

# **ASSESSING TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME: RESULTS OF A PILOT SURVEY OF 40 SELECTED ORGANIZED CRIMINAL GROUPS IN 16 COUNTRIES**

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The UN Centre for International Crime Prevention project on collecting information on organized crime groups has been ongoing for some time. Throughout this period, Jan van Dijk, Chief of CICIP's Crime Analysis and Reduction Branch, supervised the work. The following people have during this period either worked on the project or contributed substantially to the process: Graham Farrell, Alejandra Gomez-Cespedes, Samuel Gonzalez-Ruiz, Alison Jamieson, Elizabeth Joyce, Monica Massari, Francisco Thoumi, Vincenzo Ruggiero, Panayota Vassou, and Phil Williams. The role played by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), in particular Anna Alvazzi del Frate, must be acknowledged. This report was written by Mark Shaw, Aurelié Merle, and Ingke Goeckenjan. The views expressed in this report are exclusively those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Office on Drugs and Crime or of the United Nations.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Globalization and growing economic interdependence have encouraged and promoted the transformation of crime beyond borders in all parts of the world. Improved communications and information technologies, increased blurring of national borders, greater mobility of people, goods and services across countries, and the emergence of a globalized economy have moved crime further away from its domestic base. The nature of organized crime in the contemporary world then cannot be understood separately from the concept of globalization.

In 1998, in recognition of these factors, the Member States of the United Nations decided to establish an *ad hoc* Committee for the purpose of elaborating a comprehensive international Convention against Transnational Orga-

nized Crime (TOC). The *ad hoc* Committee succeeded in drafting four international legal instruments—the Convention and three Protocols on Trafficking in Persons, Smuggling of Migrants and Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms—that will facilitate the prevention and combating of transnational organized crime. Through the ratification of these instruments the State Parties who ratify the Convention will adopt several new legal concepts and mechanisms. Of importance in this regard, is the criminalizing of participation in the activities of a criminal group itself. Importantly too, the Convention will provide a basic framework of cooperation across a large number of countries in the fight against organized crime.

Critical to the implementation and monitoring of the TOC Convention will be the ability to access reliable information on international organized crime trends. Adequate information on ongoing developments from a global perspective may provide a useful marker against which progress can be measured and changes in the nature of organized crime assessed. At the same time, an international effort to collect data on developments in organized crime around the globe would provide a platform for the work of a wide ranging number of individuals and governments who are increasingly adopting more systematic ways of acquiring information on organized criminal groups.

Beyond the establishment of an overall scheme to assess trends in organized crime, the development of a more comprehensive system of classification and the ongoing collection of data on criminal groups provides a useful tool for both law enforcement officials and prosecutors. Information on various criminal groups serves not only to inform counterparts in other countries about what kinds of criminal groups are being investigated in specific states, but allows information on the activities of similar groups to be compared. If combined with data about institutional arrangements and strategies of states in addressing crime, it provides insights into the viability of measures and strategies adopted in tackling various types of criminal groups. Important to note here is that by providing a standard set of agreed upon definitions, for example for the term “organized crime group” and for offenses such as “trafficking in human beings,” the Convention and its Protocols have in effect established a base-line for future research and analysis. If all the countries that ratify the Convention use the same terminology and definitions, the task of comparative analysis will be made much easier.

To further the debate on measures and instruments to collect data on organized crime trends at an international level, this report presents the findings of a survey of 40 selected organized criminal groups in 16 countries and one region. The survey was conducted by the Centre for International Crime Prevention (CICP) in an attempt to both build the knowledge base on organized crime groups, and to develop a comparative framework for the study of the phenomenon. The means by which the data were collected and analyzed is explored below, and the findings presented. Among other results, the data have allowed the development of a typology of organized criminal groups.

## 1.2 Overview of the report

The introduction of the report begins with a short review of the definition used for transnational organized crime by the TOC Convention. This is particularly important as it sets the scene for a more detailed discussion of the nature of the actual criminal groups themselves. This is followed by a brief review of the provisions of the TOC Convention in respect of monitoring and information collection on transnational organized crime groups.

The introduction concludes by arguing for a clear distinction between criminal groups as individual entities – the key focus of this report – and clusters of criminal groups such as the often-identified “Russian Mafia” or West African organized crime problems. This distinction between groups and clusters is of some importance to the report, which argues that the collection of information on transnational organized crime must focus on the lowest possible level, that of the criminal groups themselves. While criminal clusters may contain specific characteristics – indeed, these are presented at various points in the report – they do not on their own constitute valid research categories for the study of organized crime.

The second section of the report gives an overview of the mechanics of the project itself. It is noted here that the gathering of data on organized crime groups in a number of countries, constitutes a significant research challenge. The section thus begins with a preliminary examination of some of the methodological obstacles involved in such work. This is followed by a short review of the survey methodology used and the general approach adopted.

The third section of the report provides an overview of the data gathered on each of the groups in question. Details of all the groups are presented in respect of a number of key variables. These include: structure, size, activity, level of transborder operations, issues in respect of identity, level of violence and corruption used, extent of political influence, penetration into the legitimate economy and the degree to which the group in question cooperate with other organized criminal groups. The results of the selective cross-referencing of some of the most prominent of these variables against each other are also presented.

The fourth section uses the information that has been gathered to present five possible standard typologies of transnational organized crime groups. The characteristics of each of the typologies is presented and illustrated by the inclusion of examples from the groups that have been collected.

The report concludes with an examination of the possibilities for future data collection on transnational organized crime groups at an international level.

## 1.3 Defining transnational organized groups

The diversity of criminal actors and organizations has made consensus about the definition of “organized crime” difficult. It has been argued that organized

crime groups differ from other crime groups in that they specialize in enterprise as opposed to predatory crimes, have a durable hierarchical structure, employ systemic violence and corruption, obtain abnormally high rates of return relative to other criminal organizations, and extend their activities into the legal economy (Naylor, 1997:6). According to this interpretation, criminal groups that do not meet these five conditions are not 'organized crime.' Others have opted for a broader definition: "Organized crime consists of organizations that have durability, hierarchy and involvement in a multiplicity of criminal activities" (Reuter, 1983:75). Nevertheless, arguments as to what constitutes organized crime and what does not have occupied a central position in the debate, and are critical to efforts to monitor developments from an international level (Naylor, 2002:14-18).

The concept of transnational crime – essentially criminal activity that crossed national borders – was introduced in the 1990s. In 1995, the United Nations identified eighteen categories of transnational offences, whose inception, perpetration and/or direct or indirect effects involve more than one country.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, the UN promoted a survey among Member States, which asked respondents to list cases of transnational organized crime in their respective jurisdictions. However, only a few were able to provide satisfactory, unequivocal answers. National legislation lacked clear definitions of this type of crime and held blurred distinctions between the national and transnational nature of offences.

The debate in the *ad hoc* Committee on the elaboration of a Convention against Transnational Organized Crime did not lead to consensus on a definition of "organized crime" or to a list of crimes that would constitute such a phenomenon. As a result, State representatives agreed to focus on the characteristics of actors rather than of acts. The proposal of some delegates to include an enumerative or indicative list of offences was rejected. It was felt that transnational organized groups shift from one activity to another, and that it would be futile, or even counterproductive, to attempt to capture, in a legal text, all criminal ventures in which such groups are engaged at present or may be engaging in the future. (For an overview of the drafting process, see Vlassis, 2001.)

Agreement, however, was reached on what constitutes an "organized crime group" and what is entailed by "transnational crime." Thus, an organized criminal group is a "structured group of three or more persons existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit."<sup>2</sup> By "serious crime" is meant "conduct constituting a criminal offence punishable by a maximum deprivation of liberty of at least four years or a more serious penalty."<sup>3</sup>

According to the Convention, an offence is transnational if "(a) It is committed in more than one state; (b) It is committed in one state but a substantial part of its preparation, planning, direction or control takes place in another

state; (c) It is committed in one state but involves an organized criminal group that engages in criminal activities in more than one state; or (d) It is committed in one state but has substantial effects in another state.”<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note then that in defining “organized criminal groups” the negotiators of the TOC Convention opted for a broad definition. It was decided not to limit the scope of application to hierarchically structured or mafia type organizations but also to cover more loosely organized criminal groups, committing serious crimes that are transnational in nature. Such a broad definition is sensible given the diversity of the phenomenon. Yet this broad focus significantly complicates any process of monitoring and data collection at an international level on transnational organized crime groups.

#### **1.4 Monitoring global organized crime trends**

As will be shown later in the report, the most striking outcome of the organized criminal group data collection exercise is the variety of groups on which information has been collected. The diversity of the groups is perhaps the most startling feature of the data, suggesting that when we talk of transnational organized crime in a variety of localities, we are often in fact referring to very different phenomena. Given the diversity of the phenomenon and the lack of any consolidated information base at international level, the requirement for information and data sharing is specifically recognized by the TOC Convention. This stipulates that states should “consider analyzing, in consultation with the scientific and academic communities, trends in organized crime in [their] territory, the circumstances in which organized crime operates, as well as the professional groups and technologies involved.”<sup>5</sup> The Convention also urges states to share information on organized crime and specifically recognizes that “common definitions, standards and methodologies should be developed and applied as appropriate.”<sup>6</sup>

These factors, and their inclusion in the Convention, constitute a significant challenge for international bodies, specifically the United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention (CICP) and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), in providing the framework for such analysis and information sharing to occur. Data on organized crime groups across the world is uneven, and often dominated by information from the developed world. There is in contrast a general lack of knowledge on the nature and extent of organized crime groups in the developing world (A point of view made for example by Allen, 1999:5-7). The focus is also generally on organized crime groups which have a high public profile – such as the Russian Mafiya (See for example, Rawlinson, 1998) – to the exclusion of a wide range of smaller criminal enterprises which often resemble more complex and fluid networks (Coles, 2001).

Indeed, the available evidence suggests that new technologies and other developments related to globalization have lowered the barriers to entry in re-

spect of some criminal activities, and have as a result diversified the nature and types of activities that criminal groups are involved in. Thus, if research focuses only on high-profile better-known criminal groups it is possible that this work will reflect a declining portion of the reality of organized crime as the situation continues to evolve. It should be noted that one methodological concern – that applies both to this report as well as to other work which attempts to collect primary data on organized crime groups – is that data collected will be biased towards more visible and prominent criminal groups as opposed to less visible, unconventional and smaller groups. (For a more detailed examination of the characteristics of criminal networks and some discussion of these methodological issues, see Williams, 2001[a].)

The challenge at the international level is to collect information on a phenomenon that has both local (at the level of states) and international dimensions (organized criminal groups by their nature engage in illicit trade across borders). Such interconnectivity between the local and the global has been neatly termed ‘glocal’ by one analyst (Hobbs, 1998). At the same time it must be recognized that the nature of organized crime in a range of societies does not resemble the structured hierarchies of the popular imagination. In contrast, and as already emphasized, criminal enterprises are dynamic and often relatively loose structures, making the task of both law enforcement and research and information collection activities more difficult (Williams, 2001[b]). These features suggest that critical to understanding the data that have been collected is, in the longer term, to develop a more rigorous system to classify various organized crime groups, both in terms of their structure, activities and the degree of harm which they cause.

Given these factors, consolidated information on emerging trends in organized crime seems indispensable for setting goals, allocating resources and evaluating results. At the regional level, Europol and the Council of Europe issue regular overviews of organized crime trends. No international organization including INTERPOL, publishes regular global reports on the subject. The TOC Convention however lists the exchange of information on patterns and trends in transnational organized crime as one of the main tasks of the Conference of State Parties and its Secretariat. To prepare for this upcoming task was one of the key reasons why CIGP began this process of information collection around criminal groups. The key aim of this project is to begin to explore the possible ways in which this can be achieved. By collecting and presenting information on a wide range of criminal groups across a variety of countries, it is hoped to achieve a greater understanding of both the possibilities and difficulties of an international monitoring exercise in respect of transnational organized crime.

Before proceeding it is necessary to draw a distinction between a series of concepts around which there is often some confusion in debates on organized crime. This will serve to clarify the immediate aims of this report.

## 1.5 Distinguishing between groups, clusters and markets

The core focus of the CICP project has been the collection of information on *specific* criminal groups. Such data must lie at the heart of any understanding of the nature of the phenomenon of transnational organized crime, as it is the criminal groups themselves that constitute the building blocks of the system. The details obtained in respect of this data collection exercise are also more likely to be of use to policy makers and practitioners than the collection and collation of higher level information on trends in organized crime, which can generally be acquired from secondary sources. The building of a substantial database on the nature and activities of organized crime groups from across the globe will constitute a significant resource in any future effort to monitor global organized crime trends.

Nevertheless, the exercise of collecting information on individual criminal groups, while important, does not provide a comprehensive enough approach. Two other requirements are necessary. The first is to provide regional assessments of criminal markets around the globe. The second is to trace and monitor trends within the various ‘clusters’ of organized criminal groups such as for example Russian, West Africa or Turkish criminal groups. While it is recognized that the latter are often shifting and ill-defined categories, they constitute an important building block in providing a comprehensive understanding of the development of organized criminal activity across the globe. Trends and changes in each of these clusters, and the underlying causes as to why individuals from specific geographic locations become involved in organized criminal activity may alter. This shapes in turn the nature and formation of individual criminal groups and the markets in which they operate.

It is worth noting here that there is often confusion between what is termed ‘groups’ and what has, in the context of this study been termed “clusters.” Reviews of international organized crime often collapse the two. That is, by reviewing recent developments in Russian or West African organized crime as if these were *single and inter-connected criminal groups in their own right*. Instead broader criminal clusters, while sharing many similarities in structure and organization among the various groups that constitute them, are not on their own definable criminal groups. They are rather conglomerations of similar criminal groups often simply labeled by the media for ease of reference. Yet these definitional categories do have some value for two important reasons: they provide the ability to identify particular trends amongst the groups that make up the clusters and though analysis in this area remains weakly developed, point to the requirement to examine in greater detail why some ethnic/social or national groups appear to have a greater propensity for the engagement in organized criminal activity than others. Thus, reference is made throughout the report to various criminal clusters. It should be emphasized again however that such clusters are not defined criminal entities with clearly delineated boundaries, but are often complex associations of criminal organizations and individual actors.



The above point is well illustrated by detailed study in the United States of the so-called Russian Mafia submitted to CICP in the course of the project. (A detailed argument to this effect has been published in Finckenauer and Waring, 1998.) This argues that Russian organized crime in the United States is often qualified by the press or viewed by the population as a distinct Mafia even if in reality they do not represent an homogenous hierarchical structure under the leadership of any single individual. Thus, while Russian organized crime is not a single entity in itself in the United States, this terminology is used generically to refer to an association of different loosely structured criminal groups originating from Eurasia (Russia, Armenia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Chechnya, Dagestan and Georgia). The 12 to 15 networks composing Russian organized crime in the United States have a total of between 500 to 600 members. Each of the networks does not have a clear leadership, individuals being identified by their skills and personal characteristics. The connection between the networks is opportunity-driven on an *ad hoc* basis, giving great flexibility. They can rely on a high number of specialists, on financial support or other needed resources and can be quick in responding to new opportunities. This fluid structure explains why Russian organized crime groups are quick at adapting to, and diversifying into, new criminal markets.

Given the above explanation and the example illustrating it, it is hoped that in the long term a standardized system for examining trends in transnational organized crime should consist of three components – that of “groups,” “clusters” and “markets.”

- *Groups*: At the lowest level the collection of data on individual criminal organizations, using the survey methodology already developed. Over time it is hoped that this will provide enough data to develop a more comprehensive system of classification for transnational organized criminal groups, and the level of harm they cause.
- *Clusters*: The next level is the collection of information around the various clusters of criminal groups, often originating from specific geographic localities. While there is some cross-over between the first category above, in that groups which fall into these broad clusters may also be analyzed there, this approach would seek to focus on broad trends within each of these clusters rather than the specific details of any group.
- *Markets*: As already suggested, information on regional criminal markets is essential to any understanding of the development of transnational organized crime groups, and trends associated with this. Such an analysis would examine the commodities, be they people, protection, illicit narcotics or others, which characterize organized crime in various regions. Ongoing regional research projects being conducted by CICP in Central Asia and West Africa constitute important regional pilot studies in this regard.

This layered approach to the study of the problems of organized criminality, with each stage reinforcing the other, provides a comprehensive framework in which to collect information and assess trends. A word of caution however is necessary before proceeding. Building a comprehensive global system to moni-

tor developments in the field of transnational organized crime cannot be achieved overnight. At an international level what is required is the ability to collect and analyze data on organized criminal groups in a sustained manner. Once off surveys of the position are of little use. Like the sweeps of the international victim survey, they are most valuable when they have been completed on a number of occasions, thus allowing not only comparisons across jurisdictions but also across time (van Dijk, 1999). Only in this way can a comprehensive system of trend analysis of transnational organized crime be developed.

Given that the process of information collection and analysis of transnational organized crime groups at the international level is still in its infancy, this report focuses specifically on the lowest building blocks of the system, "criminal groups," on which data on a limited number have been collected.

The section that follows provides a brief overview of the process in which data for the project was collected and analyzed.

## **2. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

### **2.1 Methodological challenges**

Collecting information and data on organized crime in a variety of jurisdictions presents a series of difficulties. The process entails a combination of two features which, it has been noted elsewhere, present significant methodological problems (See for example, Rawlinson, 1999). The first is the conducting of cross-jurisdictional or comparative criminology, with all the issues of legal definition and varying interpretation that this presents. (For both the advantages and disadvantages of comparative criminology, in this case specifically research on policing, see Mawby, 1999.) The second is conducting research on organized crime, acknowledged to contain challenges that are not present in other areas of criminological study (See for example the introduction to Finckenauer and Waring; also, Hobbs, 1995). To combine these two features therefore in a comparative study of trends in organized crime constitutes a challenge for research and analysis.

A related obstacle is the fact that any study of international organized crime (particularly one conducted at the level of the UN which relies on contributions from member countries) has to rely on information generated in individual states, the building blocks of the international system. Yet transnational organized crime, by definition, operates across national boundaries. Information obtained from any one state therefore may only provide a partial reflection of the reality.

For these and other reasons the comparative study of organized criminal groups is not well developed. Literature on the subject is either very general, providing an overview of the key principles or defining features of organized crime and drawing on various examples. Or, it refers to the activities, history and trends of a specific criminal group. *Comparative studies that examine the*

*characteristics of organized crime groups in a variety of societies, having collected primary data on these, are a rare species.* The two reviews of global organized crime completed to date provide only high level overviews of transnational organized crime trends, and while useful, lack the detail of a closer analysis of individual criminal groups (These are: Adamoli, Di Nicola, Savona and Zoffi, 1998; and the *International Crime Threat Assessment*). There is thus a significant gap in the available data on international organized crime trends, which when filled, would greatly benefit the process of information sharing outlined by the Convention. This was the reason that the CICP project on global organized crime trends was initiated.

## 2.2 Data acquisition

The initial challenge faced by the CICP study was how to gather the data required – and more specifically *which* data. The approach adopted was to send out detailed questionnaires to a selected number of member states of the UN where it was believed capacity existed and information would be available which would be useful to the study. The issue of what information to collect generated more debates however than the method (the questionnaire) in which it would be acquired. The choice, broadly speaking, was whether to collect information about the general situation of organized crime in any country, or whether to collect data on specific criminal groups. The outcome is effectively a compromise, although leaning more heavily towards the accumulation of data on specific criminal groups. Thus each of the 16 countries<sup>7</sup> which have served as partners in the study, were asked to fill in a detailed questionnaire and provide an analytical overview of the three most prominent organized criminal groups in their country.

The level of prominence of the organized crime groups in question was to be determined by, among other factors, the level of media coverage of that group and the attention it had received by the police or prosecution services. Admittedly this was an imperfect method, relying on the subjective judgement of those completing the survey. While of course other criminal groups which were more effective in their methods of operation and thus would not have received attention in the media or a visit from the police would not be covered, there would also only presumably be sketchy information about their activities in the public realm. In the end information on 40 specific criminal groups was collected.<sup>8</sup>

The questionnaire itself consisted of approximately 50 variables, under the general themes: name, structure and activities of the group in question; law enforcement responses; ethnic and gender dimensions; the community and social context of the group's activities; the use of violence by the group; its level of professionalism based on information about its *modus operandi* and activities; the use of corruption to facilitate illegal activities; the ability to influence the political process; the group's transnational links, including with other organized crime groups; and finally the role of the group in the legitimate economy.

In addition to identifying and providing information on specific criminal groups, details in respect of a prominent criminal market (such as the trade in illegal narcotics, stolen motor vehicles or the trafficking in human beings) in each country was also requested, so as to provide greater insight into the overall nature of criminal activity. Again, admittedly, this method was not perfect but at least gave some more detailed information than a simple overview of organized criminal activity in the country, which could in any event be gathered by using secondary sources.

The final obstacle was to select who would be the respondents in each country. A particular problem in comparative research conducted at an international level is that governments are understandably sensitive to how they are portrayed in respect of domestic crime problems and their success in fighting them. In respect of organized crime then, government inputs and documentation should thus be supplemented with information from a variety of other sources. As Hobbs points out, "the intransigence [of some analytical accounts] that collude so closely with administrative analysis ignores narrative accounts at the considerable loss of detail, tone and depth" (Quoted in Rawlinson, 1999, p. 357). For this reason, the various surveys have been filled out by a variety of respondents, including academic research institutes, law enforcement and intelligence bodies and state research agencies, where it was felt (or where particular 'experts' were known to be located) the best results could be achieved. Respondents were also urged to draw on a number of sources.

The following institutions and agencies were involved in the research process: the Australian Institute of Criminology, the Canadian Anti-Organized Crime Division, Ernst & Young in the Netherlands Antilles; the Universidad Nacional of Bogota, the Institute of Criminology and Social Prevention of Prague, the Bundeskriminalamt of Wiesbaden, the Direzione Centrale della Polizia Criminale in Rome, the National Police Academy in Tokyo, the Research and Documentation Centre of the Ministry of Justice in The Hague, the Academy for International Co-operation of the Ministry of Interior in Moscow, the Institute of Security Studies in Cape Town, the National Criminal Intelligence Service in London, and the National Institute of Justice in Washington. UNICRI's partners in the assessment study were: University of Tirana (Albania), the European Humanities University (Belarus), the Varna Free University (Bulgaria), the Law Institute of the Ministry of Justice (Lithuania) and the National Academy of Sciences (Ukraine). Despite tight-deadlines and often difficult working conditions the respondents of these agencies and institutions were generally able to supply high quality and reliable data on organized criminal groups to the project.

### **2.3 Data reliability**

The collection of information on organized crime groups raises important questions about the reliability of that data. As already discussed above, a grow-

ing body of literature examines the difficulties of conducting research on organized crime groups and their activities. Without repeating some of the more general arguments made already, it is worth examining in more detail the process in which data on the forty criminal groups was collected, and some of the problems and challenges in this regard.

During the course of the survey, some effort was made to ascertain the opinion of the various respondents on their perceptions of both problems that they might have had in completing the questionnaire, as well as the degree of reliability that they attributed to their own answers. Thus, the analysis in this section is based largely on an assessment of these responses. On this basis, three important and inter-linked conclusions can be reached in respect of the quality of the data provided by the survey. First, the sample is skewed towards groups that present a more visible 'public face,' given that these groups are more easily identifiable and data collection is generally facilitated by a wider variety of sources. Second, and reinforcing the first point, those indicators which respondents considered to be reliable were more likely to be those on which information was publicly available. Third, given that the main aim of the survey was to develop a comparative perspective between criminal groups, important details about the context, including the social and cultural settings in which organized crime groups operate, have not received enough attention. Each of these issues is discussed in turn.

At the end of the survey questionnaire, respondents were requested to submit ideas as to how the process of data collection could be improved. Surprisingly, there was not any significant crossover between the responses given by the various correspondents. In only one case did a respondent believe that filling in the questionnaire (or completing the research to do so) posed some physical danger to himself. Issues of safety were not raised by any of the other correspondents. Nevertheless, while they were not highlighted, this factor is something that deserves some attention at the outset as it is illustrative of a wider problem in respect of the survey.

One reason that problems of safety were not encountered is that in most cases the information required was immediately available from 'official' sources such as the police, criminal justice authorities more generally, or the media. In the majority of cases, respondents relied on only a limited number of sources.<sup>9</sup> In cases where some difficulty would have been encountered, most notably in respect of financial data, these responses were simply not filled in or listed as 'unknown.' Even in the case of law enforcement agencies that completed the questionnaire, accurate financial data on criminal groups was difficult to come by. None of this is meant to criticize the correspondents, or suggest that they should have taken risks in completing the questionnaires, but simply to state the obvious point, that for the most part, and although there remain some clear exceptions, the groups on which data has been collected have at least some 'public face.' In other words, research is possible simply by reviewing secondary literature, scanning the media or conducting interviews with law enforce-

ment officials. That suggests that smaller and more loosely structured criminal arrangements which do not present a 'profile,' are less likely to be represented in the sample.

This is reinforced by an assessment by the respondents themselves of which answers in the survey questionnaire were regarded to be more reliable than others. Almost without exception, a high degree of confidence was expressed in answers such as the size, degree of violence and identity of organized crime groups, on which information is generally available. The same however does not apply to more specific details, however, such as the level of political influence of any groups or the degree to which it engaged in corruption. In particular, the majority of respondents, including law enforcement personnel, were not able to provide detailed financial data in respect of the groups involved, and when estimates were made, they were not viewed with a high degree of confidence. In sum, and perhaps rather obviously, information available from open sources, were regarded to have a high degree of validity, while more detailed information as to the actual operations of criminal groups, such as their financial data or the level to which they have corrupted public figures, was considered to be less reliable, even if sourced from law enforcement agencies.

In the case of some variables, such as that reflecting the level of violence that a criminal groups was involved in, there appeared to be a disjuncture between the general opinions of respondents as to the degree of violence, and specific data required to prove this. Thus, while in many cases respondents answered that the level of violence perpetrated by any criminal groups was high, no detailed figures such as the number of people who have been killed or injured could be provided. This is not to doubt the assertion made by the respondents, but simply to suggest that while an intuitive supposition or a review of open source material may suggest a high degree of violence associated with any criminal group, it is extremely difficult to provide concrete evidence that this is in fact the case. The same problem is applicable also to determining the level of corruption that any criminal group has been involved in. While respondents often stated that they assumed corruption took place, they found little evidence (such as prosecutions of corrupt officials) to prove it.

One area where there was some consensus amongst the respondents was that important issues of context were not easily captured in the questionnaire and attached analytical overview of each criminal group. Thus, respondents suggested that the questionnaire format did not take into account a variety of factors in respect of which organized crime groups operated, most notable being the social and cultural context in which groups had developed and carried out their operations. The implication was that by attempting to draw out information that could be comparable across societies, the survey isolated organized criminal groups from the context in which they operated, in effect, considering them in a vacuum. While it was suggested by at least one respondent that this problem could be remedied by introducing a narrative paragraph

on organized crime and its environment, this on its own is probably not sufficient to remedy the problem.

Analyzing organized crime groups outside of their cultural and social context runs the danger of attributing broadly similar causes for their development in any society, and while these may be accurate, ignores important local causal and contextual issues. Thus, while organized crime groups in the United States, Western Europe, the former Soviet Union and South Africa, may be broadly comparable, important features (such as the particular consequences of the break-up of the Soviet Union or the long term results of apartheid policies in shaping particular types of organized crime), are not taken into account. Perhaps then an important feature of any broader attempt to collect information on criminal groups and their development should be done at a regional level, allowing a comparison between criminal groups that have all arisen within a similar social context. Such an approach may be critical in respect of a broader monitoring exercise on the nature and extent of criminal groups.

These factors together suggest that that the data gathered by the survey, while useful, is also characterized by important drawbacks. Given the nature of organized crime, however, these are relatively difficult to resolve. Nevertheless they should be recognized when the data on organized crime groups is presented below. Most importantly, the groups represented in the survey have a higher level of public visibility than other groups, which are probably under-represented. In particular, the latter may apply to groups that have no public profile, are smaller and more networked in their organizational structure. In fact, such criminal enterprises may not even be considered by law enforcement agencies or the media in some societies as criminal groups in the classic sense, despite the fact that they meet the definition of organized criminal groups as given in the TOC Convention.

It should be noted by way of conclusion to this section, that a review of all the questionnaire responses suggests that the most comprehensive answers came from those who had consulted a variety of sources, often comparing and contrasting the information received. In most cases, academic analysts who had both collected secondary material and conducted interviews with officials working within the criminal justice system completed these particular questionnaires. Such multiple use of sources, particularly secondary literature, was often not the case in questionnaires completed by law enforcement officials who generally relied only on internal information, which often lacked a broader contextual background.

#### **2.4 Cross-country comparisons of organized crime groups**

The various questionnaire responses give a rich insight into the characteristics of organized crime groups in a number of societies. Each response is interesting in its own right, but the real value of the information for the purposes of

this pilot study, and despite the drawbacks outlined above, is the ability to make comparisons across countries and groups.

An initial analysis of the data suggests that some distinction must be made among the various groups analyzed. The majority of the groups that were profiled constitute single criminal entities. These are in effect relatively self-contained groups, with a clearly identifiable number of members.<sup>10</sup> Thus, for example, a small group engaged in the trade in illegal narcotics from Turkey to the Netherlands, whose members have multiple nationalities and who coordinate their activities with other criminal groups. A small number of responses do not represent individual groups, but rather categories, or perhaps more accurately clusters (as outlined in Section 1), of organized crime groups. These include responses covering, for example, the Russian Mafia in the United States or Nigerian criminal groups in South Africa. In both cases it would be inaccurate to describe these as homogenous criminal groups. They are instead made up of a large number of smaller and often overlapping groups that generally operate independently of each other. Given that these are not the same phenomena, the one being a cluster of criminal groups, the other the group itself (potentially the building block of a criminal cluster), the two categories have been separated from each other. For this particular analysis, only the information on criminal groups has been used.

Data on each of the 40 criminal groups were typed into a database and a matrix containing the most important information on the groups was constructed. This is illustrated below. The matrix represents both what are regarded as the most critical variables as well as those for which the data were assessed to be more reliable. The level of detail contained in the database has been simplified in order to accommodate all the variables concerned and allow an effective process of cross-country comparison. Such a process inevitably raises problems of classification, and although the various categories have been applied with as much care as possible (see Section 3), it is possible that some readers may debate the category that is assigned in any particular case. Any resulting changes would be unlikely to change the overall conclusions that have been drawn from the matrix.

Ten variables have been included in the data. A short explanation of each is provided below. More detail on the categories is provided in the attached 'Key to the Matrix of Organized Crime Groups,' which follows at the end of this section.

1. **Structure:** An assessment was made of the variety of structures that were present across all of the groups analyzed. Key to the system of categorization or rating is the degree of hierarchy present in each group. Thus, the rating system provides a spectrum of alternatives from strictly hierarchical to looser network type arrangements. The various structural forms of the organized crime groups in the survey are important in that they form the basis for the five typologies of criminal organizations presented in Section 4.
2. **Size:** An estimate of the number of individuals involved in the various groups was requested from each of the respondents. In most cases the numbers pro-



vided were explicitly stated to be only an approximation. Respondents also generally estimated both the core memberships of the groups in question, as well as the wider number of associate or other members indirectly connected to the group.

3. **Activities:** Respondents were asked to provide as comprehensive a list of the criminal activities of the group under examination as possible. In some cases this was clearly a single primary activity around which occurred a cluster of sub-activities that are supportive of the primary activity. In some cases there were only a limited number of activities (two or three), while in others there were multiple activities. These distinctions are reflected in the categorization.
4. **Transborder operations:** Simply assessing the number of countries in which the group in question was estimated to be active created a measure of the level of transborder operations. Because of a lack of information in some cases, no determination could be made. Nevertheless, an attempt has been made to categorize the criminal groups wherever possible according to limited, moderate or extensive transnational activity.
5. **Identity:** The identify classification reflects not only those groups regarded by the respondents as having a strong ethnic base, but also those whose members are drawn from similar social backgrounds. The latter may cross ethnic identities. We believe that sharing a similar social background allows for an important distinction to be made among groups that are clearly based on ethnic ties and allegiances. Thus, while motorcycle gangs may have as members individuals drawn from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, they are predominantly made up of white, working class males. This classification allows us to identify criminal groups that clearly have no strong social or ethnic identity.
6. **Violence:** Respondents were asked to make both a subjective judgment of the level of violence used by the criminal groups, as well as providing some harder evidence of its extent (for example, numbers of business people or police officers killed). From these two measures an assessment was made of the groups use of violence. Importantly, this included both externally and internally focussed violence. Ratings have thus been based on the use of little or no violence, the occasional use of violence, and cases where violence is essential to the primary activity of the group in question. The distinction here is of course a subjective one, made by examining the data for each group, and where violence was regarded as being essential to the primary profit accumulating activities of the criminal group.
7. **Corruption:** As with the assessment of violence, that for corruption relied on both a subjective judgment of its extent, as well as on the presentation of actual cases where individuals had been prosecuted for the offence. Detailed data were not always available with respect to the latter indicator; thus the categorization relies heavily on the subjective judgment of respondents. As in the case of violence, the three categories are little or no corruption used by the group, corruption used occasionally, and corruption seen as essential to the primary profit making activities of the group.
8. **Political influence:** An accurate assessment of the degree to which any criminal group has exercised political influence is virtually impossible. As with other subjective categories, the classification relies upon the judgments of the respondents. Within this constraint, it is possible to gauge at what level of political jurisdiction the influence has been exercised. The jurisdictions include local or regional/state/provincial levels, national levels, or in countries other than the one in which the respondent is based.
9. **Penetration into the legitimate economy:** Respondents were asked to estimate the level of penetration into the legitimate economy by criminal groups, and to

provide evidence for their estimate. In most cases such evidence was difficult to acquire, and thus actual figures are nearly nonexistent. Nevertheless, drawing largely on law enforcement sources, most respondents provided as comprehensive an assessment as possible. A review of these suggested a classification based on three broad categories: no or limited penetration into the legitimate economy; some investment of profits into legitimate activities; and finally, extensive crossover between legitimate and illegitimate activities. The latter was based upon information about companies and business sectors where such investment and crossover occurred.

10. Cooperation with other organized crime groups: As with many of the categories above, the level of cooperation with other organized crime groups (and which ones) is often difficult to establish. Nevertheless, drawing largely on law enforcement sources, most respondents provided some indications as to the level of cooperation in this regard. The categories distinguish among no cooperation at all; cooperation in the base country (that is, the country where the respondent completed the assessment); cooperation with groups in countries outside of that country; and finally cooperation in both the base country and abroad.

It is clear from the overview of the categorization that the system is not a foolproof mechanism for drawing comparisons among criminal groups. Nevertheless, the survey variables permit the beginning of an effort to draw international comparisons across criminal groups. Again it is worth emphasizing that on their own, the data collected on each group are useful, but the value added by comparing across groups and societies is even more so. The number of groups (40) is not large enough to draw conclusions in all areas, and there are various methodological problems as indicated. Despite these limitations, the study nevertheless sheds light on how an overall international system of information collection and analysis should be constructed. A detailed key to the various categories and classifications is on the following page.

### **3. PROFILE OF THE ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS SURVEYED**

#### **3.1 Profile of the groups**

This section of the report provides a broad description of the data collected on each of the 40 organized crime groups. It is worth emphasizing again that the data presented here (a series of classifications within 10 categories) simply provide an overview of the assessment of each organized crime group. A more detailed look at each of the groups is in the Appendix. Using the definitions in the Key, this overview describes the 40 groups according to structure, size, use of violence, scope of activities, level of transborder operations, corruption, level of political influence, extent of activity in the legitimate economy, and, the degree of cooperation with other organized crime groups.

One point is worth reiterating. *The 40 criminal groups on which data are presented here do not constitute a representative sample.* Nevertheless, they facilitate drawing some broader conclusions (however tentative) about the nature, the general structural typology of, and the development of organized crime.

## KEY TO THE MATRIX OF ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS

### STRUCTURE

**A - Rigid hierarchy:** Single boss. Organization or division into several cells reporting to the centre. Strong internal systems of discipline.

**B - Devolved hierarchy:** Hierarchical structure and line of command. However regional structures, with their own leadership hierarchy, have a degree of autonomy over day to day functioning.

**C - Hierarchical conglomerate:** An association of organized crime groups with a single governing body. The latter can range from an organized umbrella type body to more flexible and loose oversight arrangements.

**D - Core criminal group:** Ranging from relatively loose to cohesive group of core individuals who generally regard themselves as working for the same organization. Horizontal rather than vertical structure.

**E - Organized criminal network:** Defined by the activities of key individuals who engage in illicit activity together in often shifting alliances. They do not necessary regard themselves as an organized criminal entity. Individuals are active in the network through the skills and capital that they may bring.

**SIZE** *This includes not only the group's core membership, but all associated and related individuals.*

**A** - From 1 to 20 members    **B** - From 20 to 50 members    **C** - From 50 to 100 members    **D** - More than 100

**ACTIVITIES** *An \* has been added when drug trafficking is the primary activity of the group.*

**A** - One primary activity, other illegal activities supportive of this

**B** - Two to three major activities

**C** - Multiple activities

### LEVEL OF TRANSBORDER OPERATIONS

**A** - limited (1 to 2 countries)    **B** - medium (3 to 4 countries)    **C** - extensive (five and more)

### IDENTITY

**A** - Organization with no strong social or ethnic identity

**B** - Social-based organization with members drawn from the same social background or with common social interests

**C** - Ethnic-based or family-based organization with members strictly from the same ethnic group / region / country.

**LEVEL OF VIOLENCE** *Both internally and externally focussed.*

**A** - Little or no use of violence

**B** - Occasional use of violence

**C** - Violence is essential to the criminal activities (accumulation of profit) of the organization.

### USE OF CORRUPTION

**A** - Little or no use of corruption

**B** - Occasional use of corruption

**C** - Corruption is essential to the primary activity (accumulation of profit) of the organization.

### POLITICAL INFLUENCE

Data in this category is not always reliable. If corruption is suspected, although there is no evidence that it has occurred, category B-D has been denoted.

**A** - None    **B** - At a local / regional level    **C** - At a national level in the country of intervention    **D** - Abroad

### PENETRATION INTO THE LEGITIMATE ECONOMY

**A** - None or limited

**B** - Some investment of profits of crime in legitimate activities.

**C** - Extensive crossover between legitimate and illegitimate activities of the group.

### LEVEL OF COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZED CRIMINAL GROUPS

**A** - None

**B** - Cooperation in the base-country

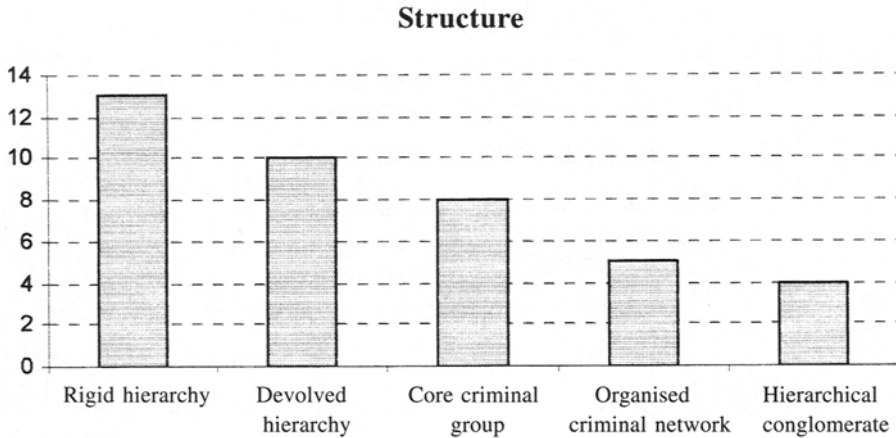
**C** - External cooperation abroad

**D** - Cooperation in the base-country and abroad

### 3.1.1 Structure

The questionnaire asked respondents to describe the structure of the criminal group on which they had collected data. Just under one third of the groups have a rigid hierarchical structure. A further ten are described as having a devolved hierarchical structure. Four groups are conglomerates of a number of hierarchical groups. The remainder (again, about a third) are more loosely organized—consisting of either a core criminal group of individuals or a criminal network. Thus, the majority of the groups (two thirds) have some form of hierarchy to their structure.

The remainder (one third) are more loosely structured, ranging from small groups of core individuals around which criminal activities are organized, to just a group of individuals who operate in a rather amorphous criminal network.



While the majority of groups in the survey have a hierarchical structure, one should be cautious in generalizing from this finding. This is because it is likely that more unstructured groups are underrepresented, both because hierarchical groups are more likely to be officially defined as organized crime, and are seen to be causing greater harm.

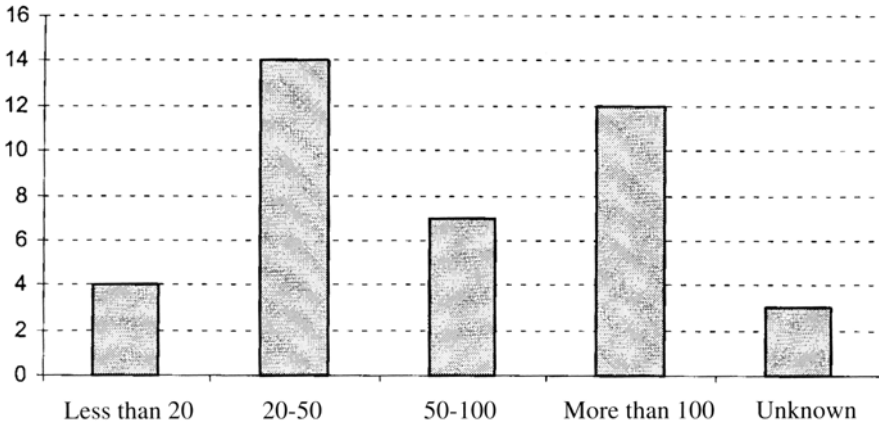
### 3.1.2 Size

The secrecy of membership and the difficulty of distinguishing between core and “other” members limit estimates on the size of organized criminal groups. Size is, however, an important variable in determining the scope of criminal activities of a criminal organization, and the amount of harm it can cause. The estimates of size used in the survey were based on a count of not only the core membership of any group, but also on the estimated number of associated or related members. This may account for the fact that in most cases the groups listed are relatively large. In only four cases was the group less than 20. In 14

Matrix of Organized Crime Groups

Name	Structure	Size	Activity	Trans-border Activity	Identity	Violence	Corruption	Political influence	Penetration in legitimate economy	Cooperation with other OCG
Italian group - Germany	C	B	B	B	A	B	C	A	C	D
Group with no name - Germany	E	C	C*	A	A	B	A	A	A	A
Group with no name - Germany	D	B	B*	A	C	A	A	A	A	A
Group with no name - Germany	B	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Verhagen Group - Netherlands	E	B	A*	C	A	B	B	A	A	?
Group with no name - Netherlands	E	B	A	C	C	A	B	A	A	B
Group with no name - Netherlands	D	B	A	B	A	C	A	A	A	A
Group with no name - Netherlands	D	C	B	C	A	A	B	A	B	D
Group with no name - Netherlands	A	C	A*	B	B	B	C	A	C	C
Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs - Australia	D	D	B*	B	B	B	B	A	C	C
The Mc Lean Syndicate - Australia	D	B	A*	C	B	B	A	A	B	D
Japanese Yakuza - Australia	B	B	A	A	C	B	A	D	C	C
The Orange Case - Caribbean	E	A	A*	C	B	A	A	A	B	C
The Dream House Case - Caribbean	D	C	A*	B	A	C	C	A	B	C
The Meji Case - Caribbean	E	?	A	A	A	B	C	C/D	C	A
Fuk Ching Gang - United States	B	C	C	B	C	C	B	D	B	C
La Cosa Nostra - United States	B	D	C	C	C	C	B	C/D	B	?
Clan Paviglianiti - Italy	B	D	C*	C	C	C	B	B	C	C
Sizranskaya Groopovka - Russia	A	A	A*	B	C	B	B	A	B	?
Group with no name - Russia	A	B	A*	A	C	B	A	A	A	A
Ziberman Group - Russia	C	C	A	B	A	C	B	B	C	?
Group with no name - Russia	A	A	B*	C	A	C	A	A	C	C
VIS-2 - Bulgaria	A	?	C	C	A	C	C	B	C	C
Cock Group - Lithuania	A	B	C*	B	B	C	C	B	C	C
Savlokhov group - Ukraine	A	B	B	B	C	C	C	B	C	C
Juvenal group - Colombia	D	D	A*	C	A	A	C	B	B	C
Hells Angels - Canada	B	D	C*	C	B	C	A	B	B	C
The 288 Prison Gang - South Africa	C	C	C*	A	B	C	C	A	C	D
La Cosa Nostra - Italy	B	D	C	C	C	C	C	C/D	C	D
Licciardi Clan - Italy	B	C	C*	C	C	C	C	C	B	A
Group with no name - Italy	?	?	C*	C	A	C	C	A	A	D
Yamaguchi-Gumi - Japan	B	D	C*	B	B	C	A	C	B	C
The Liu Yong syndicate - China	A	B	B	A	B	C	C	B	B	A
The Zhang Wei syndicate - China	A	D	B	A	B	C	C	B	C	A
The Liang Xiao Min syndicate - China	A	B	B	A	B	C	C	B	C	A
Family organization with no name - Mexico	D	A	A	A	C	A	A	A	A	A
Amercia Contreras Organization - Mexico	D	D	C	C	C	A	B	B	B	D
Mocha Orejas Organization - Mexico	A	B	A	A	A	A	B	B	A	A
Carillo Fuentes Organization - Mexico	A	D	A*	C	A	B	B	B/C/D	C	D
Arellano-Felix Group - Mexico	C	D	A*	C	A	C	C	B/C	C	D

Size—includes core membership, plus associated members

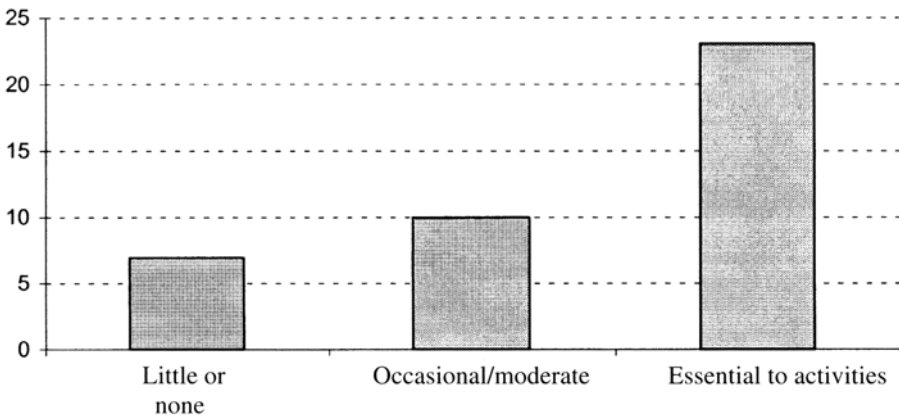


cases the numbers of active individuals in each of the groups concerned was estimated at between 20 and 50. Just fewer than half the groups had more than fifty individuals. In three instances, there was not enough information to make a reasonable estimate of the number of individuals active in the group.

**3.1.3 Violence**

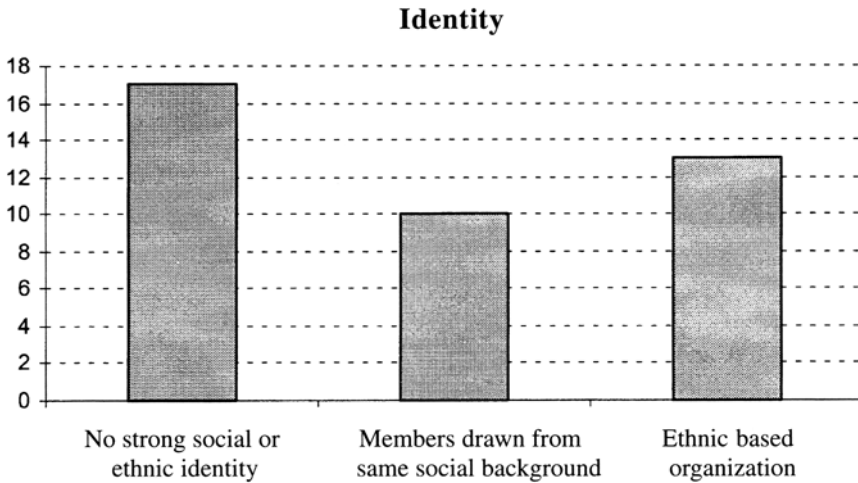
Violence is a key defining feature of the majority of organized crime groups represented in the sample. In the largest number of cases (23) violence was classified as being essential to the criminal groups’ activities. In an additional 10 cases, the respondents indicated that violence was used only occasionally or moderately. In only seven cases were the criminal groups classified as using little or no violence. Thus, while structures and forms of operation may vary markedly, the use of violence (or at least the threat thereof) is an important defining feature of these criminal groups.

Use of Violence



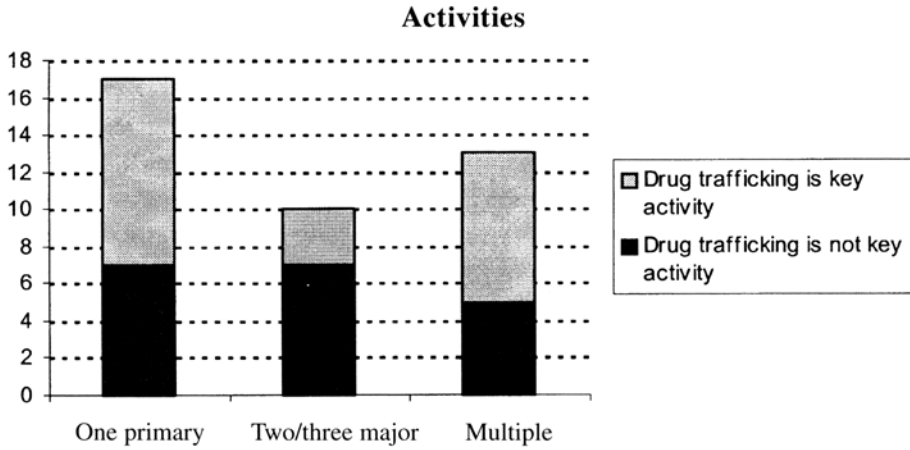
### 3.1.4 Ethnic or social identity

One of the potentially most interesting conclusions to be drawn from the data is the degree to which the organized crime groups in the sample have no strong social or ethnic identities. Such identity characterized less than half of all the groups examined. In those instances where there was ethnic or social identification, members are drawn from either the same ethnic group (13 cases) or from the same social background (10 cases). Admittedly, as outlined above, the distinctions among these various categories are by no means always clear. Despite this limitation, these data suggest at least a possible challenge to the ethnic theories of organized crime.



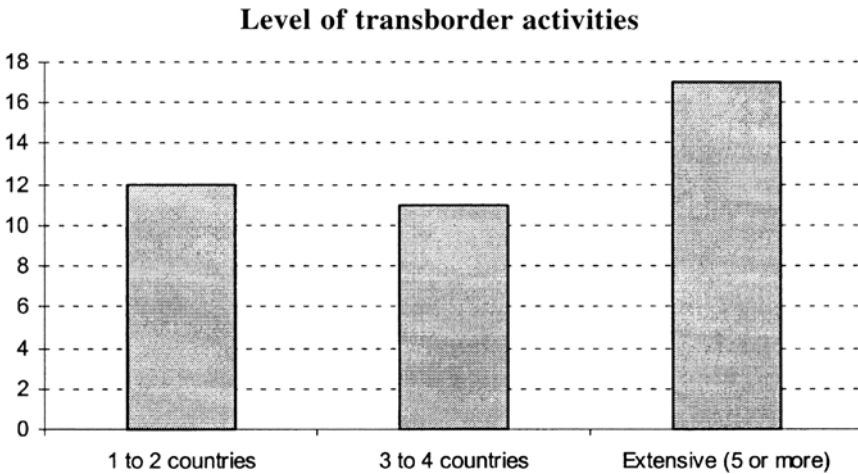
### 3.1.5 Activities

The assumption is often made that single criminal groups engage in a wide variety of activities, each of them reinforcing the other. Some attempt was thus made in the survey instrument to document in some detail the overall set of activities of each criminal group. What is most interesting from the results, is that the largest number of groups engaged in only *one* primary criminal activity (such as the smuggling of people or illegal narcotics). Although there may have been some sub-activities (for example, forgery) essential to the overall purpose, these were not carried out in the pursuit of profit, but instead were aimed at making the primary activity of the group possible. In a number of cases (10), two to three primary activities were listed, and in another 13 (just under one third of the sample), the groups profiled engaged in multiple criminal activities. It should be noted that, as illustrated in the figure below, a significant proportion of the organized criminal groups have drug trafficking as their main or core activity, irrespective of the activity category into which they fall.



**3.1.6 Transborder operations**

While the majority of groups engaged in only one primary activity, this does not indicate that their activities were geographically confined. In the largest number of cases (just under half of the total number), criminal groups spread their activities across five or more states. Eleven groups engaged in activities across three to four states, while just under one third of the total number confined their activities to only one or two countries. These findings confirm that we are truly looking at a transnational crime phenomenon.

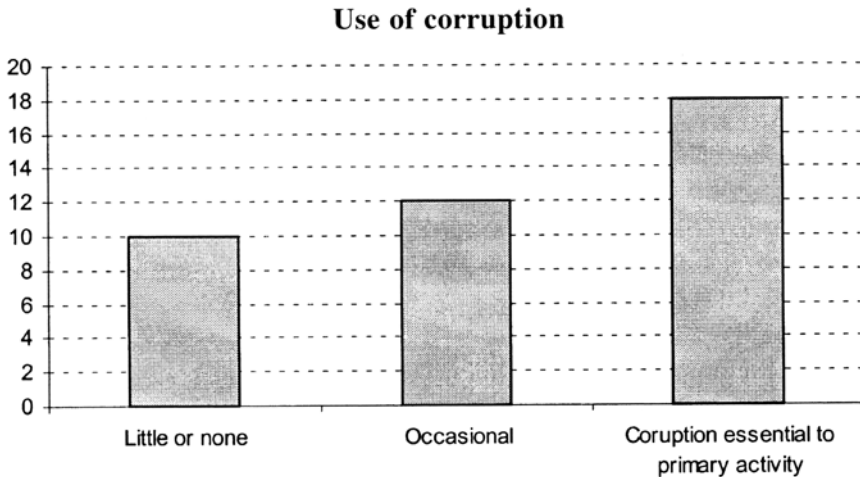


**3.1.7 Corruption**

Given the importance of corruption as a tool for organized criminal groups, the survey also attempted to provide some measure as to the degree to which

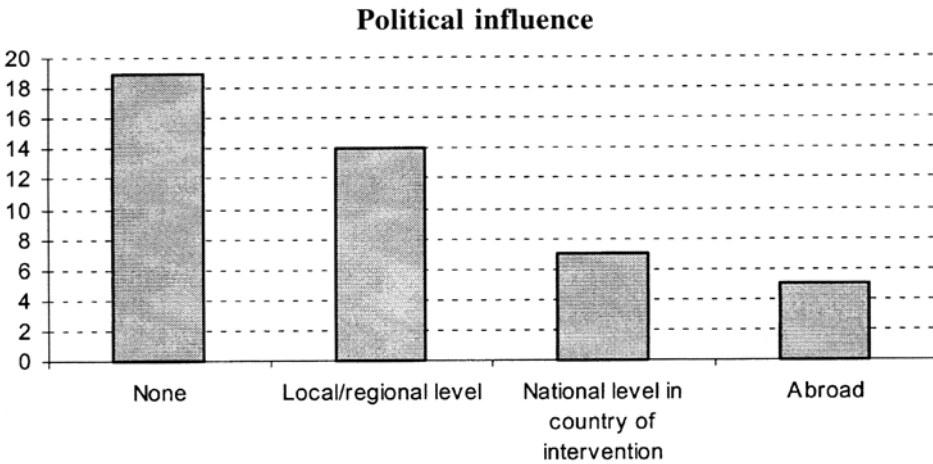


corruption was important to the operation of each group. Again, the measure was largely based on a subjective assessment of the use of corruption, although in some cases numbers of actual corruption cases were recorded. In just under half of the groups (18 cases), corruption was essential to the primary activity of the criminal group. In one third of the groups (12 cases), occasional use was made of corruption. In the remaining instances (10 cases), there was little or no evidence of corruption. Perhaps most significant is the degree to which in the overall majority of cases, corruption is a key element for the undertaking of organized crime activities, and that three quarters of the groups use corruption occasionally or regularly. This result underlines the necessity for states to establish strategies to combat corruption in concert with the fight against organized crime. The two are intrinsically linked.



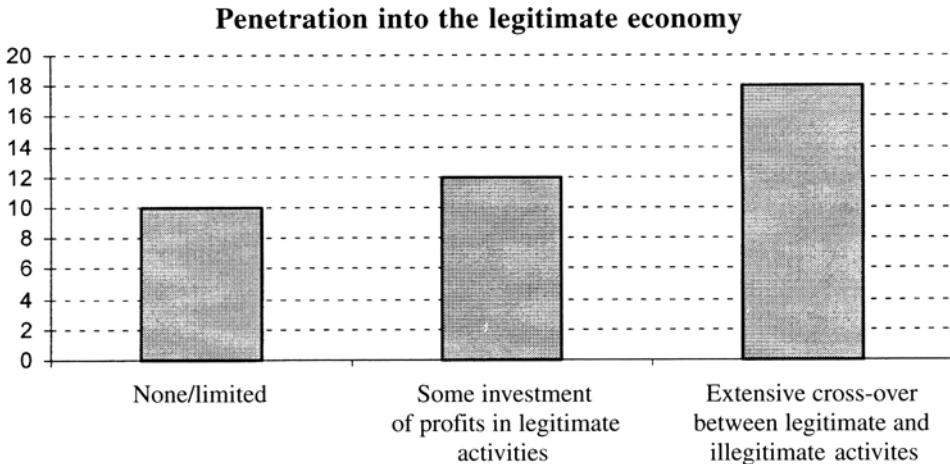
### 3.1.8 Political influence

Closely tied to the issue of corruption and penetration into the legitimate economy, is the degree of political influence possessed by criminal groups. In just under half of the surveyed groups, respondents reported no evidence of any political influence. Another one third of the groups were said to have political influence at the local or regional level (14 cases). In seven cases, organized crime groups were reported to have some influence at the national level, and in five cases to have some influence in a country or countries outside of the one where the respondent recorded their activities. In only five cases did a respondent regard political influence to cross more than one political jurisdiction, for example, occurring at local, regional and national levels (1 case), at a national level and abroad (3 cases), or at all three levels of government (1 case).



### 3.1.9 Cross-over between licit and illicit activities

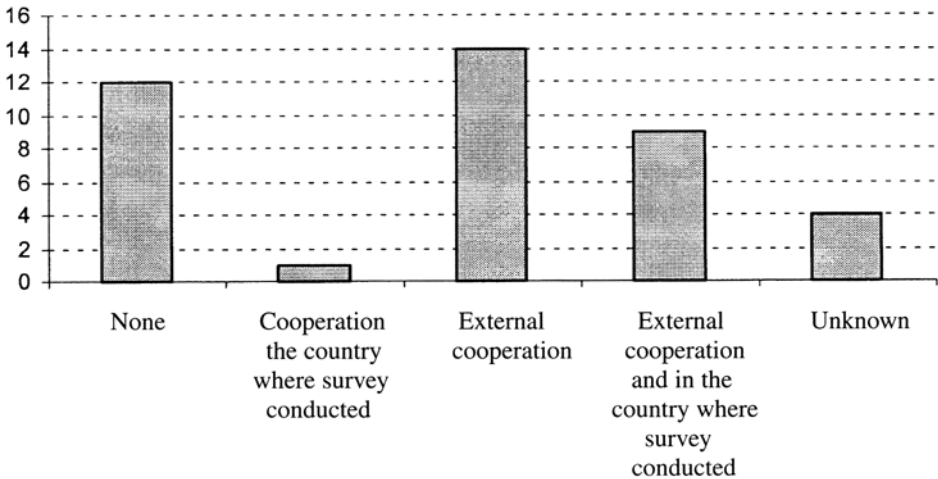
An attempt was made to determine the extent to which the criminal groups surveyed had managed to penetrate the legitimate economy of the country or countries where they were based. The evidence from the groups unsurprisingly suggests a blurring between the involvement of the groups (or individuals associated with them) in both illegitimate and legitimate activities. In the largest number of cases (18) it was reported that there was extensive crossover between legitimate and illegitimate activities. In an additional 12 countries, there was evidence of the investment of profits from illegitimate activities into some form of legitimate business activity. In the smallest number of cases (10), there was no or very little evidence, that profits obtained from illicit activities were channeled to legitimate investments, nor that there was an extensive crossover between legitimate and illegitimate activities.



### 3.1.10 Cooperation with other organized crime groups

Finally, an attempt was made to assess the degree to which the criminal groups in question cooperated with other organized crime groups. In the largest number of cases (14), respondents believed there to be some level of cooperation with transnational organized crime groups outside of the country where they conducted their activities. In most cases, such cooperation was based on the requirement to obtain illicit commodities (in most cases illegal narcotics) to smuggle into the domestic market where they were active. In only a single case was cooperation confined to the country where the survey of the criminal group was conducted. In nine cases both external and internal cooperation was recorded. In a surprisingly high number of cases (12), there was no evidence of cooperation with other criminal groups. It was not possible to establish a reliable response in four cases.

#### Level of cooperation with other organized criminal groups



### 3.2 Summary of key characteristics

The most common characteristics of organized crime groups assessed by the survey are as follows:

- Two thirds of the groups have a classic hierarchical type of structure, while one third are more loosely organized.
- The majority of the groups are of moderate size, with between 20-50 participants.
- Violence is essential to the undertaking of their activities for the majority of the groups.
- Less than half of the groups do not have a strong social or ethnic identity, while ethnic-based organizations represent less than a third of the organized crime groups.
- The largest number of groups engaged in only one primary criminal activity.
- In the majority of cases groups are engaged in criminal activities in multiple countries.

- The vast majority of the groups make use of corruption, either extensively or occasionally.
- Just under half of the groups are said to have no political influence, while one third of the groups have influence at the local/regional level.
- Less than half of the groups have extensively penetrated the legitimate economy.
- The largest number of groups cooperate with other organized criminal groups, largely as a source of illicit commodities.

These conclusions give a broad overview of the main characteristics of the 40 organized criminal groups under study. Now to begin to frame some typologies, it is necessary to relate the variables to each other to see whether there appear to be any correlations. The following section presents the results with a few selected variables.

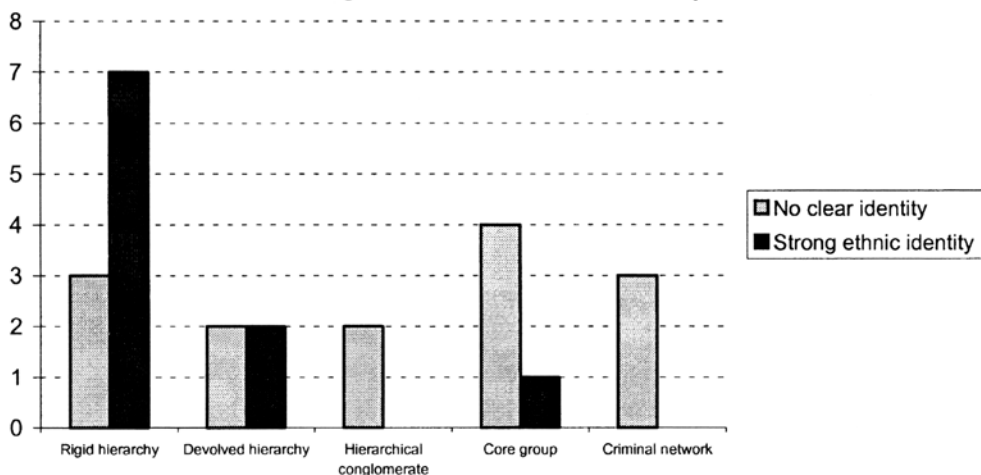
### 3.3 Correlating selected variables

The data outlined above provide only a one-dimensional view of the organized crime groups that were selected for study. Combining characteristics will allow us to address such questions as: Are groups that have a high propensity for violence more likely to be structured in one way rather than another? Do strong social or ethnic ties determine the structure or the levels of criminal activity? In order to test these and other propositions, each of the variables outlined in the description of the criminal groups was cross-referenced against every other variable. From this, we see that three variables – structure, violence and identity – appear to be highly related to a range of other variables.

For example, structure appears to be related to size. The larger the number of individuals involved, the more likely the groups are to have a more strict system of hierarchical organization. With very large numbers, the devolved hierarchy seems to be the prevalent form. This form has regional structures, with a degree of autonomy, operating under a centralized system of control. Presumably, the higher the numbers of people involved, the greater the level of hierarchical control and violence that are required to ensure internal control.

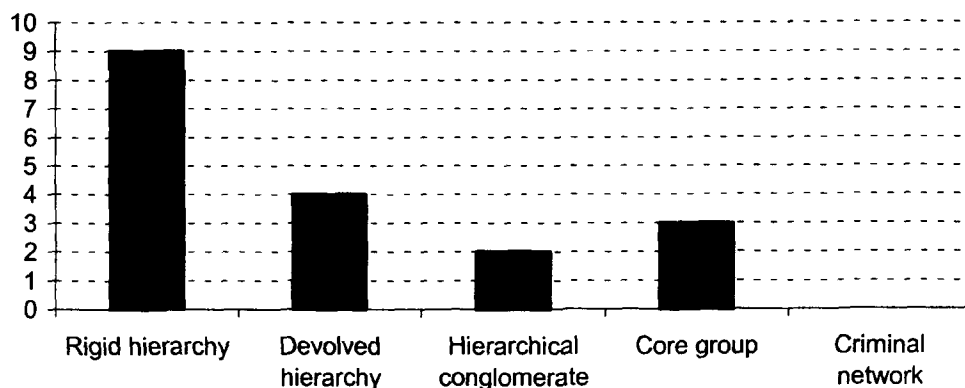
When structure is related to identity, the data suggest that the more loosely organized a criminal group, the more likely it is to have no fixed identity. Thus the structural categories of ‘core group’ and ‘criminal network’ have no strict rules concerning the recruitment of members. For criminal groups structured in the latter way, identity may be less important than function or skill. Conversely, the more hierarchical the group, the more likely they are to have a strong ethnic or social basis for their organization. A summary of the individual overviews of each of the 40 groups (attached as an Appendix) is also illustrative of this. Groups that are described as having hierarchical structures are more likely to have strong ethnic or social identities. The converse generally applies to groups that have looser forms of organization, such as criminal networks. This is illustrated in the figure below, showing that groups with strong ethnic identities (darker bars) are, with one exception, of the ‘rigid hierarchy’ and ‘devolved hierarchy’ forms.

**Number of groups in each structural type with either strong ethnic or no clear identity**



The level of violence used by the group is associated with a number of characteristics. For example, greater propensity for violence is associated with more hierarchical structure. Twenty groups out of the 27 with a hierarchical type of structure use violence as an essential tool in undertaking their activities. In contrast, none of the five more loosely structured criminal networks were reported as having violence as a key element in their activity. This may be explained by the possibility that more formally structured criminal groups maintain continuous involvement in certain criminal markets and thus employ violence to maintain a degree of control of those markets. Higher levels of violence are also associated with criminal organizations that have strong social or ethnic identities. The most violent groups therefore are generally those that have a hierarchical structure, and a strong social or ethnic identity. This is shown in the figure below.

**Number of groups in each structural type where violence is regarded as essential to their activities**



Where trafficking in illegal narcotics is regarded as either the primary activity of a group, or an important core activity, the level of violence is also generally much higher. This could be due to the particular nature of some drug markets – open air, large sums of cash changing hands among buyers/dealers of questionable character, a tendency to be heavily armed, etc. Perhaps associated with this also is the further finding that the more transnational activities, the greater the violence.

Turning briefly to corruption, the data indicate that it seems to be related to penetration into the legal economy, and to the exercise of political influence. This makes sense in that corruption would logically be a tool for gaining economic and political influence.

Apart from these factors there are no other strong associations among the remainder of the variables. Three key variables – structure, violence and identity – appear to be important determinants in defining typologies of organized criminal groups. Of these, the degree of formal hierarchical structure seems to be of most importance. More structured criminal organizations tend to make greater use of violence, have a stronger ethnic or social base, have a greater propensity for corruption, have more cross-over between legal and illegal activities, and are more likely to engage in transborder activities.

While this analysis is useful in attempting to identify particular characteristics of organized criminal groups, it also runs the risk of reducing a range of complex phenomena to simply being a function of the way in which a criminal group is organized. Other potentially important factors, such as the social or cultural context—which may have important impact upon for example the degree of violence used by a group—can easily be ignored in such an analysis. This drawback has already been explored in the discussion of data reliability. It bears repeating that caution is required when undertaking a comparative study of the nature of organized criminal groups. Nevertheless, the data as presented here do suggest a remarkable degree of coalescence between a range of factors, and the degree to which criminal groups are hierarchically organized.

In contrast to hierarchically organized criminal groups, more loosely organized groups are smaller in size, have no particular social or ethnic identity, do not have violence as a necessary element in undertaking their activities, and are mainly engaged in only one or two transborder activities. Such networks have, as a consequence, often been regarded as ‘disorganized crime,’ and are seldom seen as posing the same threat as traditional hierarchical groups. But in fact, the opposite may be the case. “One of the most significant points about [criminal] networks”, a recent study has noted, “is that they are not immediately and obviously visible. Criminal networks can hide behind various licit activities, can operate with a lower degree of formality than other types of organization, and can maintain a profile that does not bring them to the attention of law enforcement” (Williams, 2001[a], p.71). Networks should thus be regarded as sophisticated organizational forms with great flexibility and adapt-

ability. Their loose structure makes it more difficult for law enforcement to combat due to the difficulty of identifying all the players involved and of effectively decapitating the structure, which often simply reconstitutes itself when key individuals are removed.

Such different organization forms, and their varying characteristics, point to the need to attempt to establish a limited number of typologies that capture the variety of organized crime groups. The step of cross-referencing different variables serves as an important part of that process. This issue is considered in greater detail in the following section.

## 4. TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS

### 4.1 Why develop typologies?

The overview of the data on each of the 40 organized criminal groups provides some insight into the wide variety of organizations present across the 16 countries. At the same time, it is possible to identify a number of important similarities across the groups and in so doing outline five broad typologies of criminal groupings. It should be repeated that, given the relatively small sample of groups in the survey, these initial typologies could be supplemented by others as research continues. There are at least three useful purposes for developing typologies from the data:

- Typologies are important in providing greater detail as to what is meant by the concept of 'transnational organized crime.' It is clear from the overview of the groups outlined above the wide variety of structures, activities and harmful impacts that are encompassed in the concept. The identification of different types provides even more detail in this respect, giving a clearer picture of what is entailed by the phenomenon of transnational organized crime.
- The identification of a series of typologies has important policy implications for law enforcement agencies. Different strategies of law enforcement must be used in confronting different types of organized crime groups. The identification of typologies provides a useful means to order the debate in this regard. In particular, the identification of typologies may provide a useful training tool for law enforcement personnel.
- Critical in respect to this project, typologies provide an important mechanism to sort and monitor transnational organized crime trends, by identifying which types are most common in which particular social contexts. *Important in this regard is the fact that typologies also provide a useful framework in which information on trends can be collected and sorted, and where necessary new types or categories within each typology can be developed.*

Empirically derived typologies also have the value of countering the simplistic public image of organized criminal groups as simply being "mafias." Law enforcement authorities have long underestimated the harm caused by smaller groups whose capacity to adapt to new markets and profits is considerable and whose detection is difficult because of their low profile and their

loose structure. It is also important to inform the public more generally about the wide variety of forms that organized crime takes. Experience has shown elsewhere that awareness raising among the public about the dangers of organized crime (and how to identify its manifestations) can be an important weapon to fight it.

Whatever the advantages of developing a set of typologies, it must be conceded that those presented here can and should be reworked and perhaps replaced with others. Our goal is to further inform the debate about how data on transnational criminal groups can be collected and ordered. In so doing, more sophisticated instruments to monitor the impact of the TOC Convention on the development and functioning of transnational organized crime groups can be developed.

Reviewing and identifying similarities from all the data that had been collected around the various groups identified the five typologies outlined below. It must be noted that the structure of various groups remains the core element around which the typologies were developed. While attempts were made to develop typologies separately from how the groups were organized structurally, these did not generally provide a useful method of delineation.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the issue of the structure of the groups is critical to determining a series of typologies. While this does not provide an immediate answer to what activities groups engage in, it does provide a relatively useful guide of *how* these activities are pursued.

The five typologies identified and a short introductory explanation of each are as follows:

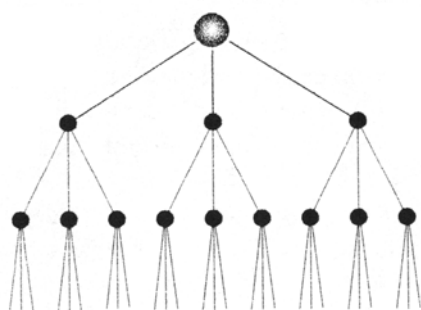
- ‘Standard hierarchy’: Single hierarchical group with strong internal systems of discipline.
- ‘Regional hierarchy’: Hierarchically structured groups, with strong internal lines of control and discipline, but with relative autonomy for regional components.
- ‘Clustered hierarchy’: A set of criminal groups which have established a system of coordination/control, ranging from weak to strong, over all their various activities.
- ‘Core group’: A relatively tightly organized but unstructured group, surrounded in some cases by a network of individuals engaged in criminal activities.
- ‘Criminal network’: A loose and fluid network of persons, often drawing on individuals with particular skills, who constitute themselves around an ongoing series of criminal projects.

Each of these typologies is considered in greater detail below.

#### **4.2 Typology 1: ‘Standard hierarchy’**

The standard hierarchy (illustrated diagrammatically above) is the most common form of organized criminal group identified in the sample. It is characterized by a single leader and a relatively clearly defined hierarchy. Systems of internal discipline are strict. Strong social or ethnic identities are often present,





- Single leader
- Clearly defined hierarchy
- Strong systems of internal discipline
- Known by a specific name
- Often strong social or ethnic identity
- Violence essential to activities
- Often have clear influence or control over defined territory

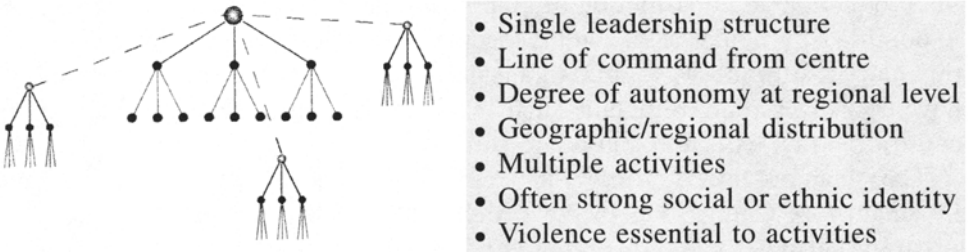
although this is not always the case. There is a relatively clear allocation of tasks and usually some form of internal code of conduct, although this may be implicit and not 'officially' recorded. In almost all cases, a standard hierarchical criminal group will have a *name* by which it is known both to its members and outsiders. The size of such groups can range from relatively small (a few individuals) to several hundred. In most cases however, a standard size would be in the range of 10 to 50. Propensity to engage in corrupt activities to facilitate primary activities is high.

Of the 40 groups analyzed in the context of this study, 13 could be classified as fitting the broad profile of this typology. For example, all three groups from China fit this typology. These groups have generally been created around a single individual, who often gives his name to the criminal group. The groups are medium sized (50-200 people) and have a strict hierarchical structure with a code of honor, internal 'house rules,' and absolute loyalty to the controlling figure. Members are recruited among the criminal underworld and from the ranks of former convicts, but also amongst government officials and civil servants. The use of violence is a key characteristic of their activities. Indeed, many of the groups began their operations with extortion and often engaged in violence (or the threat thereof) to secure profit. Having accumulated wealth, the criminal groups invested in a range of legitimate businesses such as casinos, nightclubs and restaurants. Illegal activities too were expanded (and often carried out under the guise of legitimate business) to include gambling houses, prostitution, cigarette smuggling and racketeering. Corrupt officials, and in some cases political representatives at the local level, have been used to secure both influence and protection for the groups.

The other groups that fit this typology are largely from Eastern Europe – Russia, Bulgaria, Lithuania and Ukraine. These are all relatively small in size (two have less than 20 people and three have less than 50 people). They possess a clear hierarchical structure and are characterized by high levels of internal discipline and clearly defined roles for each member. The style of management is generally authoritarian and obedience to the chief is key to the cohesion of the group. The use of violence, including for enforcement purposes within the group itself, is relatively common. Most of the organized crime groups in question are active in the legitimate economy, mainly the running of,

or investment in, private companies. In most cases, hierarchically organized groups appear to exert control or influence within the confines of a specific geographic area.

**4.3 Typology 2: ‘Regional hierarchy’**



Although a hierarchical criminal group, with relatively strict lines of command from the centre, there is a degree of autonomy present in regional organizations under the control of the group. This level of autonomy varies, but is generally limited to day to day management issues. In some cases, regional hierarchies appear to operate a ‘franchise model’ in which regional groups pay money and give allegiance in order to use the name of a well known criminal group, helping to improve their own influence and instill fear into their competitors. The control structure at the centre is often replicated at the regional level. Levels of internal discipline are high, and instructions coming from the centre generally override any regional initiatives. Regional hierarchies, given their geographic distribution, generally have relatively large numbers of members and associates. Also, they are likely to engage in multiple activities.

One set of criminal groups that illustrates most effectively the regional hierarchy typology is that of outlaw motorcycle gangs, one of which from Australia was analyzed for the purpose of this survey of criminal groups. Outlaw motorcycle gangs have a clearly defined hierarchical structure, divided into sub-groups each operating in specific geographic regions. The basic element of the structure is the chapter, which operates in a specific local area and is governed by a president. This individual has absolute rule over the chapter in terms of decision-making and often rules with dictatorial power. Each chapter has a degree of independence from the others. Drawn largely from the white working class, outlaw motorcycle gangs have a strong social identity. Gangs are generally entirely male. While membership was traditionally granted after a strict internal process (including a period of probation) such procedures have been weakened in some areas in an attempt to acquire more members. The most highly organized gangs have also targeted prospective members with particular skills (such as lawyers, accountants, realtors or chemists) of value to the criminal operations of the club. Most outlaw motorcycle gangs are governed by rules known as ‘by-laws,’ or a constitution. Some gangs have written

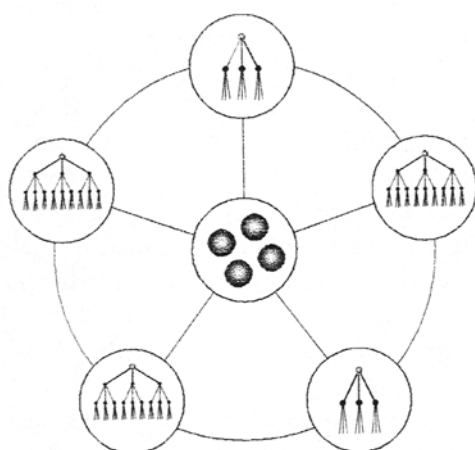
codes of ethics. Rules typically require loyalty to the club and condone violence to further the gang's interest. Gangs' frequent use of extreme violence is well known and their reputation and demeanor are used to intimidate witnesses and others. A guiding principle of gang membership and activities is an 'out-law' lifestyle, which may call for anything from mere social rebellion to highly organized criminality for profit. Outlaw motorcycle gangs are prominent in the production and distribution of amphetamines and cannabis. Chapters seek to dominate particular areas with respect to drug manufacturing, drug distribution and prostitution. Rival biker gangs are violently excluded. Some chapters have now diversified to include such crimes as insurance scams, vehicle theft and trafficking, extortion and other crimes

The Asian organized crime groups outlined in this study (Yamaguchi-Gumi in Japan, Fuk Ching gang in the United States and the Japanese Yakuza in Australia) also belong to this typology. These groups have a hierarchy, headed by a defined leadership structure. Day to day business is left to 'managers' further down the pyramid who act with a level of autonomy and are generally in control of operations in specific geographic areas. Such groups are governed by a variety of rules and norms, draw on members from particular ethnic groupings, and operate with a high level of discipline. In particular, the Japanese groups suggest that some aspects of the franchising arrangement described above may be present, with groups assuming the name and protection of a prominent criminal group on payment of tributes and allegiance to a controlling body.

All the Italian organized crime groups outlined in the study have a hierarchical structure, headed by a single boss or oligarchy. Most of the groups have a three-tiered organizational structure with a top level controlling a province or a region where all the strategic decisions are taken, a middle level with representatives or families controlling a territory and a lower level of members executing the orders. A strict code of conduct, sometimes based on an oath of loyalty, provides cohesion and discipline within the groups and dictates the role and the position of each member within the organization. All the Italian groups considered in the study are relatively large, with their activities spread across several regions. Violence is also often key to their activities.

#### **4.4 Typology 3: 'Clustered hierarchy'**

A clustered hierarchy is an association of organized crime groups with a governing or oversight body. The groups in question may themselves have a diversity of structures, but generally they are of the 'standard hierarchy' type outlined above. The governing arrangement for the group can range from a flexible umbrella type structure, to a more rigid control body. The degree of autonomy of each of the criminal groups that make up the cluster is relatively high. 'Clustered hierarchies' may result when a variety of individual criminal groups come together to divide up markets or to regulate conflict among them. Over time however, the cluster assumes some identity of its own. Given the



- Consists of a number of criminal groups
- Governing arrangement for the group present
- Cluster has stronger identity than constituent groups
- Degree of autonomy for constituent groups
- Formation strongly linked to social/historical context
- Relatively rare

number of groups involved and the potential geographic diversity, it should be expected that any 'clustered hierarchy' engages in multiple activities and has a relatively wide membership. 'Clustered hierarchies' are relatively rare and may be subject to internal competition or the exploitation of divisions between groups by law enforcement.

Given that clustered hierarchies are formed from a variety of component criminal organizations or gangs, this process is strongly influenced by a range of factors relating to the context and process in which this occurs. This is well illustrated by the example of the '28s prison gang' in South Africa.

Having its origins in South Africa's prisons, and mainly drawing on individuals from a specific ethnic group, the 28s have come to establish their dominance over a number of criminal gangs. The 28s began more than one hundred years ago when they developed as a ruthless prison gang in correctional facilities throughout the country. They forged tightly knit, disciplined and well-structured criminal gangs among inmates. They and other prison gangs (most notably the '26s') vied for the control of the informal trade networks and sexual services on offer within prisons. Once released from prison, many members of the 28s joined street gangs, as over time a direct correlation between membership in the 28s and seniority in street gangs evolved. The leadership of the 28s, however, continued to be based in prison, and as a result it was not then possible to develop a cohesive criminal organization that could impact effectively on the open criminal market. Only when senior members of the 28s were released from prison, and they happened to have exceptional qualities of leadership, could this take place. This development occurred at the same time as the introduction of synthetic drugs (mainly methaqualone) into the local drug market. Then followed the opening up of the country's borders as a result of the end of apartheid, bringing new market opportunities and higher levels of profit. The 28s have maintained the discipline and hierarchical structure of the cluster, while diversifying their operations outside of prison. Key to the process of formation remains the fact that individuals drawn from a variety of

criminal activities have been initiated into the gang while in prison. While dominant in one province, the Western Cape, the 28s operate across South Africa, albeit in a decentralized way. The different groups are structured and have their own internal hierarchies, but the structures are not uniform across all the component groups. Despite this make-up, there has been clear overall leadership from the centre with relatively strict lines of reporting and discipline throughout the cluster. At a local level, this is balanced against a relatively high level of decentralized management of day to day operations of profit generating activities.

Two other organizations on which information was collected for the study also fit this profile.

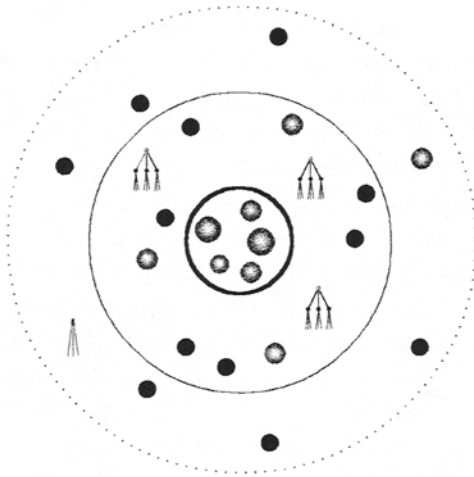
The first is an Italian dominated heterogeneous organization of groups active in Germany. This cluster is composed of a large number of gangs, different in size, and working independently of one another. They are linked through personal contacts and representatives, and coordinate their activities. The governing arrangement in this case is therefore relatively fluid and dynamic. In the areas in which they operate, they aim to dominate the sub-contracting market in the construction industry.

The second clustered hierarchy is the Russian based Ziberman cluster. Ziberman consists of six separate criminal groups, each with a hierarchical structure and definite roles for each member. Co-ordination among the six groups making up the cluster is achieved by an oversight structure of four individuals. There is a strict code of conduct across the groups and high levels of violence characterize the process of achieving internal discipline. The Ziberman organization first established itself through the illegal trade in tobacco before diversifying their activities into the smuggling of alcohol, gambling and trafficking in stolen vehicles.

It should be noted that despite the fact that the Ziberman cluster and the 28s consist of several criminal entities, both members and outsiders see them as single criminal organizations with a diversity of component parts. This is a key criterion for this typology. *A series of groups coordinating their activities would not be considered a clustered hierarchy if they regarded themselves as consisting of completely separate criminal enterprises, which, while attempting to co-ordinate their activities, were often in competition with each other.* The sum is more important as an entity than the collective parts.

#### **4.5 Typology 4: 'Core group'**

Criminal groups in this typology generally consist of a limited number of individuals who form a relatively tight and structured group to conduct criminal business. Around this 'core group' there may be a large number of associate members, or even a network, which is used from time to time, depending on the criminal activity in question. There may be an internal division of activities among the core members. 'Core groups' are generally quite small (20



- Core group surrounded by a loose network
- Limited number of individuals
- Tightly organized flat structure
- Small size maintains internal discipline
- Seldom has social or ethnic identity
- Only in a limited number of cases known by a specific name

individuals or less) and are more likely to engage in a single or at least a limited number of criminal activities. Internal discipline is maintained through the small size of the group and the use of violence, although the latter is not as prominent as in the standard hierarchy. ‘Core groups’ generally have little or no social identity, and are structured and run purely for the benefit of the small number of individuals in charge. Such groups are not often known by a specific name, either by those involved or by outsiders.

Of the 40 groups on which data have been collected in the context of this study, eight can be identified as fitting this typology. These are all loosely structured criminal operations, controlled by a small number of key players, surrounded by a wider circle of people. Three of the groups operate in Western Europe (in the Netherlands and Germany), have no names (in fact a relatively common feature of loosely structured criminal groups), and have no distinct social or ethnic base. The two groups active in the Netherlands are mainly involved in the trafficking of human beings. Each member has a specific role in the trafficking process (for example, recruitment, transport, protection and marketing). Such groups are more horizontally structured than hierarchically ordered. The groups include several nationalities, generally reflecting the make-up of the countries from which they operate. Such groups are strictly profit oriented and opportunistic, shifting from illegal activity to illegal activity on the basis of where most profits can be generated.

A good example of this typology is the McLean Syndicate operating from Australia. Membership outside the core is relatively loose and fluid—individuals or groups of individuals coming together on the basis of common economic needs. This means that members may move in and out of the support network, as circumstances require. In this way the Syndicate is able to constantly draw on new human resources and new skills as required by changing opportunities and markets. Once accepted by the Syndicate, the newcomer may only associate with Syndicate members when his or her particular skills or

expertise in a specific field are required. Clearly, the most important requirement of Syndicate membership is the ability for other members to trust the person in question. Only key members of the Syndicate appear to be required to maintain full-time commitment to the goals of the organization as a whole. Relationships among these key members are built on trust and mutual understanding established over many years of common involvement in illicit ventures. They all have a high degree of professional know-how in respect to their area of expertise – the illegal importation of cannabis into Australia and other countries. The core group is composed of a number of different criminal cells, operating with defined roles, coordinated by persons occupying leadership roles in each of the cells. Various cells from the McLean Syndicate are known to be operating in several overseas jurisdictions outside Australia, including the Philippines, Pakistan, Thailand, Germany, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong and Singapore. The Syndicate can rely upon the availability of ‘enforcers’ and specialists who are used to collect debts – mostly related to payments for narcotics – and to settle disputes within the organization. The ‘enforcer’ uses threats of violence and intimidation to instill a sense of order and to deter other persons outside the group from interfering with the criminal activities of the McLean organization.

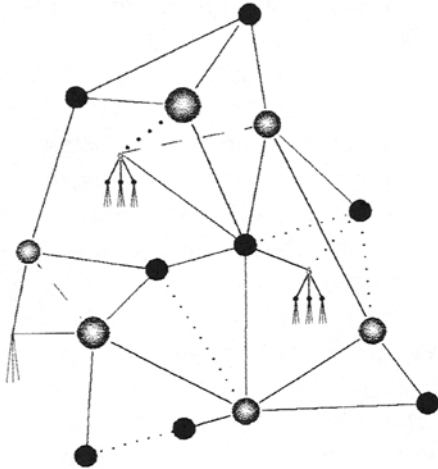
As in the case of the structured hierarchy, the core group typology is probably one of the most common organizational forms. Of note is the impression that law enforcement pressure on a range of more hierarchical structures, such as those outlined in typologies 1 and 2, may have spurred an evolution from the more highly structured and hierarchical organizational form to the ‘core group’ form.<sup>12</sup>

One important sub-category of this typology should also be touched upon. Relatively loosely organized criminal enterprises like those outlined above, can on occasion assume a corporate structure with a legitimate business front. In effect then, the core group can hold all the credentials of a legitimate business, yet engage in illegitimate activities. The crimes these groups engage in are closely tied to their apparent involvement in legitimate business. Thus such illegal activities as money laundering and tax and investment fraud are predominant. The number of members making up each group is generally small (less than 20), but their level of professional know-how is often very high. These groups tend to be non-violent, and to have close connections to legitimate economic actors and government authorities. Given their cover as legitimate economic enterprises, and their integration into the legitimate economy, the activities of such groups are difficult to detect by law enforcement agencies.

This sub-category of the core-group typology is best illustrated by one of the German criminal groups examined in the course of this study. The example involves the activities of a legal front company engaged in investment fraud activities. The core group fits into the typology as outlined above, with the additional twist of having an apparently legitimate legal front. The use of vio-

lence is not a feature of the group. Nor is the group based on any identifiable ethnic background.

#### 4.6 Typology 5: “Criminal network”



- Defined by activities of key individuals
- Prominence in network determined by contacts/skills
- Personal loyalties/ties more important than social/ethnic identities
- Network connections endure, coalescing around series of criminal projects
- Low public profile—seldom known by any more
- Network reforms after exit of key individuals

Criminal networks are defined by the activities of key individuals who engage in illicit activity in often shifting alliances. These individuals may not regard themselves as being members of a criminal group, and may not be regarded as being a criminal group by outsiders. Nevertheless, they coalesce around a series of criminal projects. The individual characteristics and skills among those who make up the network heavily determine the nature and criminal success of such networks. Networks usually consist of relatively manageable numbers of individuals, although in many cases different components of the network may not work closely with (or even know each other) but be connected through another individual or individuals. Personal loyalties and ties are essential to the maintenance of the network and are key determinants of relationships. It should be noted, however, that the various individuals within the network do not carry the same weight. Instead, the network is generally formed around a series of key individuals (or nodal points) through whom most of the network connections run.

Of our 40 groups, only four can be considered criminal networks. Despite their small number in the sample, experts believe it likely that criminal networks are more common than reflected here, and indeed are a growing phenomenon. The perhaps misleadingly small representation here may be a result of the fact that hierarchical structures are more likely to be identified by law enforcement agencies, and the hierarchy broken up if specific individuals or small groups at its pinnacle are removed. In contrast, when it comes to criminal networks, law enforcement agencies again are more likely to identify the activities of key individuals, but when they are ar-



rested or prosecuted, the network simply reforms itself around new individuals and activities.

Two of the criminal networks considered in the context of this study are operating from the Netherlands; the remaining two are from the Caribbean. All four organizations are loosely organized, with the activities of the leading practitioners constantly interchanging, and with a broader network of individual criminal contacts being drawn upon in the case of specific criminal operations. The size and the nature of activities of each of the criminal networks vary. The Meij case in the Caribbean involved a single suspect, surrounded by a network of individuals assisting him in his large-scale fraud and forgery enterprise. These particular criminal networks are mainly involved in a single activity (although this is not always the case) and may reconstitute themselves to conduct other activities. The ability of all four groupings to conduct the task at hand was highly dependent upon their ability to recruit the available human resources and skills into the network. The Verhagen Group—which was involved in the smuggling of cannabis into Europe—for example, went so far as to attempt to recruit one particular skill (the ability to captain a ship) by advertising publicly in the media. The use of violence is not essential to these groups, but rather is only instrumental and incidental, as their main focus resides in the high-level individual skills of their members.

One significant omission from the sample, but one that we believe provides an important illustration of the network structure, is the case of West African organized crime. We know from other sources that West African criminal networks – which are made up predominately of Nigerians – have in the last decade achieved remarkably high levels of market control. The growth of criminal networks from the region have paralleled the process of state decline there, and are, among other things, a feature of weak local law enforcement, historic trading networks operating through the region and the presence of a significant West African Diaspora in cities around the world. West African criminal networks engage in a mixture of criminal activities, ranging from advanced fee fraud and other financial scams to trafficking in cocaine and heroin. West African criminal groups, with no specific corporate structure or hierarchy, would therefore appear to be classic examples of criminal networks. In part, this is a reflection of the activities in which they are engaged; these are many, interconnected and often overlapping. People who emerge as prominent players in any criminal network are often those who possess specific skills, have cultivated important contacts (for example with a state official) or who have themselves taken the initiative in bringing together a small group of people to run an illicit business enterprise. While individuals may rise to significance as a crime or drug ‘baron,’ in most cases this does not imply that a carefully and clearly structured organization is acting under orders.

Despite the presence of extensive West African criminal networks in a number of places around the world, there is no name or list of names to which one could refer. The criminal networks themselves seldom carry any name of their

own. This reflects the shifting and essential fluid nature of the networks. Loose and often temporary alliances or associations may be formed around specific 'projects.' Individuals or small groups of people are best described as nodal points in a larger web of criminal activity. None of this explanation should imply, however, that such a loose network is not the most effective means of doing illegal business. With a flat structure, instant communication between members (the mobile phone has brought a revolution to both legal and illegal business) and a keen eye on the profit to be made in any deal, such organizations, loose and seemingly unstructured as they are, are highly effective in literally delivering the goods. The added advantage for West African networks is that tracing the operations of such criminal networks is extremely difficult for law enforcement agencies, and when individuals are targeted and identified, the network can quickly reform itself around new players.

#### **4.7 Linking the typologies to criminal clusters**

The development of typologies is important to understanding the nature of criminal clusters. Analyses of organized crime often attribute similar characteristics to broad clusters of criminal groups, such as for example the so-called "Russian Mafia." While these characterizations may be true in some cases (see the outline of West African criminal networks above), such generalizations should be treated with caution for two reasons: *First, the groups that make up any criminal cluster may themselves represent a diverse number of typologies. Second, the nature of the criminal groups within any cluster may change dramatically over time, as their operations mature or as criminal markets change.* These points are well illustrated by the examples of the Albanian and Colombian criminal clusters.

'Albanian organized crime' is more and more often spoken of, and indeed Albanian criminal organizations play an increasingly important role in supplying the European drug market. The strategic location of Albania on the drug and people trafficking routes from the east, the weakness of local law enforcement, and the size of the Albanian Diaspora (many having fled internal disorder and the war in the Balkans) have all contributed to the growth of the problem. The groups which make up the cluster 'Albanian organized crime' continue, however, to evolve. While originally many Albanian criminal groups were "reminiscent of the first Calabrian Mafia cells: non-hierarchical and almost always organized around family ties," such criminal organizations as they mature are increasingly characterized by hierarchical and ethnic based structures. These have a strict code of conduct. Albanian criminal organizations are characterized by high levels of violence that is both internally and externally focussed. A second critical period of change is now occurring with Albanian criminal groups now evolving into more sophisticated structures, with the development of networks among regional criminal groups. Thus, according to a report of the Italian Investigation Directorate for the Mafia, several criminal

groups operating at local levels and in contact with each other now form the 'Albanian Mafia.' This arrangement makes it extremely difficult to identify the ruling group of individuals (Drawn from UNODCCP, December 2000:46-49).

While Albanian criminal groups seem to have modified their structure with the growing of their activities abroad and with diversification into new activities, Colombian criminal organizations reorganized themselves into looser structures after severe repression from law enforcement agencies.

From the mid-1970s until the early 1990s, the illicit cocaine trade was dominated by Colombian criminal organizations, in particular by cartels based in the cities of Medellin and Cali. Law enforcement successes against these two criminal organizations in the early 1990s has led to a fragmentation of the drug trafficking business inside Colombia, and the concomitant rise in prominence of Mexican drug trafficking organizations supplying the U.S. market. Nevertheless Colombian organizations remain pivotal in the processing and trafficking of cocaine. In recent years, a prominent trend has been the emergence of second tier and small trafficking organizations. In effect the groups that dominated the market in the 1990s have been replaced by a broader-based industry with more participants, although there is a high level of coordination between some organizations. Where drug trafficking operations in the past were dominated by 10 to 15 major organizations and their subsidiary groups, the illegal trade in narcotics is now said to be dominated by 150 to 200 smaller organizations and many other groups made up of as few as 10 people (UNODCCP, December, 2000, pp. 32-36).

While the earlier groups were hierarchically organized, with high visibility and political impact, the new groups have more specialized roles and missions among their members, and are more tightly and horizontally organized. Success in illegal markets is ensured through both the diversification into a variety of illegal products and markets and the coordination among criminal groups. In short, while the cartels were much more likely to resemble the structured hierarchies of typologies 1 and 2, the trend now is towards more tightly controlled core groups, assisted by a web of individuals engaged in a variety of illegal projects. Such tightly controlled structures, with their diversity and sheer numbers, pose new challenges for law enforcement.

These two illustrations again highlight the importance of gathering data on the nature of the criminal groups that make up any cluster. The concluding section of the report which follows provides a brief review of the findings, and suggests a way forward in respect to the overall task of gathering information on organized crime groups.

## **5. WAY FORWARD**

### **5.1 Project overview and assessment**

This study has sought to draw upon information collected on 40 criminal groups in 16 countries across the world. Information was largely gathered

through national correspondents in each of the societies concerned, according to a series of established guidelines and topics. The aim of the project was not only to collect information on the criminal groups themselves, but to use the research process as a pilot study to inform any future information collection, data exchange and monitoring that would take place under the provisions of the TOC Convention.

A considerable quantity of information on organized crime groups has been collected in the course of the project. A distinction was made at the outset between criminal groups, as presented here, and “criminal clusters” and “criminal markets.” While the study of “groups,” “clusters” and “markets” is essential to a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of transnational organized crime, the focus in this report has been on the nature of the criminal groups themselves – essentially the building blocks of the phenomenon of transnational organized crime. One of the strengths of the data is that it allows, for almost the first time in the study of transnational organized crime groups, the development of a detailed comparative analysis. This has facilitated the presentation of the key characteristics of all the groups that have been considered.

One issue worth emphasizing by way of conclusion is that the survey of groups lacks representation from more loosely organized groups or criminal networks. This is a serious failing, given the increasing focus on more loosely organized criminal entities by law enforcement bodies and in the research literature. Two interconnected explanations for this neglect are possible. First, criminal networks are not yet fully recognized as full-fledged criminal groups in some jurisdictions, and the focus of law enforcement agencies continues to be on the activities of the key individuals who make up the network nodes of the criminal network. Second, hierarchically structured groups may have a higher visibility and cause more harm (although this is in many cases tied to a local area) than more loosely organized criminal networks.

The data did allow for the comparison of various characteristics of the groups. While a future larger sample of groups will make this exercise even more useful and informative, some valuable conclusions can be drawn. Cross-referencing the structure of the groups against other variables produced the most interesting findings. For example, larger criminal groups were much more likely to have hierarchical structures, while groups made up of relatively few individuals were more likely to be loosely structured. More hierarchical groups were also more likely to have strong ethnic or social identities, while the converse was true with the more loosely organized groups. Greater levels of violence were also associated with strict hierarchical structures and strong ethnic or social identities. Groups specifically involved in the trafficking of illegal narcotics displayed higher levels of violence than other groups, particularly those with a diversified array of activities. These tentative conclusions must be tested in future work. More definitive conclusions about the varying features of organized crime groups may also lead to a clearer understanding of the forces determining the organizational shape of the various groups in different social and cultural contexts.

The data on the 40 criminal groups in many cases reflect the prevailing view of what transnational criminal groups look like and how they act. Nevertheless, in a few specific cases, the presentation of the data suggests that broad generalizations about organized crime groups may not stand up to scrutiny when tested empirically. Thus, the often-made statement that criminal groups engage in a diversity of activities is shown to be true only for a minority of the groups in this study. The data from the survey suggest also (although again admittedly the sample is very small) that more loosely organized groups are likely to be smaller and less violent, and thus much less likely to come to the attention of the authorities.

Relying heavily on these data, various typologies of organized crime groups were identified. The five typologies identified ranged from more tightly structured groups to more loosely organized criminal networks. Most notably, the development of a series of typologies is useful both in illustrating the diversity of criminal groups encompassed by the concept of 'transnational organized crime,' and in providing a framework for future data collection and analysis.

## 5.2 Problems and prospects

Presenting the data and providing an overview of the key characteristics begs the question as to how the activities of transnational organized crime groups should be monitored in the context of the TOC Convention. The survey suggests that three broad and initial conclusions should frame any debate in this regard.

First, that there remain considerable methodological obstacles to the implementation of an effective system to monitor organized crime trends across the globe. The problem of acquiring standardized information on a social phenomenon across a number of societies is clear. Collecting such data on transnational organized crime is made that much more difficult by problems of secrecy and data access. While court files may provide the most reliable sources of data, for example, they often lack information about the broader context in which organized crime operates. They also are, in most cases, skewed by a clear prosecutorial aim (such as the conviction of a single individual), thus excluding data on other potentially useful issues for research purposes. Added to this, any research and information collection exercise is hampered by the fact that the focus of the research is effectively a moving target: what can be said about a variety of organized crime groups today (notwithstanding delays inherent to any research process) may not be true tomorrow. Already, in the case of this report, the data on each of the groups is now relatively dated [and indeed some groups, as is said to be the case in China (see Appendix), have been dismantled by the law enforcement authorities] and do not reflect the current situation.

Second, there is the consistent thread running through the report that highlights the degree of diversity across transnational organized crime groups. It

has been emphasized that what is meant by 'transnational organized crime' may vary considerably from context to context and from group to group. Media portrayals of hierarchically organized and structured groups with clear leadership figures simply do not apply as a whole to the variety of structures and activities that constitute the phenomenon of transnational organized crime. This diversity is illustrated in this report by the presentation of the five standardized typologies based largely on the structural characteristics of the groups that have been reviewed in this study.

The final conclusion is related to the issue of the degree to which any information on organized crime trends becomes out of date relatively rapidly. Indeed, and as a brief review of the material in the Appendix illustrates, source material drawn from within the criminal justice system itself is often only made available when organized criminal groups have been broken up and prosecutions begun. Nevertheless, the immediate assumption made when debating how to effectively monitor trends in organized crime is that the information must be as recent and up to date as possible. This poses real problems, given resource and personnel constraints, with respect to how information can be constantly presented in a timely manner so to be of greatest assistance to policy makers.

The drawbacks inherent in the identification of these issues must however be weighed against the arguments for the collation, analysis and presentation of data on organized crime groups at the international level. Without an effective measure of the nature and extent of transnational organized crime on the international level, it will be difficult (impossible?) to systematically assess what progress is being made in countering it. It would seem important to know for instance, whether the replacement of hierarchical models by criminal networks as observed in Colombia, will manifest itself in other countries when law enforcement activities increase. At the very least, this pilot study has suggested that some important data can be collected. Moreover, what is critical to the exercise is not only the collection of the data to highlight problems in particular societies, but that when these data are compared and contrasted, some important conclusions can be drawn.

An adequate understanding of transnational organized crime at an international level implies some procedure by which information is collected and analyzed. Closely related to this process of collection is the challenge to present the information in a way that it can best be used by a variety of policy makers, law enforcement officials and researchers working on the phenomenon of organized crime around the world. What may be unrealistic is to promote the idea of a definitive global study on organized crime, rather than on the production of a more dynamic vehicle, allowing both the ongoing publication of findings and the ability for outsiders to access data at any time. Any attempt to establish an ongoing process of information collection therefore must produce an outcome which is not a once off-report but a constantly accessible tool for a wide variety of users. It should, for example, be possible to access such a col-

lection of data at any time, not being restricted to periodic publications that attempt to provide a snapshot of organized crime in the globe at any point in time.

Given the challenges outlined above, it must be conceded that any system of information and collection on global organized crime trends will be a challenging exercise. The continued collection of information on criminal groups does constitute one way in which the process can be taken forward. An international data base on a wide variety of criminal groups, and the continuous updating of the typologies outlined above would serve as a useful method of monitoring international developments in the field of organized crime. Such groups must, however, be drawn from a variety of countries, including both from the developed and developing worlds.

Such a project would not seek to replicate work that is already being done at an international level by, for example INTERPOL, which maintains a database of key suspects. That database relates much more closely to the immediate assistance of investigators working in a variety of environments. The proposed new database would instead aim to provide information that is not easily available elsewhere concerning the history, context and classification of a variety of criminal groups. If the database is large enough, such information could be of considerable value to policy makers and law enforcement officials alike. Given that the emphasis in the area of police data is always on the accessing of real time information, little attention is paid to storing data on groups that law enforcement has successfully dismantled, or on those that have displayed particular characteristics that are no longer present. Collecting and keeping such historical information on organized crime groups will be of great importance in any analysis of transnational organized crime trends.

Critically, the ongoing collection of information on criminal groups would provide the material necessary to produce an effective system for their classification. Already an attempt has been made here to show how even a relatively few groups present the possibility of developing typologies. Such typologies may be central to any monitoring exercise as they provide a means to sort information into categories that are established at the same time as providing the possibility of identifying new typologies (and hence new trends) or more detailed sub-categories within each typology. The collection of information on a large variety of organized crime groups, will also allow, over time, the development of more systematic instruments to measure the harm that individual groups cause.

What would also be important in such an exercise is to ensure that the collection and analysis of information takes place in a sustained manner. The once off collection and publication of data will weaken the credibility of any such instrument. Data collection could be facilitated by the creation of a network of national and/or regional correspondents drawn from a combination of independent research bodies or law enforcement agencies. The ongoing collection of information on criminal groups at the same time as the TOC Convention is in the process of being ratified constitutes an important exercise. In the final

analysis however, it is the Conference of State Parties, envisaged under the provisions of the TOC Convention, that will be critical in determining how and with what instruments the implementation of the Convention will be monitored. This pilot study has sought – by collecting data on a variety of criminal groups and proposing a means by which this can be sorted and monitored – to highlight what are the possibilities in this regard.

### Notes

1. The offences listed included money laundering, terrorist activities, theft of art and cultural objects, theft of intellectual property, illicit arms trafficking, aircraft hijacking, sea piracy, insurance fraud, computer crime, environmental crime, trafficking in persons, trade in human body parts, illicit drug trafficking, fraudulent bankruptcy, infiltration of legal business, corruption and bribery of public or party officials.
2. United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) Convention, Article 2 (a).
3. United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) Convention, Article 2 (b).
4. United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) Convention, Article 3 (2).
5. United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) Convention, Article 28 (1).
6. United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) Convention, Article 28 (2).
7. In fact 16 countries and one region, the Caribbean. The countries to which questionnaires were sent are: Australia, Canada, Colombia, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States, South Africa and the Russian Federation. Data from a similar UNICRI study of countries in Eastern Europe were also added. These are: Lithuania; Ukraine; Bulgaria; Albania and Byelorussia. In the case of China and Mexico detailed information on specific criminal groups was added through the assistance of CICIP staff members with experience on these two societies. In the final analysis some data from countries could not be used, bringing the total number of countries from which information was used to 16.
8. This is less than three per country as in a number of cases fewer responses were received. Some countries however submitted four responses.
9. Of interest here is that one of the problems mentioned by some respondents in respect of the questionnaire was the complaint that it was unnecessary to list the data source at the end of each question, as in many case the same sources – either a series of articles or interviews with law enforcement officials – were used to fill in all the responses.
10. ‘Self-contained’ should not however imply that there is significant crossover and cooperation with other groups, but that they constitute a relatively self-contained unit for study. The difficulties inherent in such distinctions illustrate the extent to which trying to analyze the various component parts of transnational organized crime represents a definitional mine field.
11. It should be noted that most typologies of organized crime rely on the structure of the groups themselves as the key organizing principle.
12. This is an argument that has been made both in respect to the changing nature of Colombian criminal organizations as well as to some Mafia groups in Italy.

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