Contra Affair - by the 1980s drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) had become a sizeable and significant threat.

President Nixon ordered the creation of the DEA and declared a “War on Drugs”, but it was not until the 1980s under President Reagan during the crack epidemic that the “War on Drugs” went into overdrive and the DEA started taking a more prominent role. In the mid-1980s, two significant events prompt Mexican drug traffickers to become targets of U.S. enforcement: the first, the expanded role of the Guadalajara cartel in moving drugs across the border following the success of the South Florida task force in restricting Miami as a primary entry point, and the second, was the assassination of DEA agent Kiki Camarena, allegedly by the Guadalajara Cartel under the orders of Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo AKA the Godfather. These factors prompted a crackdown that eventually led to the imprisonment of Felix Gallardo and the breakup of the Guadalajara Cartel into smaller competing factions. Thereafter, the U.S. continued to pressure Mexican authorities to pursue a “decapitation” strategy which propagated similar dynamics of drug organizations’ fragmentation or replacement.

Domestically, the Mexican political sphere has undergone significant shocks since the 1980s. The 1980s marked the beginning of the end the 70-year long Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) regime as it started to lose its first grip on power throughout the country. It was typically believed that the PRI itself was organized as a pyramid scheme, propped up by pay-to-play arrangements. The drug industry, pulling in millions, was no exception, and Felix Gallardo managed to capitalize on corruption and plugged his organization into the PRI governance structure. However, even the PRI could not ensure cartel stability when outside pressure created instability in the industry through fragmentation of groups. As the PRI lost power, it also became less capable of enforcing agreements, which led to more spikes of violence by cartels looking to seize control of competitors’ turf. This was exacerbated in the 2000s when the PRI lost its monopoly of the presidency to the National Action Party (PAN) and several shakeups appeared to weaken long-standing groups, such as the Gulf Cartel, favored by the PRI under Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and fragmented upon the capture of its leader Osiel Cardenas.

Finally, in 2006, the “War on Drugs” became the centerpiece of newly-elected president Felipe Calderon’s governance strategy and the country became ensnared in violence. By several accounts, Calderon’s party, the PAN, ultimately favored the Sinaloa cartel to take over the industry as it purportedly was viewed as the less violent option. While Calderon denied this, pointing to the capture of prominent Sinaloa cartel members, data has shown that the Sinaloa cartel suffered relatively far less arrests than other groups.217

Subsequently, the PRI returned to power under Enrique Peña Nieto but could do little to return to former arrangements and his administration was plagued by a rising trend of drug-related violence and rampant corruption.

In 2016, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who was viewed as a political outsider and had twice lost a presidential election in 2006 and 2012, was elected amid promises to clean house and to follow a strategy of “social advancement” rather than militarization. Despite this, there were mixed signals sent when he installed the National Guard as a new body of enforcement which followed a hybrid model of military and police. Before AMLO took office, the notorious kingpin Joaquin “Chapo” Guzman was extradited to the United States, marking a significant shift in DTO power dynamics. AMLO’s security forces attempted to seize Chapo’s successor in Culiacan, Sinaloa, only to see the city overrun by cartel hitmen and forcing the government to release Chapo’s son. The start of AMLO’s term has similarly been marred by high levels of violence, including in Mexico City, and volatile shifts in cartel influence as well as rising smaller gangs.

The chart below, from Animal Politico, highlights the progression and fragmentation of Mexican DTOs over the years:
Economic context relevant to DTOs:

Mexico enjoyed a “golden era” from 1950 to 1970 where GDP grew at an average of 3-4% annually and was marked by macroeconomic stability and modernization of industry. This ended abruptly by the mid-1970s with a prolonged recession in 1976, and eventually, a period of drastic decline with a series of severe economic crises from 1982 to 1995 marked by high inflation and wide austerity measures. Apart from increases in extreme and moderate poverty, economic adjustments in the 1980s brought about unambiguous spikes in inequality, particularly among urban and rural settings. An economic study of these years found that, “income distribution between 1984 and 1989 became more unequal and remained practically the same between 1989 and 1994. Between 1984 and 1989, extreme and moderate poverty increased. Between 1989 and 1994 both remained practically unchanged, and extreme poverty may have decreased very slightly.”

In areas like Sinaloa, where agriculture represented a key part of the state’s economy, market liberalization came at a high cost and the area lagged behind most other Mexican states. Many higher-educated Sinaloans emigrated to other states where production grew under Mexico’s export-led model while the poorer stayed behind. Since the 1980s, the state has suffered from a net loss of population.

Nery Cordova, who writes on Narco-culture, mentions, “the support systems and the channels of distribution that the Mexican state has make life difficult and it seems that locals have no options but [trafficking]. The problem has expanded to the cities, where thousands of marginalized youths, with no education or resources, look for something to get by and are incorporated into delinquency. The economic system continues hurting large swathes of the population.”

Chechen Mafia*

Covered at length in Chapter 3.

La Familia Michoacana / Knights Templar

Origin years: 1980s

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220 Córdova Solís, Nery. "La narcocultura: poder, realidad, iconografía y" mito"." 2012
Peak year(s): 2006-2010

Location of origin: Mexico (Michoacan – Southwest)

Summary:
*For Mexico’s War on Drugs general context, see Sinaloa Federation.

La Familia Michoacana began as an anti-crime, vigilante group in the southern state of Michoacan, which has large areas where farmers cultivate marihuana and poppy for heroin. A group known as “El Milenio” controlled the area in the 1990s, and although there are different accounts about how a shift in power came about, the Zetas – armed wing of the Gulf Cartel – took control in 2003. Locals saw the Zetas as oppressive outsiders and support for La Familia grew to drive out the Zetas and expand into other states. By 2006, the group emerged as an influential methamphetamine trafficker based in Michoacan, Guerrero, Morelos, Guanajuato, Queretaro, Jalisco, and Mexico City.

The group was known for its regional fanaticism, which employed language of political insurgency and evangelical crusade to justify its dealings. Its activities ranged from drug trafficking to extortion, kidnapping, and racketeering. When it announced itself, the group allegedly proclaimed the following:

“Who are we? Common workers from the hot lands region in the state of Michaocan, organized by the need to end oppression, the humiliation to which we have constantly been subjected by people who always had power...Our sole motive is that we love our state and are no longer willing to see our people’s dignity trampled on.”

Their shift in business model from vigilante to trafficking organization occurred after a series of U.S. law enforcement efforts to clamp down on the production and sale of methamphetamines were successful in reducing U.S. meth labs and provided a golden opportunity to La Familia. A Justice Department report noted that La Familia trafficked around 200 tons of meth per year, or $20 billion worth of product and was credited with half the supply to the U.S. It is believed that La Familia controlled around 30% of official commerce and that 85% of legitimate businesses are in some way or another connected to the organization.

In 2010, its charismatic leader, Nazario Moreno Gonzalez, alias “El Chayo”, was reportedly killed in a shootout with police. The group announced its intention to dissolve, however, Moreno’s death triggered a split between two rival bosses, Jose de Jesus Mendez of “La Resistencia”, and Servando Gomez, of “Knights Templar”. Gomez was captured in 2015.

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221 Albert De Amicis, M. P. P. M. "Los Zetas and La Familia Michoacana Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs)." (2010).
222 Wilson Center (https://www.wilsoncenter.org/la-familia-michoacana)
The Knights Templar were more explicitly ideological, going by a 22 page booklet titled “The Code of the Knights Templar” which listed plans to, “start an ideological battle that challenges us to defend the values held by a society based on ethics and constructed throughout centuries.” The group was largely dismantled by 2015, overtaken by the rest of La Familia Michoacana and Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion (CJNG).

Main Sources:
- Wilson Center – La Familia Michoacana Profile (https://www.wilsoncenter.org/la-familia-michoacana)

Yamaguchi Gumi (Yakuza)

Origin years: 1915-1940
Peak year: 1960s
Location of origin: Japan (Kobe)
Summary:
Yakuza origins can be traced back to the Tokugawa Shogunate between the years 1603-1868, when two distinct groups of social outcasts began to organize to form tight-knit groups under leadership of bosses: tekiya (peddlers) and bakuto (gamblers). Tekiya were wandering peddlers that were considered burakumin or “non-humans” and belonged at the bottom of the Japanese feudal structure. Fugitives from higher classes would also join the tekiya under these informal structures and turf wars and protection rackets began to develop. Gambling was strictly forbidden during the Tokugawa Shogunate and bakuto conducted their businesses covertly, branching out into loan sharking and other illegal activities. These underclasses would consolidate over the years to formal gangs. Between 1734 and 1749, in order to quell gang wars between rival groups, the shogun’s government began to appoint oyabun or “foster parent”, the officially sanctioned bosses. Even today, certain groups consider themselves either tekiya – involved in protection - or bakuto – involved in business dealings.

Since the 1910s, the Yakuza were able to develop a symbiotic relationship with the Japanese government. Academic Eikio Siniawer mentions, “In the shadow of the Russian Revolution, both yakuza and the state were deeply concerned about the upsurge in
leftist activism and labor union strikes that were perceived as unpatriotic threats to societal stability. The state had much to gain from uninterrupted, capitalist production and Yakuza were more than happy to accept the payment of company management willing and able to hire them as strikebreakers. Yakuza and the state also came together out of a mutual characteristic: the purposeful use of violence as a means to exert and maintain power.\textsuperscript{223}

Although Yakuza gangs dwindled in size during World War II, they rebounded after the war. In 2007, the Japanese government estimated that there were more than 102,000 Yakuza working Japan and abroad. Despite the official end of discrimination against burakumin in 1861, many gang members are descendants of the outcast class while others are ethnic Koreans and face considerable discrimination.

The Yamaguchi-gumi, Japan’s largest organized crime group, was founded in 1915 and includes about half of all active yakuza. It split into factions in 2015: the original organization and the Kobe Yamaguchi-gumi. In 2018, there was a third split, creating the Nikyo (Dantai) Yamaguchi-gumi. They engage in criminal activities such as international drug smuggling, human trafficking, and arms smuggling, while holding significant amount of stocks in legitimate corporations and close ties to the Japanese business world.

The Yakuza were instrumental in carrying out extrajudicial violence for the state, and they often wielded highly nationalistic and conservative leanings that worked in favor of the Japanese government. Even in post-WWII periods, the Yakuza were important actors of stability for the U.S.’ “democracy from above” model and a forceful pushback against the rise of communist groups. After the devastating Kobe earthquake in January 1995, the Yamaguchi-gumi were the first to come to the aid of victims in the gang’s home city. After the 2011 tsunami, yakuza groups sent truck-loads of supplies to the affected area.

According to police estimates, Yakuza gang membership reached its highest level, of some 184,000, in the early 1960s. However, by the early 21st century their numbers had declined to approximately 80,000, divided roughly evenly between regular members and associates – about half of these linked to Yamaguchi-gumi.\textsuperscript{224} The members are organized into hundreds of gangs, most of them affiliated under the umbrella of one of some 20 conglomerate gangs. The largest conglomerate is the Yamaguchi-gumi, founded about 1915 by Yamaguchi Harukichi but fully developed and aggrandized only after World War II by Taoka Kazuo.

Similar to that of the Italian Mafia, the yakuza hierarchy is reminiscent of a family. The leader of any gang or conglomerate of yakuza is known as the oyabun (“boss”; literally “parent status”), and the followers are known as kobun (“protégés,” or “apprentices”; literally “child status”). The rigid hierarchy and discipline are usually matched by a right-wing


\textsuperscript{224} https://theweek.com/articles/477780/obama-vs-yakuza
ultranationistic ideology. Kobun traditionally take a blood oath of allegiance, and a member who breaks the yakuza code must show penance. Through these codes, Yakuza have managed to suppress petty criminals, and Kobe and Osaka, home to their primary syndicates, are among the safest towns because smaller offenders do not trespass Yakuza territory.

Over time the yakuza have shifted toward white-collar crime, relying more and more on bribery in lieu of violence, and indeed in the early 21st century they were one of the least murderous criminal groups in the world. These activities make the relationship between yakuza and police in Japan a complicated one; yakuza membership itself is not illegal, and yakuza-owned businesses and gang headquarters are often clearly marked. The National Police Agency estimated that they still collect 5% of all revenue from construction work, and their front companies are involved in waste disposal, entertainment, and labor dispatch.

Yakuza are viewed by some Japanese as a necessary evil, in light of their chivalrous facade, and the organizational nature of their crime is sometimes viewed as a deterrent to impulsive individual street crime. However, according to expert Jake Edelstein, in recent years, the government has successfully taken more forceful steps to remove Yakuza from Japanese society altogether and constrain its influence further, leading some to question whether this security strategy might cause a violent backlash.

**Main sources:**
- Britannica – Yakuza (https://www.britannica.com/topic/yakuza)
- ThoughtCo – Yakuza Historical Roots (https://www.thoughtco.com/the-yakuza-organized-crime-195571)
- Adelstein, Jake. “Opinion | Japan's Yakuza Aren't Disappearing. They're Getting Smarter.” 2017
- Stucky and Adelstein “Where have Japan’s Yakuza Gone?” 2014

**Camorra**

**Origin years:** ~1820
Peak year: ~1943
Location of origin: Italy (Naples)
Summary: The Camorra emerged during the power vacuum in Naples during the years 1799-1815 when the Parthenopean Republic was proclaimed on the wave of the French Revolution and the Bourbon Restoration. The first mentions of the Camorra date back to 1820 when police records document a disciplinary meeting of the Camorra, and when the first written statute was discovered. This indicated a stable organizational structure in the underworld. In 1848, the liberal opposition to the king turned to the Camorra for popular support, as the Camorra were leaders of the city’s poor.

The group was divided into low camorra who held sway over the poorest and high camorra which were members of the middle class that fed off public works contracts and other government bureaucracy. The aftermath of the revolution led to rising inflation and skyrocketing rents and poverty allowed the Camorra to further capitalize and cement itself as an important organization, as explained by historian Frank Snowden:

The high cost of produce reflected the predations of organized crime. Naples possessed in the Camorra one of the most powerful criminal associations in modern European history. Like the Sicilian Mafia, the Camorra clothed itself in populist rhetoric, proclaiming itself the champion of the poor and the defender of the South. It veiled the reality of the unpitying oppression that it meted out. The Camorra adopted mysterious jargon and rites that mimicked those of a secret society; it flaunted a pseudo-chivalric code of ‘honour’ among its members; and it created a mythology of distributive justice in which it claimed the role of urban Robin Hood. The Camorra is best understood as a means of market rationalization. The destitute furnished the mass of members of the Neapolitan underworld and in a society dominated by mass unemployment and poverty, there was a constant threat of an oversupply of recruits to the life of crime.225

Eventually, the Camorra began to function as gatekeepers to the crime profession and as a monopolist of crime, where freelance criminality would not be tolerated. The city was thus divided into fourteen families or “societies”, one in each neighborhood where the organization had an effective presence. It ruled without competition in prostitution, illegal gambling, ‘protection’, money-lending, and theft. Through this monopoly, the Camorra dominated large areas of economic and political life of the city, even in association with officials, as Snowden explains, “in their final years before the national revolution, the Bourbons made use of the services of camorristi to enforce, if not law then at least a kind of order.” When the regime fell, the new liberal administration was forced to collude with organized crime and made use of the Camorra as an auxiliary police force. The weak authority of the “Risorgimento” government

225 Snowden, Frank Naples in the Time of Cholera 1884-1911
meant that the Camorra could thrive like never before, extracting rent from all state services and rigging elections or making powerful friends that would cater to their interests.

In post-World War II, the Camorra had another period of flourishing when, after the Nazis were expelled in 1943 and Allied forces took over, Allied authorities were overwhelmed by the social tumult that followed and turned to the underworld for assistance. In exchange for turning a blind eye to their black-market activities, the Mafia was willing to help the Allies govern.

The Camorra continue operating in underground markets, and as recently as 2012, the Obama administration imposed sanctions on the Camorra labelling them one of the four key transnational organized crime groups, along with the Brothers’ Circle from Russia, Yamaguchi Gumi from Japan, and Los Zetas from Mexico. The report states that Camorra is “a loose collection of allied and competing local clans in the province of Naples and the Campania region of Italy. The Camorra operates internationally and is involved in serious criminal activity such as counterfeiting and narcotics trafficking […] The Camorra may earn more than 10 percent of its roughly $25 billion annual profit through the sale of counterfeit and pirated goods – such as luxury clothing, power tools, CDs, DVDs, and software – in European and US markets.”

Among other illegal Camorra activities identified by the U.S. Treasury were money laundering, extortion, alien smuggling, robbery, blackmail, kidnapping, and political corruption. The Treasury targeted five individuals identified as leaders of different Camorra clans.

Main sources:
- Britannica – Camorra profile (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Camorra)
- Lonely Planet – “Campania in detail” (https://www.lonelyplanet.com/italy/campania/background/history/a/nar/70b6f132-d3ff-41e5-8d82-995beceaf661/359867)
- Snowden, Frank Naples in the Time of Cholera 1884-1911

‘Ndrangheta

Origin years: 1880s

Peak year: 1960s and 1990s

Location of origin: Italy (Calabria)

Summary:
‘Ndrangheta (derived from the Greek word for “heroism”) originated in the 19th century as rural brigands in Calabria (the “toe” of Italy), but reached modern prominence in the 1980s and 1990s with entry into cocaine market and forging ties with drug producers and distributors throughout Latin America in Peru, Colombia, Guyana, and Brazil.\(^{227}\) A US diplomatic cable in 2008 concluded that ‘Ndrangheta maintained bank accounts in Monte Carlo and Milan and transplanted operatives throughout the world, laundering its proceeds from kidnapping and extortion through tourism investments throughout Europe. Calabrian prosecutors have distinguished two stages in ‘Ndrangheta’s profit model: the first was based on kidnapping and using drug trafficking to transform the proceeds from those activities, and the second when drug trade took the place of kidnappings as the main activity. They benefited and expanded from Italian authorities’ crackdown on the Sicilian Cosa Nostra in the early 1990s. The modern version of ‘Ndrangheta is said to be the most powerful criminal group in Italy and one of the richest in the world, with a turnover of 53 billion euro in 2013 – more than Deutsche Bank and McDonald’s put together according to Demoskopia research institute.\(^{228}\)

Calabria was hospitable territory for mafia operations given its Aspromonte terrain (“Rough Mountains”) and remoteness and poverty compared to the rest of Europe. The group is controlled by a few prominent, historic families – such as Pelle, Romeo, and Giorgi. Internal fighting led the group to form a “provincia”, a central governing body to settle disputes and provide stability. Because ‘Ndrangheta has been forged by family links and intermarriages, it is a tight-knit organization which conforms to a strict hierarchy and is difficult to break down – there is still wide respect for “omerta” or the mafia’s code of silence. Despite some of the major clans’ operations being disrupted, the group has remained resilient due to each clan’s high level of autonomy and its flexibility in expanding when another faction is weakened.

Oxford University researcher Zora Hauser, said that the mafia “are established in virtually every city in Calabria and control the entire spectrum of legal and illegal economic activities: waste disposal, construction, renewable energy, agriculture, tourism, drug and weapon trafficking and most recently the refugee business.”\(^{229}\) For the lower ranks of this group, extortion continues to be the main


source of revenue. There is also evidence that ‘Ndrangheta has cooperated with Cosa Nostra in certain terrorist attacks meant to intiate the government into softening its attacks on organized crime.\textsuperscript{230} A coordinated police raid conducted by 3000 officers across 12 Italian regions and several countries in December 2019 ended with the arrest of over 300 people – including politicians, lawyers, accountants, and a local police chief - indicated that the Italian state was stepping up its efforts to curtail the organization’s influence.

\textit{Main sources:}


\textit{Red Commando}

\textit{Origin years:} 1979  
\textit{Peak year:} Early 1980s  
\textit{Location of origin:} Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, Ihla Grande)  
\textit{Summary:}

The Red Commando or *Comando Vermelho* formed in 1979, emerging from the Candido Mendes prison on Ilha Grande as a self-protection gang for prisoners. At the time, Brazil’s brutal right-wing military regime kept common criminals together with leftist dissidents. The final years of this military regime in the early 1980s were characterized by inflation, persistent inequalities, and mounting social instability. As a report by Werner Baer states, “the rural poor, disconnected from centers of political power and the infrastructural developments that had been occurring, continued to suffer illiteracy and health problems, with few economic or political means of affecting change.”

Over time, political prisoners taught other inmates about guerrilla tactics and pushed them to organize. Thus, the hybrid group formed with political undertones, with its motto being “Peace, Justice, and Liberty” as the “Red Phalanx”, but it soon after abandoned the ideological elements and became more explicitly an organized crime group. Its ideas spread to other prisons, and decades later, similar groups like the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) would emerge.

Initially, the Red Commando was known as a gang of bank robbers and drug traffickers and used their influence to take control of Rio’s favelas. It used violence but also social investments such as assistance to locals, short-term loans, employment, as well as protection from petty crime. Many within the Red Commando’s ranks had originated from these favelas, making connections to the locals much easier. In the 1980s, the Red Commando expanded its influence by working with Colombian drug cartels and moving into cocaine trade.

Currently, it is allegedly the largest criminal organization in Brazil, but instead of being centralized, it operates in a horizontal support structure where a network of local bosses support each others’ operations. In 2005, the group was believed to control more than half of Rio’s most violent areas, but this fell to 40% in 2008 and certain police pacification programs intended to reduce the group’s appeared to have moderate success in further reducing the group’s influence in the early 2010’s. In 2016, the alliance with PCC broke down, ushering in a wave of violence in Brazil’s prison system, and PCC sought to further erode the Red Commando’s power by forming alliances with enemy gangs. However, it is believed to maintain a steady presence both in Rio and internationally, in Bolivia, Colombia, and Paraguay.

*Main Sources:*
- UCDP – Red Commando profile (https://ucdp.uu.se/#/actor/772)

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Medellin Cartel

*Origin years:* 1976
*Peak year:* 1985
*Location of origin:* Colombia (Medellin)
*Summary:*

The assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan in 1948, a popular left-wing politician led to a wave of violence between right and left-wing militant groups during the 1950s and 1960s known as *La Violencia*. Over 300,000 people died as a result of the civil war, and it prompted the rise of several left-wing movements and militant outfits, including FARC, ELN, and 19th of April movement. From 1967 to 1980, however, the Colombian economy experienced sustained growth with GDP growing at an average annual 5% supported by an expanded labor force, increased labor productivity, and accelerated investment. Generous foreign aid in the 1970s and economic stability allowed Colombia to ride out the global recession reasonably well compared to other Latin American economies. It was also in the 1970s that poor farmers began to plant marihuana as an alternative to legal crops which they struggled to survive under.

The development of the large-scale DTOs in the 1970s occurred in the later years when criminal groups looked to satisfy demand for cocaine in the US by processing coca leaf from Peru and Bolivia. During the 1980s, the two large Colombian empires started to form with Pablo Escobar’s Medellin Cartel and the Cali Cartel in the southwest. In the late 1970s, Pablo Escobar began smuggling coca paste into Colombia, refining it, and hiring mules to take into the United States. Eventually, his operation would become more sophisticated with the incorporation of Carlos Lehder and George Jung who had expertise in flight trafficking and organized flights to South Florida using small biplanes that could avoid radar detection. By this time, left-wing paramilitary groups were controlling wide swathes of territory and engaged in kidnapping and taxation of drug operations. Although there was pushback to organize against them by DTOs – for example, through their own right-wing paramilitaries such as MAS - cocaine laboratories proved to be profitable for traffickers, rebels, and the government alike.

By some measures, the Medellin Cartel was bringing in over $420 million a week in the mid-1980s, and by the end of the decade supplied 80% of the world’s cocaine. Initially, Escobar invested heavily in social capital, investing in charity work and even
occupying a seat in the Colombian senate in 1982. In 1983, he lost this seat after an investigative report was published, and the two journalists who uncovered the story were assassinated as a result in 1984. By 1985, the Medellin Cartel’s increased political and economic influence and methods of coercion made it a target of the Colombian government and president Betancur began plans to sign a treaty of extradition with the United States, in a direct threat to Pablo Escobar.

Escobar weaved a network of corruption and violence to maintain his business and the Medellin Cartel carried out thousands of murders – 1000 of them being Medellin police and 200 being judges and Colombian officials. Escobar started to be more brazen in his defiance of the Colombian government as the threat of extradition loomed. In 1985, the guerilla group M-19 stormed the Colombian Supreme Court to destroy all files on “Los Extraditables”, most of whom were members of the Medellin Cartel. The group also planned numerous car bombs in major urban centers. In August 1989, Escobar declared total war on the Colombian state. In one of the most brutal acts, the cartel killed Colombian presidential hopeful Luis Carlos Galan in 1989, and in what was a stark turning point to terrorism for the group, it attempted to assassinate presidential candidate Cesar Gaviria Trujillo by exploding an Avianca flight carrying 107 people.

With Escobar increasingly targeted by the Colombian and the US government, he negotiated a surrender with the Colombian government in 1991 in which he would remain under arrest in a luxury prison. However, when it became likely that an agreement on extradition would be reached, Escobar fled and evaded arrest once again. He was killed by Colombian authorities in December 1993. The fall of Escobar marked the decline of the Medellin cartel and the subsequent rise of the Cali cartel as the preeminent cocaine supplier of the world. In the late 1990s, the Cali cartel would in turn be replaced by the Norte de Valle cartel. However, both the Medellin and Cali cartel would spawn other small offshoot criminal groups that continue to operate in Colombia.

Main sources:

Los Zetas Cartel

*Origin years:* 2010  
*Peak year:* 2012  
*Location of origin:* Mexico (Northeast – Tamaulipas)

**Summary:**  
For Mexico “War on Drugs” general context, see “Sinaloa Federation” case.

The Zetas are an offshoot of the Gulf Cartel, which was based in Matamoros, Tamaulipas (on the border with the US in northeast Mexico). The Gulf Cartel’s precursor, the Matamoros cartel, grew to prominence when its leader, Juan Nepomuceno Guerra, began smuggling alcohol across the Rio Grande during the Prohibition era. After Prohibition ended, the group continued to control several other rackets, such as gambling houses, prostitution rings, and automobile theft networks.

The modern Gulf Cartel came about during the 1970s under the direction of Juan Guerra’s nephew, Juan Garcia Abrego, who started incorporating cocaine into the drug-trafficking operation. Garcia Abrego was able to establish a lucrative relationship with the Cali Cartel in Colombia and by 1994, it was estimated that the Gulf Cartel handled as much as a third of all cocaine shipments from Cali suppliers. It was widely believed that the Gulf Cartel was favored by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s administration which ended in 1994 amid a period of economic crisis and widespread corruption allegations. In 1996, Garcia Abrego was arrested and extradited to the United States and left a power vacuum for the Gulf Cartel. After a turbulent period, Osiel Cardenas finally ended up as new head of the organization in 1999 and, in order to reinforce his tenuous grasp on the Gulf Cartel’s leadership, he sought out several members of the Mexican Army Special Forces to become a military wing of the Gulf Cartel who would eventually become the ruthlessly violent DTO, Los Zetas.

The Zetas was first led by an army lieutenant hired by Cardenas named Arturo Guzman Decena who recruited 30 special forces deserters. Their first operations consisted of eliminating “Los Chachos”, a group under the orders of the Milenio Cartel, that was competing for territory in the drug corridors of Tamaulipas. Eventually, Cardenas would empower the Zetas with more operations, and the group began to organize kidnappings, impose taxes, collect debts, operate rackets, secure traffic routes known as plazas, and conduct executions with particular savagery. When Cardenas was captured in 2003 and extradited in 2007, the Zetas had become increasingly influential within the Gulf Cartel and they eventually grew independently, leading to an explicit rupture in 2010 (though the separation started to manifest years before). Before this, the Zetas had already developed a reputation for acts of defiance against
the government, including tossing grenades into an Independence Day Celebration in Michoacan (President Calderon’s home state), setting fire to a casino which killed 52 mostly older women, and tossing a grenade into the U.S. consulate in Monterrey.

By 2010, the group had established itself in over 405 Mexican municipalities, twice the size of their nearest rivals, and had begun to move into Guatemala and other neighboring territories. The territorial control of each local chapter allowed them to bring in a share of other criminal activity that brandished their name. The group was also able to infiltrate state governments effectively and to sabotage elections through the intimidation or even murder of local candidates. Unlike the Sinaloa Cartel which focused on infiltrating politics at the federal level, the Zetas looked to dominate state level politics, investing millions in the candidacies of corrupt politicians such as Humberto Moreira in Coahuila and Fidel Herrera in Veracruz. This model, propelled by the capture of state and local governments, business diversification, and use of spectacular violence worked to cement the Zetas’ reputation as a ruthless enforcer who was diversified beyond drug trade.

By 2012, the Zetas showed signs of overextending and became increasingly targeted by the government due to their extreme violence and defiance of the federal government. This led to a division in leadership into two rival factions – the Northeast Cartel and the Zetas Old School each led by one of the founding Treviño brothers. The leadership crumbled further with the killing of Heriberto Lazcano, considered the founder of Los Zetas in late 2012, and the capture of both Treviño brothers in 2013 and 2015.

Currently, the Northeast Cartel has presence in the state of Coahuila, but it has also fragmented and there are no indications that the group has managed to consolidate to the degree to which it did at the height of los Zetas. The old model of the Zetas, where a central command exacted taxes from the rest of its criminal network, appears to have been replaced by disjointed, smaller groups dedicated to one criminal activity.

Main Sources:

Red Mafiya (Russian Mafia)

*Origin years:* 1910s (as the Vory)

*Peak year:* 1953, 1991-present

*Location of origin:* Russia and Soviet Union (Moscow)

*Summary:*  
The Russian Mafia or the “Bratva” (Brotherhood) is an umbrella of different, autonomous organized crime groups that originated in the former Soviet Union. The origins of these groups can be traced to the “Vorovskoy Mir” in the 1910s – which set a code of conduct that opposed czarist Russia – and later “vory v zakone” or “thieves in law” which were defined by a strict anti-government honor code in Stalin’s gulags and enforcers of the subculture created there. When several of the vor cooperated with Stalin by fighting for the Red Army in World War II, the honor code was broken and reincarceration by Stalin after the war gave rise to an internecine conflict between those returning and those that had stayed behind and adhered to the code. This fractured the culture of a “Thieves Code” which had dictated the Russian criminal underworld for decades.

After Stalin’s death, inmates were released, certain elements began to collaborate with authorities to persecute the gang leaders. Two distinct types would spawn from this shake-up: the chekists and the thieves. This would form the first basis of a symbiotic relationship between Russian organized crime and the Soviet government.

Thieves were known for smuggling and making up for the gaps left by the Soviet economy, procuring items that were unavailable. Chekists would become criminalized statesmen, and after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, would become indistinguishable from the government. In February 1993, Boris Yeltsin, the first elected president of the Russian Federation said, “Organized crime has become the No. 1 threat to Russia’s strategic interests and to national security. Corrupted structures on the highest level have no interest in reform.” As part of liberalization, the mafia was able to capitalize on new market opportunities and enforce its domains more directly. According to the Russia’s Ministry of Interior, the number of mafia gangs in Russia grew from 785 in 1990 to more than 8,000 by mid-1996 (Morbach). A report by the German Intelligence Service mentioned that, “the influence of organized crime on

232 [https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/organized-crime](https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/organized-crime)
certain individuals or groups in the special services has become in part so strong that one should talk of a kind of mutual infiltration: Mafia and secret agents use the symbiosis of their relationships to their mutual advantage."\(^{233}\)

The Red Mafiya can be subdivided into four pillars: vory v zakone (the traditional code that has eroded), nomenklatura – the former Soviet power elite of business and communist party member (they still control the shadow economy), the ethnic and national groups (only 70 of 3000 ROC are based on ethnicity), and authorities (criminal groups associated with a specific area). These would each form the basis of post-Soviet Russian government. The Mafia was known to exploit corruption, poor living conditions, unpaid military salaries and other disadvantages they helped perpetuate to influence key players in the sociopolitical sphere.

Despite the entry into white collar crime of Russian organized crime groups, such as bank fraud and auction rigging, violence remained a staple of the Mafia. These groups tended to be heavily armed and carry out contract killings, as well as territorial murders, bombings, and kidnappings. Many of these groups, such as cybercriminals or smugglers, have been known to carry out state-sanctioned operations to raise funds for Russian political influence. As such, their operations are highly diversified but fall under the umbrella of the state.\(^{234}\)

In modern times, the Mafia is thought to be integrated into the sociopolitical structure held in place by Vladimir Putin’s government. Mark Galeotti states that, “The Kremlin does not control organized crime nor is it controlled by it. Rather, organized crime prospers under Putin, because it can go with the grain of his system. The gangs that prosper in modern Russia tend to do so by working with rather than against the state. In other words: do well by the Kremlin, and the Kremlin will turn a blind eye. If not, you will be reminded that the state is the biggest gang in town.”

At the base of it, economic inequality has been a powerful catalyst for mafia influence. An analysis on inequality during periods of consolidation mentions:

In the long run, the evolution of income inequality in Russia appears like an extreme version of the long-run U-shaped pattern observed in the West during the 20th century (Figure 5). Income inequality was high under Tsarist Russia, then dropped to very low levels during the Soviet period, and finally rose back to very high levels after the fall of the Soviet Union. Top income shares are now similar to (or higher than) the levels observed in the US. On the other hand, inequality has increased substantially more in Russia than in China and other ex-communist


\(^{234}\) https://www.newsweek.com/putin-welcomes-return-russian-mafia-484083
countries in Eastern Europe. Figure 6 shows the marked divergence after the fall of Communism in the top 1% income share in Russia as compared to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.235

**Main Sources:**

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Cosa Nostra (Sicilian Mafia)

**Origin years:** 1870s  
**Peak year:** 1950s, mid-1980s  
**Location of origin:** Italy (Sicily)  
**Summary:**  
Although the Sicilian Mafia has no precise date of origin, a large consensus of scholars agrees that it began in the context of the fall of the Bourbon Kingdom and the unification of Italy. Because the state was weak and incapable of enforcing the law, the Mafia filled the void by providing private protection. Studies place the more exact places of origin in the urban, richer, and more export-oriented areas near Palermo, protecting the capitalist-export businesses of oranges, lemons, and sulfur mines. Eventually, the Mafia was also used to crack down against political opponents; first, republicans, and after, socialists.  

According to Acemoglu et al., the Mafia in Sicily spread precipitously at the end of the 19th century, partly to counter the demands of the rising Peasant Fasci organizations, which were the first popular socialist movements in Italy that emerged in full force after a severe drought in 1893. These groups articulated the plight of peasants and workers in Sicily and their demands included higher wages, land redistribution, better working conditions, longer-term contracts for land leases, a return to sharecropping arrangements, and reduction of indirect taxes. Sicily had a history of weak state presence, so landholders, estate managers, and local politicians would turn to the Mafia to resist these demands. There are many documented instances in which the Mafia collaborated with the military to fight against the Peasant Fasci and suppressed protests, and Acemoglu et al. find correlation between the territorial distribution of Peasant Fasci in 1893 and Mafia presence in 1900 across Sicilian municipalities.236

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236 https://voxeu.org/article/causes-and-consequences-sicilian-mafia
The Mafia’s role declined during Mussolini’s dictatorship and crackdowns, but once again rose by exploiting the turbulent environment after the American invasion and by tapping into mob-backed construction projects. By the 1970s, the Mafia would become a major player in international drug trafficking. In modern times, the Mafia continues to tap into profits of illicit drug production and trafficking, but traditionally, focuses on private protection and racketeering as well as private and public construction contracts. The Mafia typically would also use its influence to intimidate voters or stuff ballots and rig elections for politicians who would protect or favor them.

This infiltration of the Italian political sphere would grant the Mafia economic and political privileges. The Anti-mafia Commission of the XI legislature on Cosa Nostra stated:

“With the hands on public contracts, Cosa Nostra can control the essential aspects of the political and economical life, of the territory, because it conditions entrepreneurs, politicians, workers, and professionals. This aspect contributes to strengthen the domination on the territory, consolidates social consensus, empowers the single mafia families in the territory, in the society and in the political and administrative environment.” The protection of these advantages has important political implications on the Italian government structure. According to Paoli, “the Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (DIA) has recently put forward the thesis that some sections of the ‘ndrangheta might harbor – independently or together with Cosa Nostra – an autonomous political project. The connections with other illicit centres of power, such as secret Masonic lodges and terroristic groups, seem to support this hypothesis.”

Cosa Nostra is not a highly centralized monolithic organization, but rather a confederation of families or clans which was loosely administrated through a “Sicilian Mafia Commission”, and has changed dynamics and leadership often. It has been classified as a “cartel of private protection firms” and they have often fulfilled the role of arbitrators among criminals and overseers of illicit businesses.

Despite their infiltration and cooptation of state processes, the Mafia came to direct confrontation with the state in 1992 with the murder of anti-mafia magistrate Giovanni Falcone by explosives placed under a motorway. In response, the government dispatched 5,000 military personnel to contain the conflict. Since their deaths, the police have arrested more than 4,000 mafiosi, including Toto “the beast” Riina who was considered the boss of the Sicilian mafia until his death in 2017. Currently, Cosa Nostra is considered a much less influential, neighborhood gang with weak, younger criminals lacking the authority of their predecessors. The decline of the building sector in Sicily has also hurt the finances of the Mafia. According to Sergio Lari, former anti-mafia prosecutor and lead investigator in the Falcone and Borsellino killings, “If we had to draw a graph of the military and economic power of Cosa Nostra in
the last 100 years, the highest point on the curve would be the mid-1980s. From the 1990s on, with peaks and troughs, the general trend would be a decrease, up to today, where we’d find the lowest levels.237

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**Primeiro Comando Da Capital (PCC)**

**Origin years:** 1993

**Peak year:** 2001-present

**Location of origin:** Sao Paulo, Brazil (Piranhao Prison)

**Summary:**

Also known as the “party of crime”, the PCC emerged in 1993 in Sao Paulo state, and began as a self-protection group in a soccer game at Taubate Penitentiary. The immediate cause for a broader organization was the shooting of 111 inmates by police in an operation to quell a rebellion in the Carandiru prison in 1992. The Brazilian government had resorted to mass incarceration in order to tackle crime in the early 1990s and Sao Paulo contains 44% of its inmates, kept under extremely poor conditions.

Subsequently, the PCC adopted a discourse of unity and prompted prisoners to organize to keep the peace amongst each other and represent them inside and outside of presents. Thus, an inmate’s charter was drafted and criminals agreed to the motto, “Brother does

not kill brother, Brother does not exploit brother, the ‘Founders’ are the leaders.” The manifesto stressed the PCC’s goal of fighting injustice and oppression in the prison system under the banner “Liberty, Justice, and Peace”, and under its code, the party does not allow mugging, rape, extortion, or use of PCC for resolving personal conflicts. Most experts say that the PCC’s fundamental reason for existing was to improve the rights of prisoners, and that drug trafficking and other criminal activities were carried out to raise the organization’s leverage and funding. The group maintains a strict hierarchy for managing funds and operations.

By 1995, the PCC model had been applied elsewhere and the organization reached control of Carandiru prison. The PCC was trying to establish itself as a “self-help” society. PCC members paid a monthly fee to the organization. In 1999, PCC expanded operations to include bank robbery and drug trafficking and began conquering the market by way of violence.

Initially, the government denied its existence and separated leadership into different prisons, unwittingly helping the expansion of the group into prisons throughout Brazil. PCC would itself start riots to provoke the state into sending members to other prisons. In February 2001, the PCC seized public attention when 28,000 inmates took control of 29 prisons in 19 cities in Sao Paulo. 10,000 people were taken hostage and 27 hours later, the hostages would be freed and the riot controlled, but the PCC completely changed perception of the government towards its operation.

Less than a decade after its establishment, the PCC adopted an action plan that would define it as a “third generation gang” with a political agenda and transnational connections. In 2002, the current leader known as “Marcola” shared a cell with Chilean terrorist Mauricio Hernandez Norambuena and learned concepts of asymmetric warfare and urban guerilla warfare and further developed the political program of the PCC. A search of Marcola’s prison cell revealed him to very politically minded, finding copies of Sun Tzu’s the *Art of War* or two biographies of Che Guevara.

The PCC began to engage in political mobilization and election interference through carefully timed terrorism. During a 9-day period in 2006, the PCC unleashed a wave of violence with 293 attacks on police stations and public buildings. The violence ceased when the Sao Paulo government agreed to secret negotiations and conceded Marcola a high-level government delegation in prison. The truce reduced the rate of violence such that by 2016 the homicide rate was 46% lower. One study concluded that the PCC had become a “monopolist of death”. The PCC continued this trend of directly influencing elections and supporting candidates of their choosing. The threat of terrorism has been constantly used to counter policies viewed unfavorably by the group, such as a ban on cell phone use in prisons that was proposed in April 2016 and later postponed or not implemented.

Current estimates of PCC membership vary widely but police and media agree that at least 6,000 members pay monthly dues and are considered part of the organization. According to the Sao Paulo Department of Investigation of Organized Crime, the PCC controls more than 140,000 prisoners in Sao Paulo state. The group also held a coalition with the Red Commando and, together, they
controlled drug trade in Brazil’s two largest cities, but there is no evidence of an ideological alliance. There is also evidence of interaction with the FARC in the form of arms-for-drugs trade, and the PCC has also obtained guns from Paraguay’s organized crime groups. The figure below shows affiliation by region:

The PCC remains a formidable force which has actually benefitted directly from mass incarceration and wretched conditions in prisons. An AEI report on PCC mentions that, “the PCC’s strength, the wretched conditions in Brazil’s prisons, and the fact that each
PCC-occupied prison operates much like its own independent criminal cell mean it is likely impossible for Brazil to eliminate the group in the short run.**238

**Main sources:**

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**238** Berg, Ryan, *Breaking Out: Brazil’s First Capital Command and the emerging prison-based threat*, AEI 2020