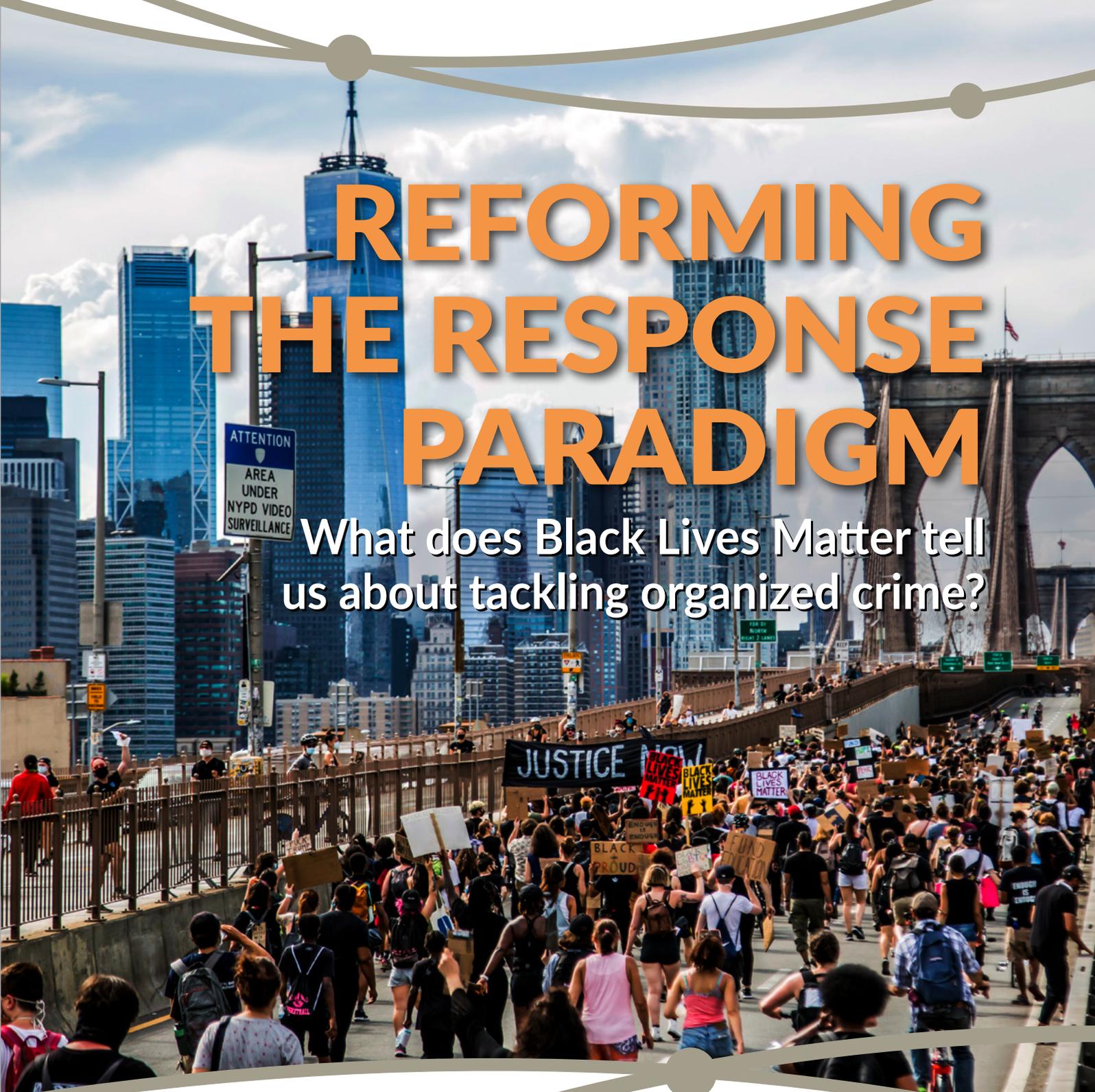


**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

REFORMING THE RESPONSE PARADIGM

What does Black Lives Matter tell us about tackling organized crime?



Summer Walker

SEPTEMBER 2020

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Cover photo: Protestors commemorating Juneteenth in Brooklyn Bridge, New York, as part of nationwide protests against systemic racism in the US. © *Pablo Monsalve/VIEWpress via Getty Images*

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SUMMARY

The current debates about power, use of force and inequality in the US provide a lens to examine responses to transnational organized crime in the context of protests against racism and police brutality. This brief explores how the current debates relate to transnational organized crime; questions how the responses to organized crime play a role in reinforcing systemic inequalities; and offers recommendations for broadening responses that go beyond the law-enforcement paradigm and contribute to a wider social-justice agenda.



INTRODUCTION: A GLOBAL WAVE OF PROTESTS

In the United States, nationwide protests against racism – in the form of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement – and police brutality have marked the broadest and most sustained civil action seen in the country since the 1960s. The protests were sparked by the death of George Floyd at the hands of four Minneapolis police officers.

Floyd's death was by no means an isolated incident. It followed growing media coverage of the March 2020 police killing of emergency medical technician Breonna Taylor in her home in Kentucky and the filmed murder of Ahmaud Arbery in February 2020 by three white men in Georgia. And, although the BLM movement has been growing since the 2013 acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer and the police killing of Michael Brown in 2014, the 2020 protests have taken on a higher level of urgency among a broader segment of the US population.

Before, and during, the protests in the US, the world was in the midst of a public-health and economic crisis brought on by COVID-19, which has exposed fault lines around governance, multilateralism, economic justice and inequality. The pandemic has triggered the largest global economic crisis since World War II.¹ Some 1.6 billion workers in informal economies may lose their livelihoods, and remittances to the Global South have fallen 20 per cent.² Excessive use of force in state security responses to managing quarantines has been widely reported. From South Africa to India to Kenya, there have been reports of beatings and shootings of citizens who break curfew and rubber bullets fired at people waiting in supermarket queues. UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said COVID-19 has created a compound health,

▲
A makeshift memorial for George Floyd, murdered at the hands of four Minneapolis police officers, turned into a symbol for all other Black lives lost at the hands of police.
© Jason Armond/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images



Protestors in Guadalajara, Mexico, demand justice for the killing of construction worker Giovanni López while in police custody. © Ulises Ruiz/AFP via Getty Images

humanitarian and development emergency, exacerbating existing inequalities. 'In advanced economies, we're seeing higher rates of mortality among already marginalized groups. And in developing countries, the crisis will hit vulnerable populations even harder,' said Mohammed.³

What happens in America often reverberates globally. The complex global emergency of COVID-19 has now met waves of uprising around anti-racism, inequality and the systems that perpetuate them. George Floyd-inspired protests have spread across the globe, from London to Tokyo. The issues resonate in many countries where similar dynamics exist. In France, protestors gathered to support BLM and called for justice in the case of the 2016 death of Adama Traoré, a French national of Malian descent, in police custody.⁴ In Mexico, protests over the extrajudicial killing of Giovanni López, also while in police custody, arrested for not wearing a face mask,⁵

were met with police violence, and at least 80 protestors taken by police reported being robbed or beaten while in custody.⁶ In Belgium, protests revolved around the colonial rule of present-day Democratic Republic of Congo, when an estimated 10 million people died during a brutal regime from 1885 to 1908.⁷ These protests and others have opened space for public-policy debates on race, equality and governance – especially in the security sector – that move beyond quick-fix reforms, and pressure policymakers, industry leaders and the average citizen to confront and correct systemic conditions that perpetuate inequality in society.

Many policing tactics deployed in communities around the world derive from policy responses to curb illicit markets. Some of the most persistent and militarized responses in communities are predicated upon fighting transnational organized crime. And these often occur in communities of colour, immigrant neighbourhoods, and marginalized and lower-income areas. In fact, Breonna Taylor was killed during a so-called no-knock raid to find illicit drugs – part of the international response to combating illicit drug markets. Opponents of BLM have attempted to discredit the life and death of George Floyd because he had fentanyl in his system.

These current debates about power, use of force and inequality provide a lens to examine responses to transnational organized crime. This brief uses the concept of illicit markets to examine organized crime as the systems and actors that make up these markets, including the government responses to them. Transnational illicit markets, such as the illicit drug or wildlife trade, connect a wide range of actors – from farmers and fishermen to hitmen and cartel bosses. Organized criminal groups, the most common manifestation of how organized crime is carried out, include cartels, armed militias and gangs. But they can also include members of political parties, corporations, businesses and local governments. By looking at the markets more broadly and then identifying where responses are targeted, one can see how transnational organized-crime responses create their own logic of power and exclusion, and are deployed to manage communities.

This policy brief begins by discussing the current US context of BLM protests, then situates the debate within the transnational organized-crime agenda, and addresses the implications for responses that align with calls for social and economic justice.

The COVID-19 emergency has met worldwide uprisings around anti-racism, inequality and the systems that perpetuate them.



▲
A protestor is arrested in Portland, Oregon. Calls to defund the police in the US reflect a rejection of brutal law-enforcement approaches.
© Nathan Howard/Getty Images

THE AMERICAN PROTESTS

Defund the police

Protests spurred by police brutality, which have been ongoing since the end of May 2020, were immediately met with further police brutality, ranging from police vehicles being driven into crowds to knocking over elderly protestors, with numerous accounts caught on video.⁸ President Trump has been hostile to the protests, posting inflammatory tweets encouraging state violence and calling BLM a symbol of hate. The administration amassed a security detail comprising a number of agencies typically charged with responding to transnational organized crime (including the Department of Homeland Security; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Customs and Border Protection; and the Drug Enforcement Agency) to quash protests with relative impunity in Washington DC and cities like Portland, Oregon, where federal law-enforcement personnel were filmed forcing protestors into unmarked vans without due process.⁹

The rapid escalation of draconian, anti-democratic responses continues to fuel participation in the protests and has shifted the national discourse on police reform, making previously marginalized activism to defund policing in America a key demand and plausible policy option.

Current demands for defunding police in the US have a long history among minority communities. Police reinforced segregation, upholding regimes like the Jim Crow laws from the 1870s to the 1960s, and worked in direct opposition to the Civil Rights Movement. Police brutality and harassment in Black American communities is commonplace, with young Black men 21 times more likely to be shot and killed by police than young white men.¹⁰ The Black Panther Party began in 1966 to patrol and monitor the local police department in Oakland, California, in response to police brutality.

The escalation of anti-democratic responses has shifted the national discourse on police reform, making defunding the police a key demand.

In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander details how America's punitive criminal-justice system and the war on drugs provide the modern-day tactics to perpetuate racial exclusion and discrimination in society.¹¹ After the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, domestic policing became increasingly opaque and targeted at the American Muslim community at large, such as the New York Police Department mass surveillance of Muslim communities.¹² One Pew study finds that 74 per cent of white Americans feel warmly towards law enforcement, whereas only 30 per cent of Black Americans share this view.¹³

As police have been tasked with a growing array of social issues, including school safety, homelessness, drug-overdose response and migration, they have increasingly criminalized Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities and low-income groups.

Police in schools and zero-tolerance policies feed a school-to-prison pipeline where children are sent to juvenile detention centres for minor infractions, increasing the likelihood that they will remain trapped in the criminal-justice system and isolated from opportunities for advancement.

By policing migration, the state increases the presence of officers in immigrant communities. Through tactics like random ID checks and home raids, they instil fear in the community by making everyday activities inherently risky, such as going to work, to the store, or to meet with family. Government-led programmes, such as a citizen academy on immigration enforcement teaching 'defensive tactics, firearms familiarization and targeted arrests, promote criminalizing certain people.¹⁴ In *Carceral Capitalism*, Jackie Wang explores how the police's role in collecting revenue for cities through fines leads to arrest warrants for non-payment. This fosters a 'parasitic relationship' with residents, which makes it 'impossible for residents to actually feel at home in the place where they live', and regulates and limits their daily lives.¹⁵

Calls to defund the police also reflect a growing rejection of the extended reach and power of domestic policing. Expanded policing powers deployed during the US war on terror owe their origins to the war on drugs toolkit, including tactics such as surveillance, pre-dawn raids, no-knock warrants, and stop and frisk. Americans are subjected daily to surveillance by helicopter, drone, Stingray technology and facial-recognition software. Through the 1033 Program, created by President Clinton, police departments were authorized to acquire military equipment, such as mine-resistant and ambush-protected vehicles used in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. An American Civil Liberties Union investigation found that out of 800 special weapons and tactics raids conducted in 2011 and 2012, 67 per cent had been deployed for drug searches.¹⁶ The search for the perpetrators of the 2013 Boston marathon bombing entailed a military takeover of an entire Boston suburb. In 2014, military-outfitted police confronting protestors over the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, showed how military policing can be turned around on its citizens.

As the power and influence of the police has grown, transparency and accountability have shrunk. So, while there is a growing recognition among Americans that law enforcement and the criminal-justice system are instrumentalized to manage and perpetuate class divisions, they also see how it could one day be used against them.



The legacy of white supremacy, deeply embedded in American society, has shaped the law-enforcement treatment of Black Americans such as Jacob Blake, shot in the back by police. © Kerem Yucel/AFP via Getty Images

Challenging racism and white supremacy

The protests have opened far more space to discuss root causes for how law enforcement treats Black Americans and the indelible legacy of white supremacy across American society. The antagonistic stance taken by the Trump administration to minority rights throughout the presidency, and the president's courting of white power supporters, as seen in the 2017 Charlottesville white supremacist rally, have elevated levels of support for reform across America. One poll finds that support for BLM rose from 43 per cent in 2016 to 67 per cent in 2020. Among white respondents, it rose from 40 per cent to 60 per cent, while 60 per cent of support was the lowest rate among Black, Hispanic and Asian groups.¹⁷

Many activists, scholars and artists have reshaped the white supremacy narrative to dispel the myth that white supremacy is only the Klan, neo-Nazis and white-power activists. People are calling for an end to systemic racism, which requires a change in a wide range of policies and systems that perpetuate racial inequality, including in housing, education, banking and criminal justice. Although there is a risk that the elite will seek a cosmetic fix, recent civic mobilization has catalyzed criticism across society – including in local government, the publishing and fashion industries, and education curricula from junior school to tertiary education.

In American policing, white supremacy allows white male mass shooters to be apprehended without harm. It accounts for the conditions outlined above, and the connections between how criminality is defined and maintaining the existing social order. It shapes the way policing occurs across neighbourhoods and within communities, upholding existing dynamics of exclusion and power that are already present in society.



RESPONSES TO TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME: REINFORCING INEQUALITY

▲
Migrants in a detention centre near Tripoli, Libya, in November 2017. Policies to address illicit markets continue to be shaped by post-colonialist dynamics.
© Taha Jawashi/AFP via Getty Images

The frameworks that drive responses to transnational organized crime are developed through multilateral, regional and bilateral cooperation. Colonialism and post-colonialist dynamics still underpin the foundations of many policy frameworks worldwide. It was only in 2015 that the United Nations adopted a universal sustainable-development agenda for all countries, attempting to move beyond the ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ country paradigm.¹⁸ Policies to address illicit markets have also been shaped by this. For instance, the global drug-policy agenda, based on US-driven prohibition and supply reduction, has historically placed responsibility for Western consumption on countries in the Global South to stop production and transit. Bilateral aid from countries like the US to Latin America largely took the form of military equipment and training, leading to decades of violent escalation. In fact, the 2016 UN Special Session on the world drug problem (UNGASS 2016) was called forward three years from 2019 at the request of Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala, who were frustrated by the impacts of the drug response in their countries (largely funded by US bilateral aid) and sought a ‘more humane’ solution.¹⁹

Transnational organized crime is a global concept, yet its impacts are felt locally in communities worldwide. Responses include highly sophisticated investigative work and financial investigations, but also some of the harshest local interventions. Aggressive policing, including militarized responses, is often self-justified by the state's countering of illicit economies, such as migrant smuggling, piracy and illicit drug markets. Mirroring conditions in the US, a drive to combat illicit markets increased the power of law enforcement or the military, while accountability shrunk. The World Wildlife Fund has been accused of hiring armed anti-poaching guards in six countries who committed rights abuses against the local populations, including sexual violence, shootings and deaths in custody.²⁰ In the Philippines, the president's declared war on drugs has led to an estimated unofficial death toll of 20 000 people primarily killed by security forces and armed vigilante groups. In Mexico, 60 000 people have disappeared at the hands of cartels, mafia groups and state security forces since its war on drugs began in 2006.²¹ In 2017, farmers protesting coca eradication in Colombia were killed by army officers.²² In some countries, such as the US and Brazil, enforcement has distinct race dynamics,²³ whereas in others, the communities most impacted may be economically or socially marginalized.

Although the aim of policymakers may be to end illicit markets, this has proven to be a very hard task. Illicit markets coexist with and shift in response to the legal economic order. The actors involved, the products and the market dynamics are sewn up with the world's economies, societies and political systems. If one considers markets in this way, policymakers have given state security agencies and criminal-justice systems the primary responsibility to manage the dynamics of illicit markets in society. And often the way this is done reinforces inequalities within society.

Security agencies have been given the responsibility to manage illicit markets, often reinforcing inequalities within society.

The wide reach of illicit markets

It is well documented that illicit markets operate across socio-economic strata and engage a range of actors. Not only are illicit commodities, such as drugs and trafficked women, taken advantage of across classes, but the functioning of many markets includes crossovers between the illicit and licit worlds.

Global supply chains for commodities such as gold, sold in boutiques around the world, often begin where informal economies dominate and criminal economies intersect, making abuses common, ranging from child and forced labour to human trafficking and coercive control.²⁴ Fish and shellfish caught by illegal unreported and unregulated fishing activity, at times deploying slave labour, move into legal supply chains. The world's biggest beef retailer has been linked to deforestation in the Amazon and to a timber company owner who was arrested for murder and illegally forming a paramilitary.²⁵ Environmental defenders and activists standing in the way of business opportunities are increasingly imprisoned by governments and allegedly assassinated by private security groups, state forces and hitmen.²⁶

Criminal actors and illicit money are deeply embedded in legal economies and political systems. Criminal groups benefit from the lack of transparency in the



Corruption protected at the highest level: former Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich had his jail sentence under corruption charges commuted by President Trump. © Kamil Krzaczynski/AFP via Getty Images

global banking system. In 2012, HSBC paid a US\$1.9 billion fine for failing to prevent Mexican cartels from laundering their proceeds through the bank.²⁷ The Paradise Papers exposé revealed both the offshore techniques for individuals and companies hiding taxable income as well as banking methods to facilitate trans-national organized crime.²⁸ There are widespread reports of governments, political parties and individuals in major institutions participating in illicit markets, and using the power wielded through the state for personal and criminal ends. For instance, the brother of Honduras's president was recently found guilty in a US court for a drug-trafficking conspiracy that allegedly involved payoffs to and support from the government and military. Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, demands harsher drug laws, yet en route to the G20 summit, one of his crew was caught in possession of 80 pounds of cocaine.²⁹

Through corruption, political systems can operate as their own illicit markets, where the politically connected and their business accomplices loot billions from taxpayers. The Gupta family in South Africa received an estimated US\$7 billion from the government of former president Jacob Zuma. Involvement in illicit markets is firmly entrenched across society, and responses play a role in reinforcing power dynamics.



▲
The military are enrolled in a crackdown on drug gangs in the Jacarezinho *favela* in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. © *Apu Gomes/* AFP/Getty Images

THE POWER IMBALANCE IN ORGANIZED-CRIME RESPONSES

International cooperation against transnational organized crime varies according to the market in question. However, across agendas, dismantling illicit economies is an exercise in dismantling power structures. In many ways, current approaches are not doing this, but instead they reinforce power dynamics by managing the system in a particular way. Enforcement centres on lower-income countries and poor communities, where people are less able to resist aggressive state interventions. As investigations or policy debates get closer to the money and power, roadblocks are thrown up. The high-level cases that are uncovered are sensationalized for the very fact that the powerful are rarely held to account. It was only after the Me Too movement and extensive reporting by the *Miami Herald* that well-connected Jeffrey Epstein was eventually criminally charged for extensive sex trafficking. The toleration of criminal behaviour by political and business elites erode the tools that exist to combat illicit markets.

Setting crime agendas is a political calculation, and it is not uncommon for politicians to invoke illicit markets to tap into underlying moral judgements and out-group bias, often based on race and ethnicity. In the US, Trump used rhetoric around migration, drugs and violence to tap into xenophobia to win the 2016 election. Germany's Alternative für Deutschland political party established itself on an anti-migration agenda, fuelled in part by the human-smuggling phenomenon through North Africa. Among politicians, all markets are not equal priorities. For instance, Bolsonaro narrowed in on the drug

trade (where responses disproportionately impact Black Brazilians), while simultaneously encouraging deforestation in the Amazon, including deforestation brought about by illegal logging, mining and farming, which threaten the land and livelihoods of indigenous communities.³⁰

Such priorities can be seen by looking at the statistics. For example, in 2018 in the US, nearly 19 000 people were sentenced in federal courts for drug crimes, whereas prosecutors convicted only 37 corporate criminals who worked at firms with more than 50 employees.³¹ In the US, efforts to counter money laundering are challenged by reduced funding to agencies fighting corporate crime, increasingly close relationships among regulators, politicians and corporate actors, and an administration focused on deregulation.³² According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, as of June 2020, 45.9 per cent of inmates had been convicted for drug offences, but only 0.2 per cent for banking and insurance, counterfeit and embezzlement, and another 0.2 per cent for continuing criminal enterprise.³³ In 2019, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested some 143 000 undocumented migrants and removed more than 267 000,³⁴ whereas Homeland Security Investigations, a bureau within ICE, initiated just over 1 000 investigations into human trafficking and recorded '2,197 arrests, 1,113 indictments, and 691 convictions; 428 victims were identified and assisted'.³⁵ Political calculations set in motion the agendas that lead to these priorities.

It is in the lowest-income, most-marginalized areas where the brunt of enforcement is felt. Enforcement of illicit markets meets the least resistance in settings that are ignored by the more affluent in society, vilified by popular narratives and where people are less empowered to resist – not least because abuses are undocumented or unaddressed. In these areas, the response is often to send in heavily armed police or the military, leading to deaths and arrests, but this often results in little change to criminal markets or the structural factors that create vulnerability in marginalized communities. These are the predominantly Black or immigrant neighbourhoods in the US, the *favelas* in Brazil, the rural coca-growing regions of Colombia, or the more marginalized *banlieues* of Paris. The state-based violence that protestors are currently rallying against occurs in neighbourhoods and villages throughout the world that are neglected, typically low income, with high unemployment and lacking in social services and infrastructure.

Meting out heavy-handed enforcement in areas that are already marginalized criminalizes communities and enables human-rights abuses by the state. Criminalizing low-level involvement in illicit economies creates structural barriers for legal employment, public health, housing, education and social-welfare programmes. It creates an enabling environment for routine violence, harassment, human rights abuses, extra-judicial killings, and a climate of fear and intimidation among communities. Police can also become the handlers and fixers facilitating illicit markets.

Such enforcement also enables the establishment of local criminal governance, further destabilizing communities. Criminal groups exert control through violence, and create social dynamics shaped around obedience and fear – extorting local businesses, forcibly recruiting youth, and trafficking local women and girls. Common characteristics of criminal governance are 'the use and threat of violence; the targeting of women, girls and young people in general; efforts to control economic



To shift current law-enforcement dynamics, greater inclusion of the most impacted communities is needed for smarter response policies.

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activity and resources; and influence over political and judicial recourse for ordinary citizens'.³⁶ These affected communities therefore face violence from both criminal groups involved in the markets and from the government response, further reducing their visibility as actors rather than as victims.

Combating transnational organized crime from outside the policing paradigm

As noted by the GI-TOC, 'the detrimental impact of organized crime is becoming increasingly felt in its capacity to penetrate and compromise states, warp the process of democracy, regulation and the rule of law, violently erode the safety, security and life chances of communities, and degrade the environment'.³⁷ A review by the GI-TOC in 2019 identified a working agenda to address organized crime issues for 79 out of the UN's 102 entities, bodies and agencies.³⁸ This shows that – from work carried out by UN Women to the UN Development Programme – the impacts of organized criminal activity are widespread and call for responses that develop from a number of perspectives.

At the global level, it is time for more sophisticated responses to organized crime: ones that engage a wider range of stakeholders, emerge from within affected communities, and focus on solutions that address the greatest harms to human lives, human rights, social justice and equality. The concept of defunding the police asks stakeholders to consider the efficacy of police raids and tough-on-crime policing, in a global climate where political corruption, corporate malfeasance and high-level transnational organized crime are becoming increasingly untouchable. Do current forms of policing achieve lasting positive results, or has heavy-handed enforcement become a piece of a puzzle that merely serves to preserve the system?

Activists from the US prison-abolition movement call for an end to the so-called prison industrial complex (i.e. prisons, law enforcement and criminal justice) as a dominant model in public safety.³⁹ A petition by the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) suggests that the funding can go 'towards building healthy communities, to the health of our elders and children, to neighbourhood infrastructure, to education, to childcare, to support a vibrant Black future'.⁴⁰ With this paradigm, instead of funding police officers, '[t]he basic principle is that government budgets and "public safety" spending should prioritize housing, employment, community health, education and other vital programs'.⁴¹ A number of cities and municipalities in the US have taken up the call, which are particularly acute given COVID-19 budget shortfalls and the exposed lack of public-health preparedness and funding.

So how might this alternative approach to funding priorities look like in terms of combating transnational organized crime? Many of the underlying concerns mimic issues in the US policy debates, such as impunity, corruption, lack of transparency, excessive use of violence and local legitimacy. While understanding that investigations, intelligence and policing remain a core part of combating transnational organized crime, we need to ask what broader agendas and concepts can nevertheless guide smarter response policies. Solutions call for an expansion in approaches and stronger inclusion of the voices of those most impacted.

It is time for more sophisticated responses to organized crime that address human rights, social justice and equality.

Recommendations for change in the response paradigm

If transnational organized-crime responses are to shift focus and address underlying societal inequalities and advance systemic change, the following areas should be considered:

Tackle corruption. While governments continue to drive anti-crime agendas, citizens around the world have voiced that their key priority is fighting corruption. The UN secretary-general has called 'global mistrust' one of the contemporary critical strategic tensions, stating that too many believe globalization is not working for them, that two out of three people live in a country where inequality has increased and faith in political establishments is declining.⁴² Even before COVID-19, this unrest had spilt over into large protests fuelled by corruption, economic crisis and rising costs of living, in countries such as Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq and Chile. Corruption is a legitimacy crisis for political systems around the world. Governments need to address corruption in politics and business, and confront the growing inequality it fosters, or risk losing their authority to local actors, including criminal and armed groups.

Decriminalize communities. Areas where illicit markets thrive are often deprioritized by government and marginalized. Such communities can be criminalized en masse, through targeting petty offences, heavy policing and harsh sentencing. This reinforces disenfranchisement and further isolates members of the community from larger society. Ending criminal offences being handed down for activities such as personal drug use, migration and others, would lessen the ability of the police to shift people into the criminal-justice system.

Strengthen local resilience. A common oversight in transnational organized crime debates is the power vested in the agency and ingenuity of the communities that are impacted by organized crime. Often, the discussion centres on a specific criminal activity, the criminal actors and the law-enforcement interventions – the communities serving as the photo backdrop for the news story of the next raid. But within such contexts, what is often forgotten is that there are individuals and organizations doing the daily work to support the community, promote well-being and challenge the impacts of organized crime in society. Strong communities are a critical building block for public safety and decreasing local vulnerability.

As noted by the Global Initiative Resilience Fund:

One of the principal challenges of responding to organized crime is the capacity of criminal groups to target and capture those very agents of the state whose mandate it is to prevent and prosecute their operations. Civil society and non-state actors have therefore become critical protagonists in the fight against organized crime, and they also play a role as protectors of the vulnerable in the absence of an effective state response.⁴³

Increase policy inputs by local actors. Greater input from local communities themselves is critical, and, within this framework, there should be a stronger focus, including greater investment, on increasing resilience within communities. If money is moved out of police budgets through defunding, it should go into building safer and more sustainable communities: investing in schools, healthcare, infrastructure, training and innovation labs, and public spaces. Discussions around budgeting priorities should therefore involve a wide cross-section of people from the affected communities, since they have the biggest stake in the stability and prosperity of where they live. These efforts should link to agendas that reinforce positive change, such as women's movements, civic engagement and environmental activism.

Support groups that fight impunity. Illicit markets thrive in silence and in an environment of intimidation. Investigating or confronting organized crime at the local level entails great risk, particularly when criminal, business and political interests overlap. Journalists are critical in the fight against impunity. The importance of a free press and protection of journalists is paramount to combating transnational organized crime. Journalists reporting on organized crime topics face safety and security risks often from two directions: the crime groups and the state. Helping journalists carry out their work in dangerous settings and building networks and support for these efforts are therefore critical.

Consumer activism is often delinked from organized-crime discussions, but they are relevant as a way to counter impunity. Awareness-raising campaigns bring attention to under-reported phenomena – from human trafficking to the illicit wildlife trade.

Assassinations of activists and civil-society actors who oppose organized crime and corrupt dealings are on the rise worldwide. In 2019, Mexico was labelled the most dangerous place to work as a journalist, surpassing Syria.⁴⁴ In many countries, including Colombia, India and the Philippines,⁴⁵ gunmen and assassins are hired to kill indigenous environmental activists. It is critical to document these killings, uphold their work and raise awareness among a global audience.

Engage practitioners from within the system. Law-enforcement and justice systems will continue to be integral in combating transnational organized crime globally. Investigative work, inter-agency cooperation and judicial integrity are all essential components of this. Many within these departments do a highly professional job and are potential partners for opening space from the inside to increase transparency, reduce corruption, and promote anti-racism. These officials have insights into the everyday workings of departments, and often find it difficult to come forward in the face of opposition within a workforce. Building and supporting networks across departments that are working towards reducing impunity, tackling corruption, addressing systemic obstacles and supporting smarter policy frameworks against organized crime will help support more effective responses.

Conclusion

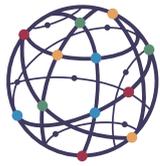
The 2020 protests to support Black lives have struck a nerve across the globe, following upon the COVID-19 health and economic crisis, which highlighted social and racial inequality across countries. In the US, the protests challenge impunity for state violence and the extensive role of police power in society. This is a common refrain across societies where governments respond to illicit markets with harsh law-enforcement and military interventions. In many ways, current approaches reinforce inequality within markets and within society. Enforcement centres on lower-income countries and poor communities, where people are less able to resist aggressive state interventions. This paradigm also diverts attention from addressing how organized crime manifests across socio-economic strata, including in the business sector, government and among average consumers. Responses will require a more varied toolkit if the harms caused by these markets are to be mitigated.

The current debates show how anti-racism and the need to challenge systemic inequality should underpin policy choices. They also ask stakeholders to consider a policy and funding paradigm for organized-crime responses that brings in a diverse range of actors beyond law enforcement. If responses are used to maintain an order that reinforces inequality, the legitimacy of the implementers and the policymakers will suffer. Rather than isolating responses to transnational organized crime from current debates, it is an opportunity for governments to evaluate their agendas and critically assess what smarter, justice-oriented responses should look like.

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