

THE POLITICS OF DRUGS AND ILLICIT TRADE IN THE AMERICAS

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Illicit trade has long been a central feature of the political economy of the Americas. Since colonial times, when smuggling flourished as a way to circumvent the rigidities and restrictions on commerce derived from mercantilist imperial policies, illicit commerce has had a profound impact on public security, the configuration of state power, and cross-border relations.

Yet, partly due to a lack of adequate data as well as insufficient comparative and theoretical analysis, scholarship in this area remains uneven and limited. Some prominent illicit cross-border economic activities (most notably drug trafficking) have been subject to extensive analyses, while others (such as the illicit wildlife trade and antiquities smuggling) remain much more obscure. Much of the existing literature on illicit trade is policy driven, single-issue focused, and devoid of comparative-historical perspective. For the most part, the literature does not deeply engage the major theoretical trends and debates in political science. With some notable exceptions, political scientists have arrived late to the study of illicit trade and its political repercussions. This is unfortunate, given that some of the field's central preoccupations, ranging from democracy to development to violence, are intimately intertwined with illicit trade and the domestic and international politics of policing such trade. And nowhere is this more evident than in the Americas.

In this chapter we first briefly sketch the scope and dimensions of illicit trade in the region, and stress the importance of various types of power asymmetries. Drawing on illustrations primarily from drug trafficking (by far the most studied and documented case), we then outline in a very preliminary fashion some of the contributions to political science in general and to the study of Latin American politics in particular that may be derived from a focus on illicit trade. We concentrate on three themes: (1) the relationship between illicit trade and democratic governance; (2) the relationship between illicit trade and organized violence; and (3) the relationship between illicit trade and neoliberalism. We conclude by encouraging more political science interest and attention but also highlight the considerable obstacles and pitfalls of conducting research in this area.

Scope, Dimensions, and Power Asymmetries

The illicit side of cross-border trade in the Americas includes the smuggling of prohibited commodities (such as cocaine and heroin), the smuggling of legal commodities (such as

cigarettes), the black market in stolen commodities (such as intellectual property), and the trafficking in bodies and body parts (migrants, sex workers, babies, endangered species, human organs, animal parts). Some of these illicit trading activities are fairly obscure and minimally policed (the smuggling of rare orchids), some are little more than a law enforcement nuisance (the cross-border trade in stolen vehicles), but others receive intense policy attention and media scrutiny (drug trafficking and migrant smuggling), and still others have clear and direct security implications (most notably arms trafficking). A number of illicit trades also have serious environmental consequences (the smuggling of endangered flora and fauna, the trade in toxic waste, the dumping of chemicals used to process psychoactive substances such as cocaine). Despite their enormous diversity, these illicit trades all share some basic characteristics: they are unauthorized by the sending and/or receiving jurisdiction, and they move across borders via mechanisms designed to evade detection and apprehension.

Illicit trade patterns reflect broader power asymmetries. First and most obviously, illicit trade is an increasingly prominent source of conflict and tension between highly unequal countries—most notably, between the United States and its southern neighbors. Concerns over illicit cross-border economic activities (especially drug trafficking and migrant smuggling) dominate U.S. relations with many Latin American countries, from Mexico to Colombia to Bolivia. In an era of economic liberalization otherwise defined by deregulation and the loosening of controls over cross-border economic exchange, there is a countermove of re-regulation through intensified policing and surveillance of illicit trade.

Some Latin American and Caribbean countries otherwise at the margins of the global economy have a market niche and comparative advantage in illicit trade: black market baby adoptions from Guatemala, migrant workers from Ecuador, and coca/cocaine from Bolivia. Other countries specialize in "transit trade" (Paraguay) and "sex tourism" (Cuba). And still others have a niche in laundering and sheltering illicit financial flows (Cayman Islands, Panama). Many countries in the region are becoming more economically integrated with wealthier countries such as the United States, but it is often the illicit side of the integration process that is most entrepreneurial and responsive to market forces (for example, drugs and migrant workers are two of Mexico's most important exports, but are not formally part of NAFTA). Moreover, remittances from migrant workers (both legal and illegal) have become a leading source of revenue for countries such as the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Mexico.

Illicit trade also reflects much broader economic inequalities in the Americas, which are reinforced by borders and their enforcement. For instance, formally excluded from first world labor markets through the front door, workers from Mexico, Central America, and elsewhere attempt to gain clandestine access to the U.S. labor market through the backdoor by hiring professional smugglers. Some peasant farmers cope with growing economic inequalities by either facilitating illicit trade (such as drug crop cultivation) or by actually becoming objects of the illicit trade (a smuggled migrant). Clandestine entrepreneurs produce, transport, sell, or otherwise enable illicit trade as an alternative ladder of upward socioeconomic mobility where opportunities for advancement in the legal economy may be limited or blocked. And still others attempt to challenge power asymmetries through organized violence—partly aided and sustained through illicit trades ranging from drugs to guns. Some of these conflicts prompt various forms of external involvement, including an influx of military aid and training. For instance, through the U.S.-sponsored international "war on drugs" and the merging of counternarcotics and counterinsurgency, Colombia has become a leading recipient of military assistance.

Power asymmetries also influence which illicit trades are at the top of the region's policing and security agendas. Thus, regulating the illicit antiquities trade (which is especially a concern for source countries such as Peru and Guatemala) is relatively anemic, with wealthy collectors in the United States and other advanced industrialized countries the primary source of black market demand. Similarly, illicit toxic waste exports from north to south receive considerably less law enforcement scrutiny than the export of labor from south to north. The United States has successfully exported its anti-drug agenda and enforcement methods across this region and the world while at the same time obstructing and weakening international initiatives to more forcefully police the illicit trade in small arms.

Indeed, it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that the very history of what trading activities are and are not prohibited in the first place is largely a story of the most powerful countries exporting their criminal law preferences and procedures to weaker countries. Thus, not just illicit trade, but the policing of such trade mirrors broader geopolitical power asymmetries. Importantly, there is also an enormous asymmetry between the power to legally prohibit particular trades and the power to effectively enforce such prohibitions—and at the most basic level, it is this asymmetry that creates the clandestine transnational space within which various illicit trade activities flourish. For example, smuggling opportunities, incentives, methods, and routes are powerfully shaped by asymmetries in policing will, capacities, and priorities. These asymmetries prompt both growing tension and cooperation between highly unequal countries, as evident not only in U.S.–Latin American counternarcotics cooperation but also in a range of other law enforcement issues such as efforts to combat money laundering and human trafficking.

Illicit Trade and Democratic Governance

Illicit trade, most notably drug trafficking, has direct and indirect effects on democratic governance.¹ Corruption associated with illicit trade directly affects the quality of political institutions, drug-related violence undermines public security, and these two factors undermine citizens' trust in democracy. In some cases, the perception that democracy does not deal effectively with crime issues² may foster citizens' support for iron fist or militarized responses to crime that further undermine civil rights and liberties. This has been prominently the case in a number of Central American countries, and is also illustrated by public support of militarized responses to drug trafficking in Mexico.³ Furthermore, in countries such as Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia, coca crop eradication has contributed to political instability and social unrest as many peasant populations depend on coca cultivation. But the relationship between democratic governance and illicit trade also works in the opposite direction, as weak democratic institutions further undermine and complicate the possibilities of effectively curbing illicit trade. Consequently, a closer analysis of illicit trade would broaden significantly our current understanding of the variation in democratic outcomes across the region.

Corruption, and its negative repercussions for accountability and transparency, has arguably constituted one of the main obstacles to the consolidation of Latin American democracies. Those engaged in illicit trade attempt to access the state or parts of it in order to secure the non-enforcement of the law. Simply put, they attempt to buy off the state because they cannot entirely bully or bypass it. Prominent cases such as the involvement of Alberto Fujimori's close advisors with drug traffickers in Peru, the connections between politicians and illicit actors in Colombia, the relations between military officers and traffickers in Guatemala, and the pervasive police corruption and protection traditionally provided by PRI

officials to traffickers in Mexico, constitute only some of the most well known illustrations. Yet, illicit trade is associated with corruption in more diverse and complex ways than is often understood. Corruption has many different manifestations and dynamics. It does not pervade the state to the same extent in all countries and it is entrenched (to different degrees and in different ways) in different branches of government and political institutions. Drug related corruption in Mexico, for example, has evolved in distinct phases depending on the patterns and organization of drug trafficking activities at particular times.⁴ This highlights the dynamic nature of the relation between state and illicit actors, which evolves not only depending on market conditions, but also on institutional and political contexts.

Thus, to fully understand the impact of drug related corruption on Latin American democracies it is necessary to more clearly specify different types and levels of corruption. A crucial question that needs closer scrutiny is how different configurations of state power affect the opportunities and dynamics of corruption. Scholars in Colombia and Mexico suggest that different state structures (a unitary versus a federal state) and patterns of political competition explain variation in relations between state officials and drug traffickers. In their view, political competition in Colombia reduced the capacity of the state to control its relations with drug traffickers, whereas in Mexico due to the PRI hegemony, traffickers were more dependent on politicians.⁵ Although the contrasting image of ultra powerful Colombian traffickers and ultra powerful Mexican politicians may be overstated, it highlights that the organizational structure of the state as well as the dynamics of electoral competition shape the relation between traffickers and state officials in different ways in each country and over time. In Mexico, the democratization process is intuitively associated with shifts in drug trafficking and corruption patterns. In Colombia, the institutional and social transformations that made electoral politics more competitive in the 1980s facilitated, and sometimes were even reinforced by, the entrance of a burgeoning criminal class in politics. Yet, political competition also hindered the possibilities of some prominent drug traffickers to become directly involved in electoral politics.⁶

These complex relations raise troubling questions that remain to be answered: Do criminal actors shape political practices or do political practices determine the incentives of illicit actors? Does democratization increase the opportunities for corruption or does it change its dynamics (rather than its scope) by making corruption less predictable and more fragmented? How do democratic checks and balances affect criminal behavior?

Literature on the dynamics of different regime types and the institutional legacies of dictatorships and armed conflict can further illuminate the complex relation between democratic governance and illicit trade. In Guatemala, the legacies of dictatorship and counterinsurgency made the military a central actor in politics at least until the signing of peace accords in 1996. This powerful institutional legacy may explain why the military has been one of the actors more closely associated with drug-related corruption as reflected not only in the accusations against high ranking military officers but also in the alleged role that former Guatemalan military members, known as Kaibiles, have played in training drug traffickers within and across the U.S.–Mexico border.⁸ By contrast, in neighboring countries such as Nicaragua, where legacies of armed conflict translated into the party system, drug corruption has been more closely related to electoral politics.⁹ Such contrasts require further research.

From a more historical perspective, an interesting but understudied area that relates to the literature on state formation is how interaction with illicit trade has shaped state institutions. Regardless of their effectiveness in combating crime, state institutions have frequently changed and been redesigned in order to carry out their crime-fighting function.

For instance, constant purges and anticorruption campaigns have resulted in the creation and recreation of security and law enforcement agencies in Guatemala and Mexico;¹⁰ and the transformation of militaries in some countries through a greater crime-fighting mission (especially militarized drug enforcement) has profound implications, including for civil-military relations and protection of human rights and civil liberties.

These institutional changes, it should be emphasized, have often been greatly influenced by external pressures and expectations—whether by major powers (most notably the United States),¹¹ or more broadly by global prohibition regimes and the growing internationalization of law enforcement cooperation.¹² This includes, for instance, the proliferation of mutual legal assistance treaties as well as highly contentious extradition agreements. Indeed, the politics of extradition would be an especially fruitful area to explore the relation between external pressures and domestic processes of policy making. Historically, the country where the most extraditions have been conducted is Colombia (and indeed, extradition was a crucial factor in the escalating violence between drug traffickers and the state in the 1980s). In Mexico, although an extradition treaty dates back to 1980, effective extraditions were not a regular practice until 2006 despite the large influence of the United States on Mexican policy. Thus, further research in this understudied realm would help illuminate the contentious politics of extradition, and the variation in timing, frequency, and domestic sensitivity to external pressure.

Finally, the analysis of the relation between democratic governance and illicit trade would benefit from a more systematic analysis and comparison of the social basis of illicit export crop production. This could include, for example, comparing different degrees and types of political mobilization and organization of peasant coca producers¹³—contrast the coca sector in Bolivia and its relatively high level of mobilization (including the election of a former coca producer union leader, Evo Morales, as president of the country) to the more politically marginalized and less organized coca producers in neighboring Peru. A closer comparative analysis of patterns of mobilization can help explain the variation in anti-narcotic policies as well as different degrees of government responsiveness to demands such as the suspension of aerial fumigation of coca crops.¹⁴

Illicit Trade and Organized Violence

Violence, like corruption, is often viewed as an inherent attribute of illicit trade.¹⁵ It is safe to assert that, on the whole, illicit trade is more prone to violence than licit trade. The basic reason for this is that illicit trade operates beyond and outside the law. Participants in illicit trade do not have recourse to the law to enforce contracts—and thus business disputes are more likely to be dealt with by shooting rather than suing. But while violence occurs more commonly in connection with illicit than licit trade, careful examination reveals considerable variation in violence across and within illicit trade sectors, as well as across time and place, requiring more nuanced scrutiny. Illicit trade-related violence is typically selective and instrumental rather than random and gratuitous and victims tend to be other market participants rather than state actors or the general public (and some state actors are targeted because they are actually market participants). Yet, criminals can sometimes target the state—police, prosecutors, judges, politicians. Furthermore, violent acts vary in form, intensity, frequency, and focus, even when targets are market participants. Thus, violence itself needs to be systematically “unpacked” to identify variation across these dimensions.

The link between violence and illicit trade is most evident in the case of drug trafficking, and it is no doubt partly for this reason that the drug trade generates so much public

concern and media and policy attention. Consider, for instance, the wave of drug related violence in Mexico that according to some estimates claimed more than 40,000 lives since 2006.¹⁶ This wave of violence has been facilitated by the increased availability of sophisticated weaponry, grenades, and bombs for trafficking organizations, underscoring a link between the illicit arms trade (with much of the supply originating in the United States) and more deadly forms of violence (though it should be stressed that the availability of arms is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for escalating drug violence). Yet, the disproportionate attention to the most violent aspects of the international drug trade obscures and glosses over some important and interesting variation. For example, far more attention is devoted to cocaine and heroin (relatively high violence) than cannabis and MDMA (comparatively low violence). Furthermore, even within the trade in hard drugs there is striking variation, and beyond the clear violent manifestations there is a more complex and ambiguous reality. Contrast Colombia, which has been plagued by high violence, to Bolivia, which has been characterized by much lower violence¹⁷—yet both are deeply enmeshed in the coca/cocaine trade (Bolivia arguably even more so on a per capita basis). Similarly, consider the variation of violence over time in Mexico, where modern forms of drug trafficking date back to the 1940s, yet until the mid-1990s the market was relatively more peaceful (or more precisely, violence was less visible).¹⁸

Thus we need more research about the conditions under which illicit trade generates violence. It requires differentiating forms and types of violence and addressing questions such as how do prohibitions and their enforcement shape the nature and level of organized violence across illicit trading activities? What are the mechanisms connecting enforcement and violence? What policing and regulatory methods and strategies are least or most likely to inhibit or exacerbate illicit trade-related violence? This question is crucial considering that high-profile police crackdowns can unintentionally fuel more trade-related violence—as some actors are removed, new ones emerge to fill the void and claim market share through violent competition. Considering that excessive violence can be bad for illicit business (since it is disruptive and invites unwanted police and media scrutiny), another key question that emerges is: does violence follow rational motivations? Ideas about the rationality of violence derived from the analysis of civil wars and ethnic conflicts provide a theoretical lens to advance the study of violence related to illicit trade. They show that seemingly irrational forms of violence can be instrumental to maintain influence or compliance when distributions of power become unstable and thus can better explain why illicit actors become more violent when they face internal disputes and external pressure. Finally, considering the wide variety of actors that engage in illicit practices, it is worth exploring how the internal structure and organization of trafficking actors affect the dynamics of violence. Descriptive evidence and insights derived from the analysis of civil wars and terrorism suggests that the size and organization of groups affects the type of violence used. For example, a large centralized organization may be more capable of engaging in violence, yet at the same time may be more able to control individual violent behavior of their members.¹⁹

A more careful consideration of the conditions under which violence emerges also requires paying more attention to less studied geographic areas. Perhaps most strikingly, the tri-border area of Paraguay is the epicenter of a variety of flourishing illicit trade activities given its strategic location, yet has remained far less violent than, say, Colombia or Mexico. Perhaps for this reason, it has largely been overlooked as a focus of study.²⁰

The relationship between insurgents and drug trafficking is a dimension of drug related violence that has been widely studied in Colombia (mainly in relation to the FARC Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and to a lesser extent in Peru (with *Sendero Luminoso*).

While the most common association is that the proceeds from drug trafficking can strengthen armed actors by providing them with a lucrative source of funding, the story is considerably more complex and subject to heated debate. According to the "narco-guerrilla" thesis (which has enjoyed considerable influence in policy circles for several decades), drugs and insurgency are inseparably intertwined and thus should be combated simultaneously and with similar methods. But critics have long questioned the underlying assumptions of this argument as overly simplistic, with counterproductive policy implications.²¹ Recent studies detail the importance of political capital insurgents generate in rural areas by protecting peasant drug producers from government eradication and interdiction efforts—and thus more intensive anti-drug operations perversely plays into the hands of insurgents.²²

The narco-guerrilla thesis also ignores that in many cases armed conflict long precedes the emergence of drug trafficking, as in Colombia, and thus it would be erroneous to simply reduce an insurgency to an interest in drug profits. It also ignores that some armed groups have not become heavily involved in drug trafficking even if they have the opportunity to do so, or that some engage primarily in the cultivation stages while others engage in the whole trafficking chain or in its most profitable stages. In this regard, existing knowledge on the relation between drugs and conflict would be strengthened by a deeper analysis of armed groups that lack of a close connection to drug trafficking such as those in Mexico. By asking more systematically under which conditions armed groups engage in illicit trade we can analyze the impact that ideology, capacities, and transnational connections have in shaping relations between armed groups and illicit business.

Besides financial and social connections, armed groups and traffickers may connect in other ways. Several studies in Colombia have analyzed the historical deep connections between paramilitary groups and drug trafficking.²³ As these studies point out, the story of paramilitary groups is complex and involves many actors and motivations, yet it is clear that drug traffickers played a key role in organizing paramilitary groups as their branch of armed protection in the 1980s. As these groups grew and advanced, they eventually became more autonomous and towards the early 2000s became a crucial player in the Colombian drug trade. This story raises three important questions. First, why traffickers decide to create armed structures that can eventually pose a threat to them by attracting excessive law enforcement and media attention, and by transferring crucial power to individuals who can potentially overpower traffickers? Second, what conditions facilitate the creation of such structures, and how do they evolve and reproduce? Third, how do changes in the security apparatus of the state relate to the creation of these armed structures? A useful comparative case in helping to answer these questions is the Zetas, the armed branch of the Gulf Drug Trafficking Organization in Mexico, formed in 1997 with deserted members of a special military and antiguerrilla force known as GAFES (Special Forces of Aerial Groups).

Finally, the connection between drug trafficking and violence can occur through the engagement of youth gangs. As in the case of armed groups, trafficking activities provide gangs more financial clout while at the same time creating incentives for their proliferation. Yet, in some cases such as those of Central American countries, the connection between gangs, drug trafficking, and violence is not, despite widespread perception, as prevalent as in other cases, like Brazil. As of 2007 the United Nations estimated that about 70,000 gang members existed in Central America alone, mostly in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. Yet, as the same UN report points out, the association between youth gangs, crime, and international trafficking is based on shaky assumptions, such as that gang members are responsible for most homicides in Central America, that diasporas are crucial in providing international connections for gangs when in fact few individuals detained in the

United States for drug trafficking are from Central America, or that drug consumption rates have increased due to growing distribution networks.²⁴ In Brazilian cities, by contrast, the gangs-trafficking-violence connection is clearer as the main drug trafficking actors are youth gangs such as the *Comando Vermelho* in Rio de Janeiro. Yet, even within Brazil, differences between the more concentrated and stable drug markets of Rio de Janeiro and the less organized of Sao Paulo, explain changing gang behaviors and dynamics of violence.²⁵ Thus, even though the origin, organization and emergence of youth gangs constitutes a separate research area on its own, it is worth asking how the violence generated by youth gangs as they engage in drug trafficking is different from that conducted by drug trafficking organizations, why youth gangs become salient in drug trafficking in some places but not in others,²⁶ and why forms of violence vary between those gangs associated with trafficking.

Illicit Trade and Neoliberalism

The spread of neoliberal free market reforms—including the liberalization of trade and finance and privatization of state owned enterprises—have been the focus of considerable research in recent decades.²⁷ Largely overlooked in this political economy literature, however, is how these shifts in the formal economy have interacted with the illicit export economy. For instance, the liberalization of trade and relaxation of trade barriers has had the positive externality of reducing the incentives to smuggle legal commodities. This is quite significant, as evading taxes and other restrictions on legitimate trade has historically been a major motivation to smuggle. At the same time, reducing barriers for licit trade may also have the unintended consequence of facilitating illicit trade. Consider the case of NAFTA. Trade across the U.S.-Mexico border has more than doubled since the mid-1990s, making it increasingly challenging for border authorities to "weed out" illicit goods such as drugs. While simultaneously facilitating legal trade and enforcing laws against illegal trade has always been a frustrating and cumbersome task, it is made all the more difficult by the rapid growth of commercial cargo through already highly congested ports of entry. Further analysis is needed to evaluate both the viability of border interdiction in the context of deepening economic integration, and the impact of tighter border controls on the integration process.

It should be pointed out that trade agreements have also become tangled up in the politics of policing illicit flows. In the campaign for NAFTA, Mexican President Carlos Salinas famously promised that the trade agreement would help Mexico "export tomatoes" instead of "tomato pickers," while he also launched a high-profile anti-drug crackdown to appease and impress Washington critics (even as drug trafficking and related corruption worsened). Likewise, for a number of Andean countries, extensions of trade preferences with the United States have been conditional on the cooperation with anti-narcotics efforts, as in the case of the ATPA (Andean Trade Preference Act) in 1991 and the ATPDEA (Andean Trade Preference and Drug Eradication Act) in 2002.²⁸ Bolivia was excluded from these preferences in 2008 as the Bush administration determined that the country did not meet antinarcotic cooperation agreements. Thus the analysis of the connections between trade liberalization and the politics of policing efforts, and the evolution of these connections over time as trade liberalization schemes shift towards more multilateralism, constitute a promising area of research.²⁹

More research is also needed to determine the extent to which the illicit economy has provided an immediate cushion of sorts for those most negatively affected by the shocks of neoliberal market reforms. For example, in the 1990s, clandestine migration and illicit drug

crop cultivation became more attractive coping mechanisms for Mexican peasants displaced by sweeping agricultural reforms (such as the lifting of government price supports and protections for the traditional ejido system).³⁰ Throughout the region, shifts in prices and dynamics of commerce derived from free trade policies may have created incentives and pressures to turn to the illicit economy. In Peru, some analysts have noted that when prices for agricultural products collapsed in the 1990s, local populations in the valleys around the Ene and Apurimac rivers that grew coca for traditional local consumption, entered the cocaine export economy.³¹ Similarly, in Bolivia the illicit economy may have acted as a cushion for increasing urban unemployment rates derived from economic liberalization in the mid 1980s.³²

Although requiring further study, there have also been some indications that privatization and financial liberalization have unintentionally facilitated investing the proceeds of illicit trade. The Mexican experience again provides a useful illustration. According to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, many of the state-owned companies privatized under the Salinas administration were bought up by drug traffickers.³³ Financial liberalization in the 1990s also apparently enabled narcoinvestment. According to the Economist Financial Intelligence Unit, the liberalization of finance and capital markets in Mexico has facilitated money laundering and narco-investment.³⁴

Finally, another interesting channel through which neoliberal market reforms may have influenced illicit trade is by reconfiguring relations between political and criminal actors. As mentioned above, in Colombia, proceeds from illegal activities expanded criminal influence on electoral politics, sometimes providing emerging politicians with an opportunity to compete and others allowing traditional politicians to maintain their control. In Colombia and other countries like Brazil and Mexico, this process may have been exacerbated by market reforms and deregulation, as these curtailed the availability of public resources for clientelistic exchanges—thus increasing the incentives for politicians to turn to other private and illicit funding sources.³⁵

Conclusions

For the study of illicit trade to gain more traction in political science, scholarship in this area will need to more explicitly and deeply engage larger debates and questions at the center of the field. In this chapter we have provided a brief sketch of just a few of the possibilities here, ranging from issues of democratic governance to organized violence to neoliberalism. To some extent, this is simply a matter of theoretical framing and asking research questions that are most relevant to the discipline. But it also relates to research design, case selection, and methods.

As a starting point, political scientists interested in this area should become more voracious consumers of works in other disciplines. Reading broadly beyond political science is always a good thing, of course, but is an absolute necessity in this particular research domain. This includes works by anthropologists,³⁶ economists,³⁷ sociologists,³⁸ and historians³⁹ working on topics related to illicit trade. A handful of interdisciplinary collections and collaborations also stand out.⁴⁰ There are also a number of more policy-oriented collections that demonstrate the utility of work that not only crosses disciplines but also the policy-academia divide.⁴¹

The field of political science has always been good at “smuggling in” insights and methods from other disciplines (with economics, it seems, particularly fashionable in recent years)—and nowhere would this be more appropriate than in the study of smuggling itself.

This is illustrated by a handful of recent books by political scientists. Michael Kenney, for instance, has applied organizational theory from sociology to help explain organizational adaptation by Colombian trafficking groups in response to pressure from law enforcement.⁴² Peter Andreas has drawn from theatrical metaphors and analogies inspired by the sociologist Erving Goffman to analyze the politics of high-profile border policing campaigns.⁴³ Desmond Arias has utilized micro-level ethnographic methods more common to anthropology in understanding everyday drug trafficking dynamics in the *Favelas* of Rio de Janeiro.⁴⁴ Mixing economics and political science, Ernesto Dal Bó, Pedro Dal Bó, and Rafael Di Tella, have used game theory and formal modeling to derive predictions about interactions between illicit market actors and the state.⁴⁵

Finally, substantial barriers to research should be recognized, with mutually reinforcing practical, professional, and political factors inhibiting scholarship in this area. The most obvious practical constraint, of course, is that studying illicit trade up close can be considerably more risky and even dangerous than studying licit trade (and it can also become an additional hurdle for U.S.-based scholars seeking approval from their university's Institutional Review Board). Related to this is the basic fact that the object of study is usually trying to avoid being observed, counted, and scrutinized. Bad (or non-existent) data is thus the Achilles heel of research on illicit trade. The “large N” studies that are typical in political science are not as viable given the extremely poor quality of the aggregate data (at the same time it should be noted that the common use of bad data related to illicit trade, including its influence on political debates and the policy process, is itself an interesting subject worthy of greater scrutiny).⁴⁶ Professional incentives reinforce these practical concerns. Simply put, the study of illicit trade and efforts to regulate it are by definition considered fringe topics in the field, more the domain of criminologists than of political scientists (despite the fact that “policing” is a core state function and the term has a closely overlapping lineage with “politics”). Last but not least are a number of political obstacles. Not surprisingly, illicit trade is often a politically sensitive topic (as are related concerns such as corruption)—and indeed in the cases of illegal drugs, human trafficking, and migrant smuggling, are considered “hot button” issues. Consequently, the data is not only often bad but highly politicized, and the most relevant state actors may be especially reluctant to talk (or at least talk candidly) and share useful information with researchers. Having said that, the cumulative work to date across many disciplines suggests that the research challenge is far from insurmountable. Moreover, it is these very political obstacles that are an essential part of understanding the politics of illicit trade in the first place and contributes to making this an especially fascinating research area.

Notes

- 1 For a more general discussion of the democratic governance literature, see Part I of this handbook.
- 2 According to the 2009 Latinobarometro survey, only 25 percent of Latin American citizens surveyed consider that democracy effectively protects them from crime.
- 3 At the beginning of President Felipe Calderón's mandate in 2006, 84 percent of the population supported the mobilization of the military in the war against drugs. Three years later, despite opposition in some sectors, surveys show that a significant sector of the population still supports Calderón's militarized strategy. Surveys conducted by Mitošky and Reforma in August 2009 reported a 50 percent approval of the war on drug trafficking, a support rate far higher than support for economic and social policies.
- 4 Peter Lupsha, “Drug Lords and Narco-corruption: the Players Change but the Game Continues,” *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Vol. 16 (1991): 41–58.

- 5 See Luis Astorga, *El Siglo de las Drogas* (Plaza & Janes, 2004); Gustavo Duncan, "Narcotraficantes, mafiosos y guerreros, Historia de una subordinación" in *Narcotráfico en Colombia: Economía y Violencia* (Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, 2005); Carlos Flores, *El Estado en Crisis: Crimen Organizado y Política: Desafíos para la Consolidación Democrática* (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005); Carlos Resa Nestares, *El Estado como Maximizador de Rentas del Crimen Organizado, El Caso del Tráfico de Drogas en México* (Instituto Internacional de Gobernabilidad, Documento No. 88, October 2001); Monica Serrano, "Narcotráfico y Gobernabilidad en México," *Pensamiento Iberoamericano* 1 (2007): 251–278.
- 6 On the relation between criminality and politics, see Francisco Gutierrez, ¿Lo que el viento se llevo? Los Partidos Políticos y la Democracia en Colombia 1958–2002 (Norma 2007) especially Chapter 8; on the political aspirations of drug traffickers see, Alvaro Camacho and Andres Lopez, "From Smugglers to Drug Lords, to Traquetos: Changes in the Colombian Illicit Drug Organizations," in Christopher Welna and Gustavo Gallon, *Peace, Democracy and Human Rights in Colombia* (Notre Dame University Press, 2001), 60–89.
- 7 Snyder and Duran Martínez also demonstrate that this question has implications for patterns of drug-related violence. See Richard Snyder and Angelica Duran Martínez, "Does Illegality Breed Violence? Drug Trafficking and State-Sponsored Protection Rackets," *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (September 2009): 253–274.
- 8 For details on cases involving the Guatemalan military: Frank Smyth, "The Untouchable Narco-State: Guatemala's Army defies DEA," *The Texas Observer*, November 18, 2005. On the role of the military see Susanne Jonas, "Democratization through Peace: The Difficult Case of Guatemala," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (2000): 9–38; Mark Ruhl, "The Guatemalan Military since the Peace Accords: The Fate of Reform under Arzú and Portillo," *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring 2005): 55–85.
- 9 For a discussion of the relation between different institutional configurations in Central America and the extent of drug related corruption see Julie Bunck and Michael Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation: Narcotics Trafficking in Central America* (Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming).
- 10 In Guatemala the replacement of the corruption ridden Department of Antinarcotics Operations (DOAN) by the Servicio Nacional de Información Antinarcóticos (SAIA) is crucial but has not been significantly analyzed. In Mexico, the creation and dismantling of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad DFS is key to understanding state-criminal relations.
- 11 For a more detailed discussion, see Coletta Youngers and Eileen Rosen, eds., *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy* (Lynne Rienner, 2004).
- 12 For a broad introduction, see Peter Andreas and Ethan Nadelmann, *Policing the Globe: Criminalization and Crime Control in International Relations* (Oxford University Press, 2006).
- 13 Such discussion would clearly benefit from the vast literature on social movements, for example, a general discussion of the uneven politicization of indigenous groups in Latin America is particularly illuminating. See Deborah Yashar, "Contesting Citizenship: Indigenous Movements and Democracy in Latin America," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 31, No.1 (Oct 1998): 23–42.
- 14 Attempts by coca growers to delay eradication campaigns have succeeded sometimes and failed in others, especially when groups are internally divided. A nice illustration in the Peruvian case is described by Ursula Durand, "Coca o muerte: the radicalization of the cocalero movement," MA dissertation (University of Oxford, 2005) and Luis Pariona Arana, "En el Centro del Conflicto: Cocaleros, Narcotráfico y Sendero Luminoso en el Alto Huallaga," *Ideele* No. 163 (May 2004); on the mobilization of coca growers in Bolivia, see Benjamin Dangl, *The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia* (AK Press, 2007) especially chapter 2 pp. 36–54; on mobilization in Colombia, see María Clemencia Ramirez "The Politics of Recognition and Citizenship in Putumayo and in the Baja Bota de Cauca: The Case of the 1996 Cocalero Movement" in Boaventura de Sousa, ed., *Democratizing Democracy* (Verson, 2005), 220–256.
- 15 For a more detailed analysis across a range of disciplines, see the special issue of *Crime, Law and Social Change* Vol. 52, No. 3, 2009.
- 16 These statistics mainly capture the so-called "narco-executions." See Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública Base de Datos de Fallecimientos ocurridos por presunta rivalidad delincinencial, and also David Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis from 2001–2009* (Trans-border Institute, Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies. University of San Diego, 2009).

- 17 It is important to note here that in the period 1997–2004 Bolivia faced increased violence associated with militarized responses to coca growers' mobilization in the Chapare region, and also that there have been important variations over time in Colombia.
- 18 Overall homicide rates were on the decline in Mexico between 1990 and 2007 and high numbers of drug related killings reflected the increase in brutal and visible killings such as beheadings and executions but not necessarily an overall increase in levels of violence. The situation changed drastically in 2008 with a spike of 50% in homicide rates. For an interesting discussion of the evolution of homicide in Mexico see Fernando Escalante, *El Homicidio en México entre 1990 y 2007* (El Colegio de México, 2009).
- 19 Just to name two examples, Gianluca Fiorentini and Sam Peltzman analyze how monopolies and large organizations can reduce the level of violence in illicit markets in, *The Economics of Organized Crime* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Wendy Pearlman discusses how internal power dynamics in extremist groups determine the use of violence in the context of peace processes in, "Spoiling Inside and Out: Internal Political Contestation and the Middle East Peace Process," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Winter 2008): 79–109.
- 20 But see, Daniel K. Lewis, *A South American Frontier: The Tri-border Region* (Chelsea House Publications, 2006).
- 21 See, for example, Peter Andreas, Eva Bertram, Morris Blachman, and Kenneth Sharpe, "Dead-End Drug Wars," *Foreign Policy*, Issue 85 (Winter 1991).
- 22 Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs* (Brookings, 2009).
- 23 See for example Mauricio Romero, *Panamilitares y Autodefensas: 1982–2003* (IEPRI, 2003).
- 24 See Crime and Development in Central America: Caught in the Crossfire, (UNODC, May 2007). For an interesting discussion of the evolution of gangs and illicit activities in Managua see Dennis Rodgers, "Living in the Shadow of Death: Gangs, Violence and Social Order in Urban Nicaragua, 1996–2002," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 38 (2006): 267–292.
- 25 For a comparative perspective on Brazilian gangs, see Benjamin Lessing, "As facções cariocas em perspectiva comparativa," *Novos estudos — CEBRAP* No. 80 (March 2008); also Guatacy Mingardi, "Money and the International Drug Trade in Sao Paulo" *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 53, Issue 169 (2001): 379–386. For a focus on the social dimensions of drug trafficking and gangs see Alba Zaluar, "Perverse Integration: Drug Trafficking and Youth in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (2000): 653–671.
- 26 For example in an interesting argument Geffray traces back the salience of Brazilian urban gangs to transformations in drug trafficking along the Bolivian border in the mid 1980s. See Christian Geffray, "Brasil: Drug trafficking in the Federal State of Rondonia," *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 53, Issue 169 (2001): 443–450.
- 27 For a more general discussion, see Corrales in this handbook.
- 28 See June S. Beittel, "Paraguay: Political and Economic Conditions and U.S. Relations" (Congressional Research Service, 2010). For a more detailed discussion of ATPA, see J.F. Hornbeck, *The Andean Trade Preference Act: Background and Issues for Reauthorization* (Congressional Research Service, 2002).
- 29 The use of aid conditionalities to advance U.S. drug control policies and also the failure to effectively make drug assistance conditional on respect for human rights and civil liberties have been analyzed extensively. Yet, there is less discussion about the connections between trade liberalization and drug controls.
- 30 See Drug Enforcement Administration, *The New Agricultural Reform Program and Illicit Cultivation in Mexico*, 14 October 1992, cited in Peter Andreas, "When Policies Collide: Market Reform, Market Prohibition, and the Narcotization of the Mexican Economy," in H. Richard Friman and Peter Andreas, eds., *The Illicit Global Economy and State Power* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 132–133.
- 31 Isaías Rojas, "Peru: Drug Control Policy, Human Rights and Democracy," in Coletta A. Youngers and Eileen Rosen, eds., *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America* (Lynne Rienner, 2005), 185–230.
- 32 See Elena Alvarez, "Economic Development, Restructuring and the Illicit Drug Sector in Bolivia and Peru: Current Policies," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (1995): 125–149.
- 33 Cited in Tim Golden, "Mexican Connection Grows as Cocaine Supplier to U.S.," *New York Times*, 30 July, 1995, A1.

- 34 "Political Outlook: Party Stability," *Economist Intelligence Unit Country Forecast*, 30 May 1995.
- 35 The decline of public resources and their replacement with illegal money in clientelist exchanges was discussed by Christian Geffray in *Globalisation, Drugs and Criminalisation: Final Research Report on Brazil, China, India and Mexico* (UNESCO-MOST and UN-ODCCP, 2002).
- 36 See, for example, the contributors to Josiah Heyman, ed., *States and Illegal Practices* (Berg, 1999).
- 37 See Francisco E. Thoumi, *Illegal Drugs, Economy, and Society in the Andes* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); R.T. Naylor, *Wages of Crime* (Cornell University Press, 2005); Gianluca Fiorentini and Sam Peltzman, eds., *The Economics of Organized Crime* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 38 See Luis Astorga, *Drogas Sin Fronteras* (Grijalbo, 2003); David Spener, *Clandestine Crossings: Migrants and Coyotes on the Texas-Mexico Border* (Cornell University Press, 2009). It should be noted that while there is a substantial sociological literature on the informal economy in Latin America, this literature typically does not include the more transnational and criminalized dimensions of informal economic activity.
- 39 See, for instance, Lance Grahm, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Informal Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Westview, 1997); Steve Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009); David T. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World* (Harvard University Press, 2002).
- 40 See, for example, David Kyle and Ray Koslowski, eds., *Global Human Smuggling* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Willem van Schendel and Itzy Abraham, eds., *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization* (Indiana University Press, 2005), and Paul Gootenberg, ed., *Cocaine: Global Histories* (Routledge, 1999).
- 41 In this regard, see, for example, Tom Farer, ed., *Transnational Crime in the Americas* (Routledge, 1999).
- 42 Michael Kenney, *From Pablo to Osama: Trafficking and Terrorist Networks, Government Bureaucracies, and Competitive Adaptation* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).
- 43 Peter Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide* (Cornell University Press, 2009, 2nd ed.).
- 44 Desmond Arias, *Drugs and Democracy in Rio De Janeiro: Trafficking, Social Networks, and Public Security* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
- 45 Ernesto Dal Bó, Pedro Dal Bó and Rafael Di Tella, "Plata o Plomo?: Bribe and Punishment in a Theory of Political Influence," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 100, No.1 (February 2006): 41-53.
- 46 See Peter Andreas and Kelly M. Greenhill, eds., *Sex, Drugs, and Body Counts: The Politics of Numbers in Global Crime and Conflict* (Cornell University Press, 2010).

PART V

Theories/Methods