

Comparative perspective on organized crime

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Simply put, organized crime means illegal systematic activity for power or profit. This crime has always been a threat to society due to the violence and corruption associated with it. These crime organizations are known to operate globally thus increasing their collective power. Criminal organizations ensure their prosperity by corrupting the creme-de-la-creme of the society who are the most distinguished and respected members of the society. Corruption is usually through bribery, fraud, tax evasion schemes, blackmail, establishment of symbiotic relationships with legitimate businesses and so forth (Allum, F and Siebert R. 2003).

The need for expansion of these criminal gangs has increased competition among the gangs and this has seen a rise in cases of gang violence. These groups engage in criminal activities like drug trafficking, money laundering, identity theft, prostitution rackets and organized illegal immigration where the people trafficked are used for criminal exploitation and forced labor. Organized crime groups exist globally and the issue of immigration has greatly contributed to this. These organizations are found in America, Italy, Latino, Russia, Asia and in many other parts of the world.

The Italian/ Sicilian Mafia Brief History. The Mafia is thought to have sprung in Sicily in the mid 19th century and was more popularly known as the Cosa Nostra which meant 'our thing'. The Sicilian Cosa Nostra consists of families called Cosche. The increase in business transactions and a demand for protection of property after the end of feudalism Sicily is thought to have led to the emergence of the Mafia society. It is also believed that groups of people specially trained for use in violence existed at this time.

Therefore it is assumed that demand met supply and thus the Mafia emerged (Wright, A. , 2006). During the fascist era, Cesare Mori was granted powers that enabled him to prosecute the Mafia within his jurisdiction. This prompted many Sicilian Mafia to flee to the United States where they continued their illegal operations. This prosecution of the Mafia weakened the group but did not eliminate it altogether. The Mafia however, regained its power during the world war II and the United States occupation.

After the war the Mafia then sought to re-emerge by re-organizing its activities. It slid into gangsterism in 1954 after the death of Calogero Vizzini who had previously been made a provisional mayor by the Allies. Two years later the Sicilian Mafia made ties again with the American and Canadian Mafia and in 1960 the two groups started to trade in narcotics. It is also during the postwar era that the Mafiosi slowly found their way into most agencies that were run by the government. These resulted in most large buildings ending up in the Mafia's possession.

Thus most economic sectors such as hotels and banks have ended up being in possession and control of the mafiosi. Though they also engage in trade in narcotics smuggling, prostitution rackets and so on their main focus is on money laundering (Wright, A. , 2006). The Mafia is comprised of independent groups and does not operate in tiers. Members who join this group have to undergo a ritual which involves pricking the finger then pouring the blood of the would-be member on a sacred image which is meant to protect the neophyte.

The image is then set alight on the neophytes hands and they are supposed to hold it from hand to hand till the fire consumes it as they pledge their

allegiance to the group (Wright, A. , 2006). Examples of Mafia groups in Italy include:- ? The Naples Mafia (Camorra) - this group has approximately 7, 000 members who operate in smaller groups of about 1, 00 families. They deal with cigarette and drug cartels and and counterfeiting. The Calabria Mafia (Ndrangetta) - it has over 6. 000 members and membership is based strictly on blood ties or marriage.

The Puglia Mafia (Sacra Corona Unita) - this group was established in the 80's and it collects money from other mafia families for landing rights on the goods and people smuggled in. The Russian Mafia Brief History The Russian Mafia is a group of organized criminals that arose after the fall of the former Soviet Union after and continued to operate for over a decade after that. This group is thought to have come up as a survival strategy for the criminals who decided to link up with the elite in the Soviet Union. In the 1990s an economic disaster followed the union's fall.

This saw desperate farmer workers of the government turn to crime for money. The criminals also needed these broke former workers as they provided useful services of information that would ensure growth and prosperity of the group. This Mafia targeted powerful commercial centers such as banks, real estates, big industries, and so on. They were also in control of legal and financial issues in major industries. The Russian Mafia operated in a three-tiered way where the high-level government officials and Soviet Union party bureaucrats occupied the topmost tier.

The second tier was occupied by shadow economic participants who exploited their jobs for illicit gain. At the bottom of this tier were the criminals who engaged in the illegal activities such as drug peddling,

prostitution, extortion and so on. The Russian Mafia fall into various groups (Varese F. , 2005). They include the:- Odessa Mafia - it is thought to be the dominant group in the U. S. it split into two subgroups in the early 1980s. The San Francisco Bay Area Odessa Mafia group is highly structured and well organized unlike its Los Angeles counterpart The Armenian organized crime group - which established itself in L. A and the city of Glendale.

The Solntseuskay group - which adopted its name from a location in the outskirts of Moscow where it is established it is thought to have close to 5000 members The Russian Mafia has become a serious threat to the Israel economy where most members of these groups are immigrating to in large numbers (Allum, F and Siebert R. , 2003). This is a very convenient target due to its lack of laws against money laundering as belonging to illegal organizations.

Easy acquisition of citizenship has also made it pretty easy to immigrate. All the member in this illegal organization have to do is to produce proof of them belonging to the Jewish community and those who did not belong to this community would easily buy citizenship. Other countries the Mafia has targeted include Sri-lanka where it controls prostitution and gambling and Columbia where it deals with drug cartels (Wright, A. , 2006). The major repercussion of this problem concerning criminal groups is a decline in the Russian economy whereby foreign investment is stifled due to extortion by the Mafia (Varese F. 2005).

Difference between the Russian and Italian Mafia. The Russian Mafia was made up of educated and skilled members most of whom were former government workers (Rawlinson, P. , 1998). The Italian Mafia constituted of

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criminals with no professional skills whatsoever. This difference resulted in the Italian Mafia engaging in criminal careers that involved violence and death while the Russian Mafia was mainly involved in sophisticated crimes that involved money laundering. The other difference is in the structure of these groups.

The Russian Mafia has a hierarchical structure where there is the boss of bosses whereas the Sicilian Mafia consists of a confederation of families where they are all on the same ground with each family having its own territorial base and existing independently. Another difference is in the period of time the organization lasts. The Russian Mafia exists for only a short duration depending on a particular task and is dissolved once the task is complete. It then re-establishes itself when need arises. The Sicilian Mafia on the other hand continues to operate regardless of how many members are lost in death or prosecution.

These makes it easy for the law to track these Italian organizations down unlike Russian Mafia. The Italian Mafia's membership is based on family structures whereby all members in a particular group belong to a particular family. This can be as a result of blood ties or marriage. The Russian Mafia on the other hand is not based on ethnic or family structures. Finally unlike their Sicilian counterparts, the Russian Mafia carries out clean transactions and operates in an underground and secretive manner (Rawlinson, P. , 1998).

The Sicilian Mafia is quite flamboyant in its lifestyle and engaged in blue-collar crimes such as protection rackets and drug cartels. Similarities between the Italian and Russian Mafia Both Mafia are characterized by

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organized crime which involves tax evasion schemes, fraud, kidnapping, extortion and so on though the degrees of these crimes vary within the two groups. They are also characterized by violence where traitors and those who do not abide by the oaths they took are killed. This violence also extends to those who interfere with the organization's operations such as judges and the police.

Both organizations have an independent structure with different groups in the organization operating differently. Despite this, all groups in the organization often work in coordination thus minimizing clashes between different groups. The other similarity is taking an oath that binds members to the group and swearing to secrecy. The oaths involve the use of blood which can either be an animal's or the neophyte's. Disrespect of the oath is dealt with with military-style discipline. This includes torturing the victims before finally executing them.

Finally both mafia arose so as to meet the demand for their services. In Russia, there was a demand for the supply of exotic goods such as furniture and so the Russian mafia came in to supply these commodities as they were in a position to import them from outside. In Italy the Mafia is believed to have emerged so as to meet the increased need for protection. Thus both organizations arose due to a similar cause. Conclusion The mafia has resulted in a rapid decline of the economy due to the fraud, money laundering, extortion corruption, among other economic crimes associated with it.

It has also resulted in physical, psychological and society harm of the people around these organizations. This problem of organized crimes has been

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fueled and motivated by a number of factors such as greed, unemployment and poor law enforcement. This problem can only be tackled by dealing with these issues that fuel the problem for example, the government can offer good salary, packages to avert the problem of greed, increase employment opportunities and implement tough laws concerning these crimes. Only then can the threat posed by these organized criminals reduce.