

Organized crime: theory and characteristics



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Statistically, most crimes committed in major American cities are crimes of passion, convenience, or opportunity committed by individual perpetrators; these can be classed as street crime or disorganized crime (Ryan and George, 1997). Disorganized crimes are difficult to predict and, often, difficult to solve. Because they cut across racial, class, and gender lines, disorganized crimes have fascinated historians, and there are several studies that attempt to find rational explanations for patterns in crime rates.

How would you describe or define organized crime?

Since the 1920s, organized crime has fascinated, horrified, and been a continuous concern for citizens and law enforcement officials in the United States (Lupsha, 1996). The public perception of organized crime has been shaped by the large volume of movies, television shows, and books that have distorted the public image of organized crime and misled the response to it. First and foremost, the first thing or picture that comes into the mind when organized crime is mentioned, is John Gotti, Al Capone and Paul Castellano, these individuals are some of the well known as members of the organized crime. Many people argue that this named individuals who have previously served jail sentence could serve as perpetrators of organized crime. So, the question is, what is the actually the right definition of organized crime? Organized crime can be defined as a group of individual who have structured plans and their objective is to get money by or through committing illegal activities. Individuals who are connected with organized crime meet their financial needs through violence, corrupt officials, and extortion. These individuals end up affecting people from as close as their neighbor hoods and as far away as other countries. The personal perception of this author is that organized crime is the organization of several

participating parties who share a common goal; generally, focused on monetary gain or control of power.

How does your perception compare to the definitions in the readings?

In reading chapter 1 of Organized Crime, I have realized that one definition can not completely define the concept of organized crime. According to the text organized crime can be defined as two or more persons conspiring together on a continuing and secretive basis with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit. My perception of organized crime and book assessment of organized crime is not that far apart. Conceptually, the term organized crime has been used to differentiate a specific manner of criminality from forms of personal and property crimes typically committed by individuals working alone (such as residential burglaries, mugging, automobile theft, vandalism, crimes of passion, and so on).

Public perception of organized crime has largely been shaped by the media and the entertainment industry (Lupsha, 1996). As in entertainment industry, organized crime has become synonymous with such criminal "genres" as the Italian Mafia, outlaw motorcycle gangs, Chinese Triads, the Japanese yakuza, Colombian cocaine cartels, and the Russian mafyia. While a defining characteristic of these dominant organized crime genres has been a shared ethnicity, organized criminality is present among a wide range of ethnic groups and nationalities. Moreover, in recent years, it has become apparent that race or ethnicity is no longer the most important criterion of who participates in a particular organized crime conspiracy. Not only has there been evidence of cooperation among many of these dominant genres, but

there are also thousands of other individual criminal entrepreneurs who work together, on an ad hoc or ongoing basis, in pursuit of illegal revenues, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or language.

The term organized crime has also been used to refer to certain illegal activities that are typically carried out by criminal organizations, such as drug trafficking, extortion, labor racketeering, smuggling, corruption, and money laundering. However, organized crime should not be strictly defined by the type of illegal activities carried out by criminal organizations and networks, for many of these criminal activities can also be conducted by individuals working alone. Instead, organized crime can best be characterized by how illegal activities are carried out. Some of the defining characteristics of organized criminality are summarized below.

What characteristics do you think are associated with organized criminal behavior?

The difficulty in clearly defining the concept of organized crime comes from the ambiguity of the term organized. For example, how organized does a criminal outfit need to be to be considered an agent of organized crime?

Most people who have studied the phenomenon agree that, at the very least, an organized-crime group has to maintain a clear hierarchy among its members and function according to a set of enforceable rules and regulations. A city gang, therefore, which temporarily groups a few youths involved in illegal activities, does not constitute organized crime. Common behaviors among organized crime groups have been within a global magnitude. These organizations have engaged in enterprises, which include various criminal acts. They specialize in money laundering, drug trafficking,

blackmail, gambling, extortion, political corruption, and loan-sharking. It seems if these individuals are permitted to silence witnesses, murder, and blackmail; extort, etc., law enforcement will constantly have difficulty in apprehending said persons or any kind of conviction regarding their actions and-or behavior (Lyman and Potter, 2007).

The primary goal of organized crime is economic profit. Organized crime does not traditionally espouse and fight for a particular political ideology. Thus, terrorist organizations like Hamas and al-Qaeda are not usually considered organized-crime groups, even if they are well organized and engage in illegal activities. organized-crime groups may acquire political power to ensure prosperity for their members, but they do not generally perceive political power as a goal in itself.

organized-crime groups have a limited, highly specialized membership and are characterized by a carefully thought-out division of labor. As in any legal business enterprise, every member knows his or her place in the organization and will undertake specific duties on a regular basis. Unlike legal businesses, however, organized crime shows a willingness to resort to violence and bribery to achieve its goals.

The continued existence of an organized-crime group does not rely on specific individuals. In other words, in this kind of a group, everybody is replaceable. Even if the leader of the outfit dies or goes to jail, the organization is designed to promptly find somebody to take over. Organized crime, therefore, is characterized by permanency, as much as by its economic priorities, lack of political ideology, hierarchy, and specialization.