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## **ORGANISED CRIME IN LATIN AMERICA**

Organized crime refers to a group of criminals who work together to commit illegal activities for financial gain and they have some features:

- Structure. These groups have a clear hierarchy, with one leader. This structure allows them to plan complex operations and maintain control over territory and activities.

- Profit Motive: Their primary goal is making money through illegal activities. This can include drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, extortion, human trafficking, swindling, murdering for money and more.

- Long-Term Operations: Unlike petty crime, organized crime groups are ongoing enterprises. They focus on establishing a foothold in a particular area and developing a network of contacts and corrupt officials.

- Use of Violence: Intimidation and violence are often used to maintain control, silence rivals, and enforce their operations. This violence contributes significantly to crime rates in areas where these groups operate.

- Global Reach: Organized crime can be transnational, operating across borders and continents. This makes it a complex challenge for law enforcement agencies.

So, for example, organized crime affects the lives of millions of people in Latin America. It's one of the most violent regions in the world. Despite being home to just 8 percent of the globe's population, the region is responsible for about a third of all global violent deaths annually. [1] It is due to functioning in country armed groups including prison and street gangs, drug-trafficking cartels, smuggling networks, militias, and vigilante groups. Today, these armed groups are present in virtually every country of the region. The most influential criminal organizations in country is Primeiro Comando da Capital and Comando Vermelho. [4]

The Primeiro Comando da Capital is Latin America's biggest drug gang, with a membership of 40,000 lifetime members plus 60,000 "contractors". The group is based in the state of Sao Paulo and is active throughout Brazil, South America, West Africa and Europe. As of now they control over 50% of Brazil's drug exports to Europe. Historically, the PCC has been responsible for several criminal activities such as murders, prison riots, drug trafficking, bank and highway robberies, protection rackets, pimping, kidnappings-for-ransom, money laundering, bribery, loan sharking, and obstruction of justice. [2]

Another one group is Red Command (or Comando Vermelho) - its Brazil's oldest criminal group, created in a Rio de Janeiro prison in the 1970s. The prisoners formed the alliance to protect themselves from prison violence and guard-inflicted brutality; as the group coalesced. It started out with low-level crimes like muggings and bank robberies, but in the 1980s the group moved into the cocaine trade, working with Colombian drug cartels and taking on a social leadership role in many of Rio's marginalized neighborhoods. A defining characteristic of the CV is their willingness to openly engage the state in armed confrontation. They are the second-largest criminal organization in Brazil behind the Primeiro Comando da Capital. Comando Vermelho consist 30,000 members throughout Brazil. The gang continues to engage in drug trafficking, arms trafficking, and turf wars with rival gangs. Notably, in recent years a struggle has intensified between the Comando Vermelho, the Primeiro Comando da Capital, and other rival gangs over control of trade routes and territory in the Amazon region. [3]

The fight against organized crime and criminal organization in Latin America is a continuous effort. While progress is made, the challenges are significant. New approaches that address both the criminal activity and the underlying social issues are crucial for long-term success. [5] The few of them are:

- Street Patrols and Raids: Police conduct patrols in high-crime areas and conduct raids on suspected gang hideouts and drug labs. However, these tactics can be risky and often lead to casualties.

- Investigations: Building strong cases against gang members and leaders through undercover operations and witness protection programs is crucial for long-term impact.

- International Cooperation: Organized crime is transnational, so collaboration between Latin American countries and international law enforcement agencies like Interpol is crucial.

- Social Programs: Investing in education, job opportunities, and community development programs can prevent youth from falling prey to gangs and criminal organizations.

So, the fight against organized crime in Latin America is a multifaceted challenge. A combination of traditional law enforcement, specialized tactics, international cooperation, and addressing the root causes of crime is necessary for sustainable progress.

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