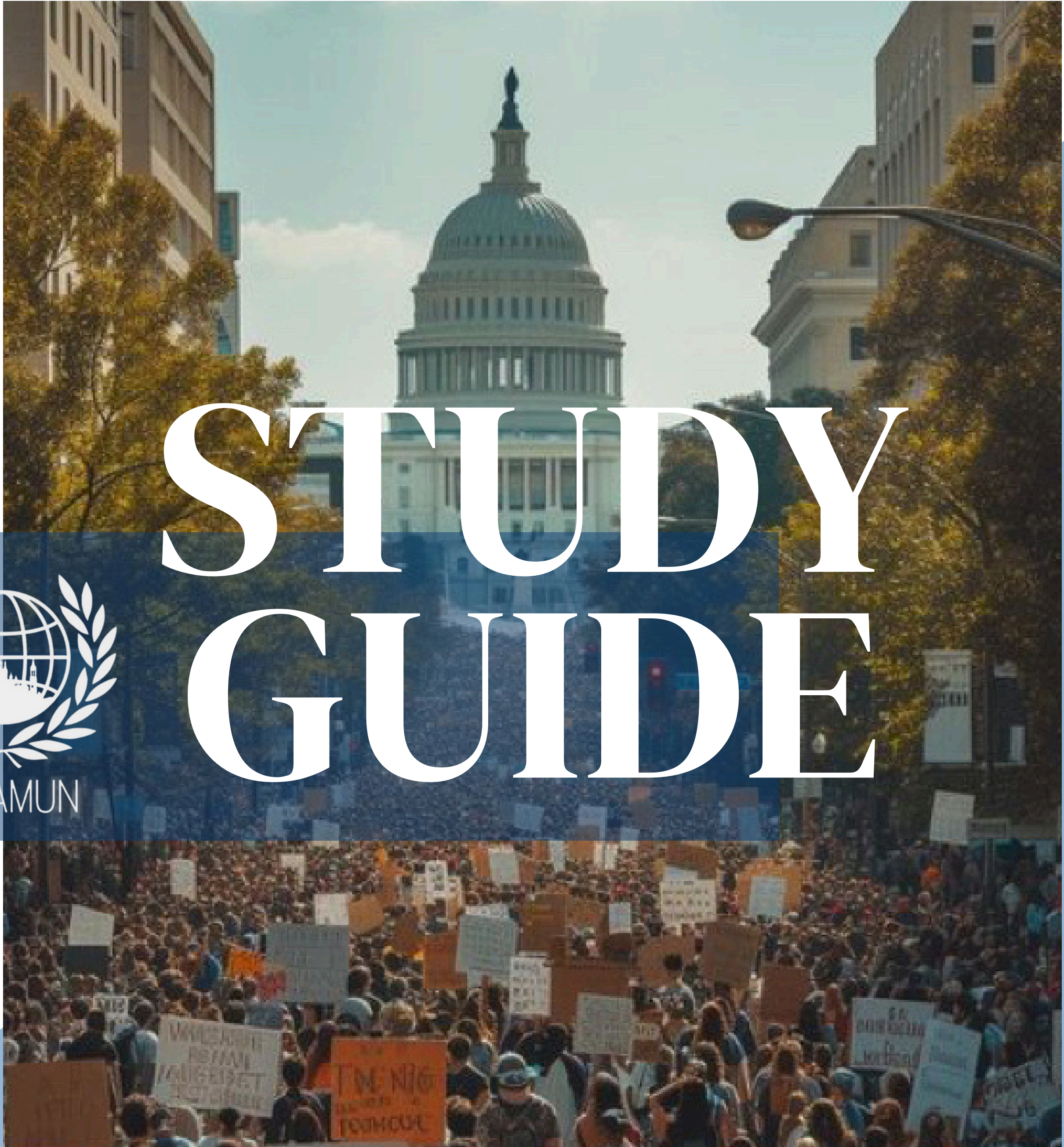


ZARAMUN 2025

“The Dilemmas Of Humanity: Borders, Justice and Ethics; Building the Future Of The World”



STUDY GUIDE



UNODC

**Combating criminal organizations while
safeguarding democratic institutions
and civil liberties**

COMMITTEE INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), works to combat and limit international crime, drug trafficking, terrorism and justice reform while maintaining justice and safeguarding human rights. It assists countries in strengthening legal systems, preventing organized crime, and addressing issues like corruption, human or drug trafficking and drug abuse. Through several strategies such as research and technical assistance, the UNODC fosters global cooperation to create safer societies.

Combating criminal organizations is a complex challenge: effective measures often require powerful actions such as surveillance or law enforcement, that include certain restrictions on certain activities. These actions may undermine democratic principles such as transparency if they are not correctly implemented. They can also lead to violations of civil rights, such as privacy or freedom of speech if governments use excessive force or control. That is why finding a balance is essential.

KEY TERMS

#1 Criminal Organizations

Criminal organizations are structured groups of individuals engaged in illegal activities with the primary goal of obtaining financial or material benefits. These groups often operate with a hierarchical or network-based structure, enabling coordination and execution of crimes such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, extortion, or organized violence. Criminal organizations are characterized by their persistence, secrecy, and use of corruption, intimidation, or violence to achieve their objectives and evade law enforcement. They may exploit systemic weaknesses in legal, economic, or political systems and often seek to establish control over specific territories, industries, or communities to sustain their operations.

#2 Democratic Institutions

Democratic institutions are the structures, systems, and organizations within a society that enable the practice of democracy, ensuring governance is based on the will of the people. These institutions are designed to uphold principles such as transparency, accountability, equality, and the rule of law, facilitating the participation of citizens in decision-making processes either directly or through elected representatives. Examples of democratic institutions include legislatures, courts, electoral bodies, independent media, and civil society organizations.

#3 Civil Liberties

Civil liberties are the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed to individuals by law, typically enshrined in a constitution or legal framework, that protect them from undue interference or restrictions by the government or other authorities. These liberties ensure that individuals can exercise their freedoms and live with dignity, autonomy, and equality in a democratic society. Examples of civil liberties include freedom of speech, religion, and assembly; the right to privacy; the right to a fair trial; and protection from discrimination, arbitrary detention, or unwarranted government surveillance.

#4 Drug Cartels

Drug cartels are highly organized criminal organizations involved in the production, transportation, distribution, and sale of illegal drugs. These groups often operate on a large scale, spanning international borders, and engage in systematic activities to control and expand their drug trafficking operations. Drug cartels are characterized by their use of violence, corruption, and intimidation to protect their business interests and maintain control over drug markets. They frequently bribe officials, infiltrate legal institutions, and engage in armed conflicts with rivals, law enforcement, or government forces. Their operations often have far-reaching social, economic, and political consequences, contributing to instability, undermining democratic institutions, and fostering environments of fear and lawlessness in the areas they dominate.

#5 Cybercrime Networks

Cybercrime networks are organized groups of individuals or entities that collaborate to commit crimes using digital technologies and cyberspace. These networks exploit vulnerabilities in computer systems, networks, and online platforms to achieve financial, political, or personal objectives, often operating covertly across national borders. Cybercrime networks engage in activities such as hacking, identity theft, ransomware attacks, phishing scams, online fraud, the distribution of malware, and the trafficking of illegal goods or information on the dark web. They may also disrupt critical infrastructure, steal sensitive data, or manipulate systems for financial gain or political motives.

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#6 Human Trafficking Rings

Human trafficking rings are organized criminal networks that engage in the illegal recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of individuals through force, fraud, coercion, or deception for the purpose of exploitation. These rings operate both domestically and internationally, often targeting vulnerable populations such as migrants, women, children, and individuals in poverty. Human trafficking rings exploit victims in various ways, including forced labor, sexual exploitation, organ trafficking, domestic servitude, and child soldiering. These organizations rely on intricate supply chains and networks of recruiters, transporters, enforcers, and facilitators to carry out their operations. They often use threats, violence, debt bondage, and psychological manipulation to control their victims and prevent them from escaping.

#7 Arms Traffickers

Arms traffickers are individuals or organized networks that illegally trade, transport, and distribute weapons and ammunition, often bypassing national and international regulations.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

Criminal organizations significantly threaten social stability, economic growth, and security. They perpetuate violence and fear within communities. Indeed, they weaken trust in governments and public institutions. For example, drug cartels in regions like Latin America destabilize entire societies using gang violence. Economically, these groups scam billions of dollars annually through activities like smuggling or fraud, by draining resources that could support legitimate development.

Organized crime is already trespassing borders and exploiting technology to operate on a global scale. Networks involved in transnational drug trafficking coordinate to smuggle cocaine from South America to Europe or Asia. Similarly, cybercriminals steal data and money from anywhere. The interconnected nature of these crimes highlights the need for international cooperation. Joint efforts, like those led by INTERPOL, are crucial for sharing ways to dismantle these cross-border organized crimes effectively.

KEY ISSUES

#1 Infiltration Of Democratic Institutions

Criminal organizations often infiltrate democratic institutions by corrupting law enforcement or judiciary systems, and politicians, eroding public trust in justice. For instance, in some countries, drug cartels and mafias have influenced authority forces to turn a blind eye to these operations, damaging the foundation of democracy and fostering distrust among citizens.

#2 Civil Liberties And Human Rights

Efforts to combat criminal organizations sometimes result in an abusive use of human rights, as authorities prioritize public security. Excessive surveillance measures, such as mass data collection or invasive monitoring, even if it is to ensure security, can infringe on privacy rights. Also, in some cases, governments exploit anti-crime initiatives as arbitrary arrests, sometimes leading to discriminatory practices and violations of human dignity.

#3 Balance Between Security And Freedom

Finding a balance between ensuring security and protecting citizens' freedoms is a delicate task. While strong measures are often necessary to dismantle powerful criminal networks, it can be publicly perceived as oppressive or unfair. Achieving this balance requires careful adherence to the law to ensure that efforts to secure society do not harm the values governments aim to protect. Collaboration between civil society and experts is essential to design strategies that maintain both safety and liberty.

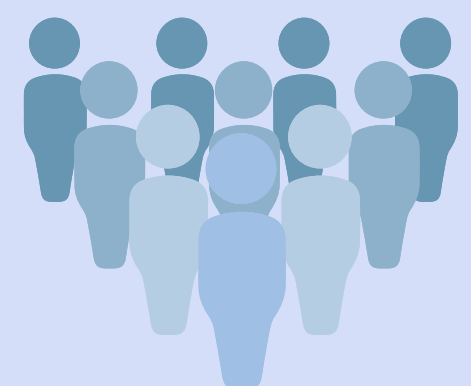
LEGAL FRAMEWORKS & EXISTING INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS



The UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), adopted in 2000, is a cornerstone treaty for global efforts to combat organized crime. It obliges member states to criminalize participation in organized crime groups, money laundering, corruption, and obstruction of justice. Its three protocols focus on human smuggling, notably that of migrants, and firearms trafficking. UNTOC emphasizes international collaboration through extradition, joint investigations, and technical assistance, creating a unified front against cross-border crime while promoting capacity building in vulnerable regions.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the UN in 1948, represents a global commitment to civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. Articles within the UDHR emphasize the rights to life, freedom, security, and fair trial, which are critical in safeguarding individuals against abuses by both criminal organizations and state corruption.

Other agreements, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), reinforce protections for privacy, justice, and freedom from coercion, ensuring that anti-crime measures respect human dignity and democratic values.



Regional organizations like the European Union (EU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and African Union (AU) play pivotal roles in combating organized crime. The EU's European Agenda on Security enhances cross-border police and judicial cooperation, targeting terrorism, cybercrime, and trafficking. ASEAN has adopted conventions like the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, focusing on cross-border collaboration in Southeast Asia. Similarly, the AU's Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention aims to strengthen legal and institutional frameworks to disrupt criminal networks while respecting regional diversity.

ROLES OF MAJOR COUNTRIES AND STAKEHOLDERS

TRANSIT & DESTINATION COUNTRIES

Countries like the United States, European nations, and Southeast Asian states play crucial roles in global organized crime dynamics as primary trafficking routes or consumption markets. The U.S. and Europe are major consumers of illicit drugs, creating demand that fuels supply chains and violence in producer nations. Similarly, Southeast Asia serves as a hub for human trafficking and synthetic drug production. These nations face the dual responsibility of curbing domestic demand while collaborating internationally to disrupt supply chains and dismantle trafficking networks.

CIVIL SOCIETIES & NGOS

Organizations like Transparency International, Human Rights Watch, and local NGOs are instrumental in combating corruption and monitoring abuses tied to organized crime. Transparency International exposes corruption through reports like the Corruption Perceptions Index, encouraging accountability in governments. Human Rights Watch documents human rights violations linked to state collusion with criminal groups, pressuring reform. Local NGOs, often on the front lines, provide critical advocacy, education, and support to affected communities, ensuring grassroots participation in anti-corruption initiatives.

SOURCE COUNTRIES

Countries like Mexico, Italy, and nations in West Africa face systemic challenges due to the deep-rooted presence of organized crime. In Mexico, powerful cartels infiltrate politics, law enforcement, and businesses, fueling corruption and violence that undermine governance. Italy's mafia groups like the Cosa Nostra or 'Ndrangheta manipulate economies and intimidate officials, often complicating judicial responses.

In West Africa, transnational criminal networks exploit weak borders and governance to traffic drugs, arms, and people. These countries grapple with compromised institutions, violence against civilians, and reduced public trust, making reforms and enforcement incredibly difficult.



INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (IGOS)

Entities like INTERPOL and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) enhance global efforts to combat organized crime. INTERPOL facilitates international coordination through databases like I-24/7, enabling real-time information sharing on criminal activities. The UNODC provides training programs for law enforcement, supports legislative reform, and leads initiatives like the Global Programme against Money Laundering to strengthen financial crime responses. Both organizations offer technical resources and foster partnerships to help countries build sustainable, effective anti-crime frameworks.

CASE STUDIES

Sinaloa Cartel
DRUG CARTELS

Drug cartels have profoundly affected countries like Mexico and Colombia, creating severe challenges for governments and devastating consequences for civilians. These cartels wield enormous economic power, often rivaling that of state institutions, through drug production, trafficking, and distribution. Their operations fuel violence, corruption, and instability, undermining the rule of law and compromising government legitimacy.

For both countries, the civilian impact includes a pervasive climate of fear, limited access to justice, and weakened public trust in institutions. The cycle of violence perpetuates economic stagnation, discourages investment, and hampers long-term development.

One of the most influential and notorious drug cartels in Mexico is the Sinaloa Cartel. This organization, established in the late 1980's, is deeply involved in the trafficking of various drugs, such as cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, and fentanyl, primarily targeting the U.S. market. Its members operate with a high level of coordination, employing sophisticated strategies to protect their operations.

Moreover, the cartel maintains extensive networks of corruption, often leveraging connections within the police and military to secure its activities and evade law enforcement efforts, which makes this group remain highly influential in the country and difficult to stop its influence. The cartel's operations are marked by extreme violence, corruption of public officials, and control over smuggling routes, particularly along the U.S.- Mexico border.

Its activities have had devastating impacts on Mexican society, including widespread violence, displacement of communities, and the undermining of institutions through bribery and intimidation.



Picture taken of some members of the Sinaloa Cartel

CASE STUDIES

REvil
CYBERCRIME NETWORKS

REvil, also known as Sodinokibi, is one of the most notorious ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) organizations, infamous for orchestrating high-profile cyberattacks that have disrupted businesses, institutions, and critical infrastructure worldwide. This cybercrime network operates with a sophisticated and decentralized model, often recruiting affiliates to deploy its ransomware in exchange for a share of the profits.

REvil infiltrates digital systems by exploiting vulnerabilities such as zero-day exploits, phishing campaigns, or malicious software updates, gaining unauthorized access to networks and sensitive data. Once inside, they encrypt critical files, rendering systems inoperable, and often exfiltrate sensitive information to use as additional leverage. Their "double extortion" tactic—demanding ransom payments, often in cryptocurrency, to decrypt data while threatening to leak stolen information—places immense pressure on victims to comply.

High-profile attacks attributed to REvil include targeting multinational corporations, healthcare providers, and supply chain operators, causing not only financial losses but also operational paralysis and jeopardizing lives in the process. For example, their ransomware attack on JBS, the world's largest meat processor, temporarily halted operations, impacting food supply chains globally. Similarly, their assault on Kaseya, a major IT solutions provider, disrupted hundreds of companies worldwide. These incidents demonstrate the devastating economic and societal ripple effects of their activities, particularly in critical industries like healthcare and infrastructure, where disruption can be catastrophic.

Governments and private organizations are increasingly focused on combating such cybercrime networks, implementing advanced monitoring systems, threat intelligence sharing, and proactive cybersecurity measures. However, this effort is fraught with challenges, including the need to balance effective threat detection with respecting privacy rights and avoiding the unlawful surveillance of personal communications.

REvil's ability to evade law enforcement for years while demanding multimillion-dollar ransoms underscores the complexity of addressing cybercrime on a global scale and highlights the urgent need for coordinated international action against these sophisticated threat actors.

CASE STUDIES

'Ndrangheta Mafia CORRUPTION IN JUDICIAL SYSTEMS

In many regions, organized crime groups infiltrate the judiciary, undermining justice and fostering a culture of impunity that allows their operations to flourish unchecked. For example, in Mexico, powerful drug cartels have systematically bribed or intimidated judges, prosecutors, and other judicial officials to manipulate legal proceedings in their favor. This infiltration ensures leniency, acquittals, or the dismissal of charges against cartel members, allowing these criminal organizations to expand their influence and maintain control.

Similarly, in Italy, the 'Ndrangheta mafia—a highly organized and secretive criminal syndicate—has long wielded influence over judicial proceedings through corruption, coercion, and collusion with political figures. By strategically embedding themselves within legal systems, these groups evade prosecution, shield their leaders from accountability, and silence whistleblowers or witnesses who threaten their interests.

The impact of such corruption extends beyond shielding criminals; it erodes public trust in the judiciary and disproportionately affects ordinary citizens, particularly the most vulnerable, who are left without reliable access to fair trials or legal recourse. This creates a cycle of injustice, where the rule of law is systematically undermined, fostering inequality and weakening democratic governance.

Over time, the pervasive corruption within judicial institutions not only enables organized crime to thrive but also damages societal cohesion and economic stability, as citizens lose faith in the ability of their governments to protect and enforce justice.



General view from inside the bunker built especially to host the maxi-trial against the 'Ndrangheta in Lamezia Terme (Calabria). EUROPA PRESS

FURTHER RESSOURCES

Sinaloa Cartel – Insight Crime

<https://insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/sinaloa-cartel-profile/>

UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime And Protocols Thereto

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html>

Universal Declaration Of Human Rights

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

International Covenant On Civil And Political Rights

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

Patrick G. Eddington Discusses Safeguarding Civil Liberties – The Rational Egoist

<https://www.cato.org/multimedia/media-highlights-radio/patrick-g-eddington-discusses-safeguarding-civil-liberties>

National Strategy For Countering Domestic Terrorism – Biden Administration

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/15/fact-sheet-national-strategy-for-countering-domestic-terrorism/>

Controlling Organized Crime And Corruption In The Public Sector

https://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/forum/forum3_Art1.pdf

Illegal Wildlife Trafficking – Reuters

[https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/illegal-wildlife-trafficking-is-stubbornly-prevalent-un-report-says-2024-05-13/#:~:text=VIENNA%2C%20May%2013%20\(Reuters\),where%20progress%20had%20been%20made.](https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/illegal-wildlife-trafficking-is-stubbornly-prevalent-un-report-says-2024-05-13/#:~:text=VIENNA%2C%20May%2013%20(Reuters),where%20progress%20had%20been%20made.)

Record Methamphetamine seizures in East, Southeast Asia – AP

<https://apnews.com/article/crystal-methamphetamine-golden-triangle-shan-ketamine-cb5de08da123b150210793a667c0c149>

Colombia Coca Leaf Farming – Reuters

[https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombian-coca-leaf-farming-hit-two-decade-high-2023-un-says-2024-10-18/#:~:text=BOGOTA%2C%20Oct%2018%20\(Reuters\),\(UNODC\)%20found%20on%20Friday.](https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombian-coca-leaf-farming-hit-two-decade-high-2023-un-says-2024-10-18/#:~:text=BOGOTA%2C%20Oct%2018%20(Reuters),(UNODC)%20found%20on%20Friday.)