

Organized crime: the social perspective



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Regardless of which form of organized crime takes place, abundantly clear organized crime is showing no signs of slowing down or even being remotely under control. The continued growth and diversification of organized crimes continues to be a major problem for law enforcement and for law abiding citizens as a whole. Organized crime existed even before there was any real understanding of it as something distinctive. After all, organized societies breed organized crime. To an extent, this reflects the greater opportunities in such environments; to an extent, it is acknowledged as more effective state law enforcement develops. Thus, classical Rome suffered from organized and crossborder smuggling, protection racketeering, and piracy, while the pirates of the Spanish Main were part of a relatively complex transnational criminal economy. In western Europe, organized crime began to emerge at the time of the Renaissance, especially in Italy and Netherlands, themselves the cradle of the new, organized society. In China, secret societies had been operating as criminal enterprises throughout the history of the empire.

However, the twentieth century saw a phenomenal growth in the scope, power, and effectiveness of organized crime as the state became increasingly powerful and intrusive. In particular, the more states try to control particular commodities and services they consider dangerous and immoral or apply taxes or regulations that drive up costs, the more they create markets for organized crime. Thus, Prohibition in the United States in the 1920s and early 1930s, the more limited Soviet anti-alcohol campaign under Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s, and the illegalization of narcotics

throughout the world all contributed dramatically to the markets and thus profits for organized crime.

Social institution is a group or organization that has a particular purpose, goal, or task, and accomplishes the successful completion of this goal, purpose, or task by influencing and persuading individuals in a community to participate, and assist with achieving this objective. Social institution applies to organized crime in numerous ways. According to Warren (1973), criminal organizations develop in geographical locations that display a portion of individuals residing within the jurisdiction desire a product criminal organization is offering. This is crucial as it allows the organization to successfully produce, distribute, and consume the product (University of Phoenix, 2010).

In addition, criminal organizations focus on a community's social structure, control the community has socially on its members, and the level of participation each community member has among the rest. Moreover, criminal organizations form tight-knit relations with legitimate businesses and owners willing to participate in the organizations success (University of Phoenix, 2010).

The alien theory states individuals involved with organized crime in Sicily and Italy had produced criminal organizations known as the Sicilian Mafia or Costra Nostra. These individuals migrated to the United States in an attempt to escape detection and apprehension by law enforcement in their own country, and to take advantage of the numerous opportunities that existed within the United States both legally and illegally. once in the United States

these groups of individuals developed, organized, and operated numerous criminal organizations, carried out minor and serious criminal offenses; and were believed by many professionals and Americans to have been the primary cause for the establishing a criminal culture (osmosis, 2003).

The social control theory asserts that an individual who is involved with a community and has strong family relations will be less likely to engage in illegal activity than those who do not. If an individual is capable of establishing a positive rapport with community members, becomes involved and participates in community programs, such as youth, elderly, religious-spiritual, and anti-crime, the individual will most likely refrain from engaging in criminal activity or at the very least consider the consequences of a criminal act prior to committing the act (Psychological Glossary, 2010).

The differential association theory considers one's social group and environment as the fundamental explanation for one's criminal behavior and the formation and joining of criminal organizations. An individual who socializes with a group or other individuals who have a history with the legal system or who engage in illegal activity are at an extremely high-risk to conform to the norms of that particular social sub-group. A prime example is a teenager who becomes involved in delinquent criminal behavior and activity as a result of peer pressure. These juveniles are susceptible to withdrawing from school, joining criminal organizations, such as street gangs, and experimenting with illegal substances and alcohol, all of which continues the juvenile down a path of addiction, career criminality, and a long criminal history into adulthood (Sutherland, 1978).

The strain and anomie theory believes that individuals who engage in criminal activity do so as a result of wanting a piece of the American dream or to obtain materialistic items of value. A majority of individuals within the United States never experience the luxury of owning a fancy vehicle, house, business, or property. Most individuals residing in the United States are forced to work labor intensive job's, receive a low paying wage, are parents who must provide and support families, such as children, and do so through legal means. Unfortunately, the desire to achieve items of value, provide a better life for one's children, such as the purchasing of school cloths, vacations, and after-school activities can force one to conduct illegal business for the purpose of gaining an additional income (Agnew, 2007).

The empirical and speculative theories discussed throughout this paper, such as the alien, social control, differential association, and strain and anomie theories can assist researchers, society, professionals, and law enforcement with understanding the elements that exist in different criminal organizations and criminal behavior. Each theory is supported by research, statistics, strong arguments, and facts that can be used by law enforcement in numerous ways. Theories as such display characteristics and mannerisms common in criminal behavior, along with what geographical locations are susceptible to the development of criminal organizations and activity. Furthermore, jurisdictions, in which its citizens are antisocial prove to be breeding grounds for many types of criminal wrongdoing that exists.