Political Economy Approaches for Analyzing Transnational Organized Crime

Countering Transnational Organized Crime Seminar

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Defining Transnational Organized Crime

Organized criminal groups → three or more people existing for a period of time
Defining Transnational Organized Crime

Organized criminal groups have specific **intents and purposes**:

- Acting in concert with the aim of committing at least one crime punishable by four years’ incarceration
- In order to obtain (directly or indirectly) a financial or other material benefit.

Organized crime is transnational when it is:

- Three or more people
- Existing for a period of time

...
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Organized crime is transnational when it is... planned, prepared, committed, or has significant consequences in multiple states.
Defining Transnational Organized Crime

“...a number of illegal activities, often within an illicit economy, conducted by organized groups or networks of people over time and for profit,” often fueled by the use of violence and/or corruption in high levels of government.

Forms and methods of transnational organized crime can change over time, and organized criminal groups learn and adapt to new conditions.

Context: Transnational Organized Crime

Enabling or gateway crimes facilitate transnational organized crime.

Money laundering
Cybercrime
Government corruption

Human trafficking
Drug trafficking
Natural resource theft
Poaching and wildlife trafficking
Goods smuggling
Piracy
A Recent Intensification

- Cold War influx of small arms and light weapons
- Megatrends (digital revolution, urbanization, youth bulge)
- Shifts in international and domestic law enforcement regimes
- Political instability

[Images of weapons and a map of Africa]
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- how context shapes the incentives and disincentives of state and non-state actors to participate (or not) in transnational organized crime
- how individual choices shape collective outcomes

Use #1: Diagnosing Drivers, Patterns, Consequences

Several elements to analyze:

• Types of actors involved in governance  
  (state and non-state; national and local...)

• Resources of these actors  
  (financial and human capital; local and international linkage; coercive and soft power...)

• Laws, policies, norms, perceptions, and processes that shape governance, development, and security in everyday life

• Types of markets available  
  (licit and illicit; local and transnational...)

• Structures of markets for different goods and services
Use #2: Informing State-Led Responses

Several theories of change that political economy frameworks can help us evaluate

**Militarized responses:**
Military engagement in kinetic operations and/or in the support of law enforcement in “cracking down” on transnational organized crime as a hard power deterrent
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**Human rights, rule of law, and governance oriented responses:**
State officials’ transparent provision of services and engagement in rights-respecting interactions with residents, citizens, and communities as a way to prevent participation or legitimation of transnational organized crime
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• Careful **calibration of militarized, development-focused, and human rights-based elements of a state response** are critical.