

Organised crime and corruption: the case of the Sicilian mafia

James L. Newell
European Studies Research Institute
University of Salford

j.l.newell@salford.ac.uk

Introduction: two aims

- To the extent that organised crime as popularly understood exists empirically, it only does so by virtue of the *positive* and *active* collaboration of strategically placed actors in the state.
- Under what conditions and how does such collaboration take place?

Introduction

- What, then, *are* popular understandings of ‘organised crime’?
- Do examples empirically exist?
- If so, on what grounds do we suggest that they require the collaboration of the state?
- Four conditions necessary for collaboration.
- How the collaboration takes place.

What, then, *are* popular understandings of ‘organised crime’?

- Large numbers
- Enduring existence
- Sophisticated internal division of labour

Do examples empirically exist?

- Large numbers: 5,000
- Enduring existence: since c. 1860
- Sophisticated internal division of labour:
 - * unified structure with a specific name
 - * families defined on a territorial basis
 - * families' actions coordinated by the 'cupola'

How does the mafia achieve its organisational robustness?

- Secrecy
- Violence
- Rigid rules

But it is not a multi-national enterprise. Why?

- Structural segmentation makes emergence of organisation-wide goals problematic
- Structural segmentation undermines the authority of centralised structures of command
- Coordinated action at the level of the family undermined by the nature of the contract the member stipulates

On what grounds do we suggest that organisations like the mafia require the collaboration of the state?

- Empirically, most crime organisations appear to be: 1) small, 2) ephemeral, 3) unsophisticated.
- The reason for this is the absence of trust arising from the constraints of illegality.

On what grounds....?

- Therefore, if there are organisations that are 1) large, 2) enduring and 3) sophisticated, this can only be because they have overcome the constraints of illegality, purchasing immunity through corruption.
- But corruption is difficult and itself an illegal activity.

On what grounds.....?

- Therefore corruption cannot *on its own* account for organised crime popularly understood.
- And, to the extent that organised crime underpinned by corruption empirically exists, this can only be because the corrupt networks are sufficiently extensive (i.e. the complicity is sufficiently systematic) as to guarantee the necessary on-going immunity

Under what conditions is such complicity forthcoming? 4 conditions

- The state must be weak
- The state must need to call on the criminal organisation for services it cannot supply wholly on its own
- The organisation must enjoy a minimum level of popular legitimacy
- The state must be at least minimally democratic

How – by what mechanisms –
does complicity take place?

- An important mechanism, in the case of Cosa Nostra, is the one through which, with politicians, it exchanges violence and electoral support for politicians' interventions with the judicial authorities

Conclusion

- If accounting for organised crime requires describing the mechanisms through which collaboration of state officials produces immunity, then doing so has the methodological advantage that it conforms to the precept according to which, to ‘explain’ a phenomenon is to describe the underlying mechanisms by which it is linked to its presumed cause

Conclusion

- But it might be argued that this leaves unanswered the question with which we started: i.e. given a lack of trust, how can such mechanisms exist in the first place?
- The problem is revealing of the limitations of ‘rational’ or ‘economic’ accounts of organised crime

Conclusion

- Further research will be needed to in order to establish whether our thesis about the four necessary conditions is applicable to similar organisations in other contexts