

Does globalization affect crime?

[Economics](#), [Globalization](#)



Introduction

Globalization refers to integration internationally through the exchange of world views, products, ideas and other cultural aspects. This is facilitated by advances in transportation and telecommunications infrastructure enabling openness in trade, finance, travel and communication (Aart Scholte, 2000). These are the major factors that have generated economic and cultural interdependence, creating economic growth and well-being, and unfortunately, also giving rise to significant opportunity for criminal activities and business (Nelken, 2008).

With these developments and economic globalization, global governance has failed to keep pace and has enabled the diversification and internationalization of crime which is presently deemed to have reached macro-economic proportions. Globalized crime includes trafficking and marketing of illegal and counterfeit goods across continents, smuggling of migrants in modern day slavery, organized crime gangs in various urban centers and insurgency, cybercrime and fraud, piracy, and money-laundering, among other vices. Despite the gravity of these threats, there persists a lack of comprehensive information and a global perspective on crime trends and the transnational criminal markets (UNODC, 2010).

This paper explores the ways in which globalization has contributed to transnational crime including the trafficking of drugs and human beings. Transnational organized crime (TOC) refers to crime that is organized and coordinated across national borders of more than one country and which involves groups or networks of individuals planning and executing illegal

business ventures utilizing systematic violence and/or corruption. This type of crime has inadvertently been a significant beneficiary of globalization (Sangiovanni, 2005).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2000 identified four elementary aspects of globalization: movement of capital and investment, trade and transactions, migration, and the dissemination of knowledge, aspects which lead to the emergence of an international network of social and economic systems (Jones, 2010). Globalization is therefore defined as the intensification of social relations across the globe linking distant localities in such a way that happenings at a local level are shaped by events far and wide and vice versa. The processes of globalization do affect and are affected by the organization of business and work, social and cultural resources, economics, and the natural environment (Kohler and Chaves, 2003).

Human trafficking

Globalization through these effects has contributed to disparities in nations of the globe (increased inequality). This consequently leads to a disruptive effect that drives people into operations in illicit markets and organized crime in attempts to cope with the situations or towards the quest of people for better life. Due to inequalities leading to impoverishment and marginalization and political conflicts in certain parts of the world, as well as socio-cultural change and restrictive policies of immigration in countries that are better endowed economically, many individuals from developing countries hoping to find work and better life are willing to borrow heavily

from their communities and to risk their lives for the opportunities desired (UNODC, 2010).

Since this is an illegal venture, these people often seek assistance from organized criminals with knowledge of the system, a trend that increases as nations tighten immigration controls. Being an illegal and clandestine activity, those providing the service have tremendous power over their charges and abuses are known to happen frequently. This particular set of events has led to what is commonly referred to as the trafficking of human beings, sometimes into modern-day slavery (Haken, 2011).

Examples of these are two northward smuggling flows that compose migrant trafficking: from Africa to Europe and from Latin America to North America. In the USA, the large Spanish speaking and Mexican expatriate population exerts a powerful influence on poorer states to the south with immigrants hoping to substantially improve their standard of living. Mexicans compose the largest percentage of illegal immigrants with 90% of them assisted by smugglers given the strict immigration controls and deterrents. Similar to this, the Africa to Europe flow has even stronger push and pull factors. This is however a fraction of the America migration partly due to the difficulty in crossing (hazardous voyages in which migrants are subject to exploitation) and the small size of the African expatriate population. This flow is evidently due to economic factors since the global economic recession has led to significant reductions in migrant trafficking (UNODC, 2010).

The trafficking of women for the purpose of sexual exploitation is also notable though the strong increase at the end of the Cold War appears to

have stabilized and a diversity of nationalities have displaced the victims from Eastern Europe that earlier dominated this market (UNODC, 2010).

Drug trafficking

There is present a huge and growing market for drugs in neighborhoods across the globe. Drugs traded and which have significance on the global scale include cocaine and heroin (Sangiovanni, 2005). 90% of global supply of heroin comes from opium poppy cultivated in Afghanistan while a bulk of cocaine flows proceeds from the Andean region. Such drugs flow either in bulk or in small quantities following trade and travel routes to destinations across continents and the globe, as well as countries en route to major markets. Some of the proceeds of this drug trade are used to finance other crimes such as terrorism (UNODC, 2010).

Other forms of crime

Following trade and travel routes and enhanced by the expanded global tourism facilitated by less restrictive visa regimes and cheaper airfares, goods that are trafficked abound including firearms, environmental resources, and counterfeit goods ferried parallel to licit goods. Alongside these, crimes such as cybercrime and maritime piracy are facilitated by enhanced communication and increased movement (UNODC, 2010).

Taking advantage of the forces of globalization, criminals and associated organizations have thrived and grown under the current world environment using the processes outlined below to promote their activities. Institutions of state that should watch and stem these activities have however been

hindered by bureaucracy and ‘red-tape’ as well as issues of sovereignty (Nelken, 2008).

Global trade and widespread deregulation

The facilitation of international trade through globalization despite its economic advantages inadvertently leads to difficulty in regulating global trade. This challenge is exploited by smugglers and traffickers in their pursuit of profit enhancing attendant crimes (Nelken, 2008). Also a significant contributor is the widespread deregulation of the global financial system since the 1970s. This has created loopholes which have allowed easy laundry of proceeds of crime by illicit actors with attempts at creating regulations and safeguards for not being very effective. These unchecked illegal activities provide mechanisms to fund terrorists, insurgents, and warlords with criminals adopting myriad distinct structures depending on their circumstances (UNODC, 2010).

Technological advancement

The advancement of technology becomes a double-edged sword providing convenience to end-users in positive uses but it is also harnessed for criminal activities, the coordination, planning, and execution of their operations in widespread locations across the globe (Kohler and Chaves, 2003). Mobile phone and internet technologies have enabled enhanced communication and the conduct of business through digital avenues. Criminal gangs also use these technologies in the conduct of their illicit activities such as soliciting customers for drugs and child pornography and the coordination of these

activities. In the case of child pornography, customers pay online to receive sexual images and content of underage children. Legislation used to control and curb some of these online activities may not be applicable when servers are based in other countries hindering effective pursuit and stamping out of such illicit activities (Sangiovanni, 2005).

Mobility of people and goods and social networks

The migration of people across countries is also utilized by trans-national criminal organizations. The obvious activities enabled by this is human trafficking and smuggling but a more serious criminal activity is based on the legal migration of people in order to set up a social network, a significant aspect in criminal organization. Human and commercial flows are too intense to easily distinguish the illicit from the licit (Nelken, 2008; Sangiovanni, 2005).

A trans-national network engaged in criminality can be understood as a series of cross-border nodes connected through communication links and/or resource exchange. The social networks act as intermediaries facilitating the movement of resources mirroring operations of multinational corporations with widespread branches. The social networks facilitate the sharing of information and localized knowledge between the established nodes in a linear and flatter distribution of social nodes that allow maximum efficiency and flexibility in decision-making and initiative. This capability enables their quick reaction and alteration of operations which is particularly useful in evading authorities in pursuit, facilitating their high resilience (Nelken, 2008; Haken, 2011).

Lack of international cooperation

Though there exist many platforms for cooperation with regard to the sharing of information and intelligence aimed at curbing trans-national crime, very little is done to facilitate this information sharing (UNODC, 2010). With international presence of diplomatic missions, very few law-enforcement agencies pursue and are involved in the same objective. Countries such as Lichtenstein and Switzerland have tight secrecy and financial regulation protecting against the divulgence of their clients' personal wealth to law enforcement agencies and bodies. This secrecy and protection favors organized crime and is thus employed by criminals to evade capture and freezing of assets by authorities (Sangiovanni, 2005).

Legal framework

With differing legal frameworks across various jurisdictions globally, what may be legal or what may require burden of proof varies in different countries. The burden of proof has different weights in various legal jurisdictions, a reality which trans-national criminal groups take advantage of in the globalized world basing and conducting their operations in countries that have lax frameworks or high thresholds for proof of criminality. For instance, drug trafficking in Singapore attracts a charge under the criminal conspiracy act, requiring little evidence of proof. Laws in the United States, on the other hand, require much more evidence or proof of conspiracy (UNODC, 2010).

There have been a number of arrests highlighting the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies and bodies in detecting and pursuing criminal activities. In reality however, many cases still go unnoticed and some unreported. Figures released, in light of the lack of transparency and too many unknown variables, may not be an accurate reflection of the actual situation on the ground (UNODC, 2010; Kohler and Chaves, 2003).

Conclusion

It is a global concern that forces of globalization that facilitate economic growth, positive social and cultural change and enhances interaction across a shrinking world are also inadvertently being utilized for negative effects and are benefiting perpetrators of crime across boundaries of nations and continents. Transnational crime is taking advantage of the globalization process to enhance the speed and frequency of its conduct of illicit activities, and as well to avoid detection and adverse consequences of law in various jurisdictions. Criminals are increasingly adapting to quick changes and developments in technology, people and goods mobility to cross borders through social networks while exploiting the lack of international cooperation between countries. They also exploit different legal frameworks between countries to successively undermine states efforts in curbing their illicit activities.

Burdened by bureaucracy and red-tape, bounds of sovereignty, and an uncoordinated international system, law enforcement bodies and agencies around the world are ineffective in their endeavor to catch up with the flow and the dynamism employed by criminal organizations. Transnational

networks have been utilized by criminal organizations to increase the speed and frequency of their operations and to increase the degree of challenge to the authority of the state with enhanced capacity to plan, direct and organize their criminal operations in countries while based in another.

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