

Forum: The International Criminal Police Organisation

Issue: Combating illicit drug networks in Latin America

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Position: Deputy Chair

Introduction:

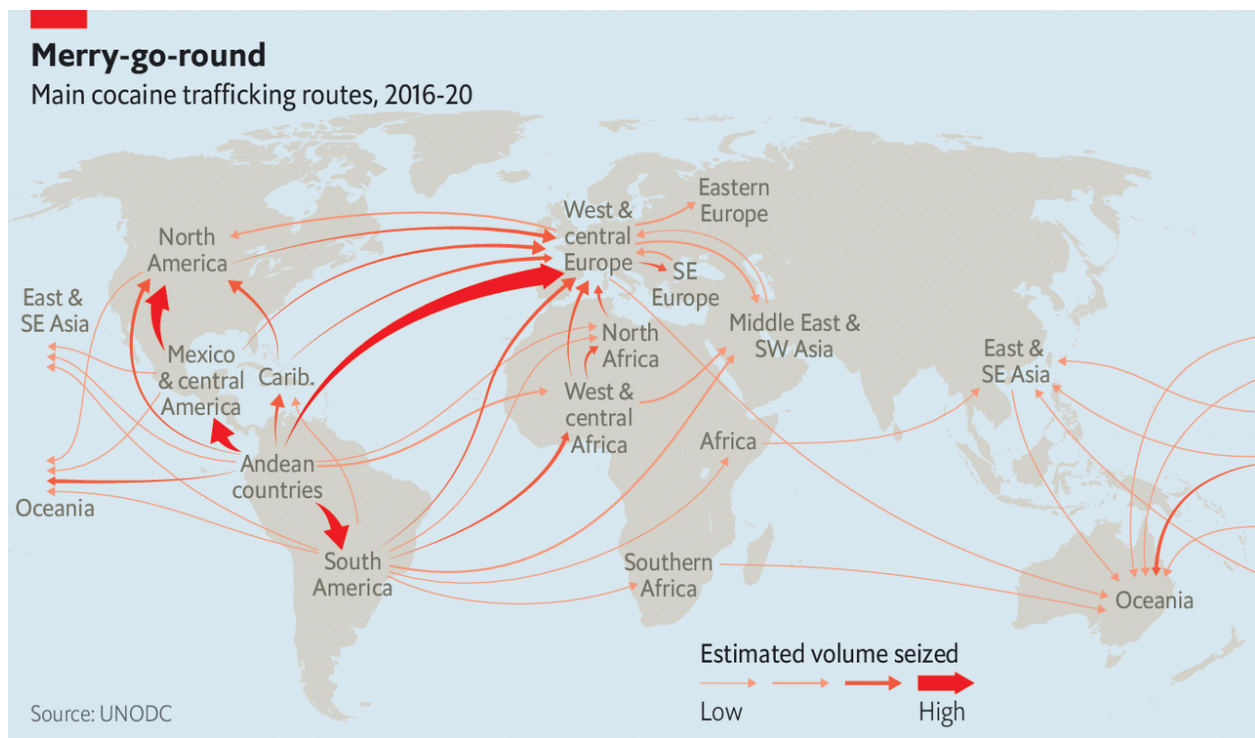
Illicit drug networks within Latin America have been fueling the global recreational drug markets for decades. In countries such as Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Mexico, and Bolivia, drugs including mostly cocaine, marijuana, and methamphetamine, along with other synthetic drugs, are produced, transported, and used rapidly.

The popularity of drug trafficking in the area is due to its geopolitical location as well as social, political, and economic factors. Latin America works as an in-between zone of the other major drug production and export locations; the Golden Triangle region of Southeast Asia, Afghanistan, and the Andean nations, which are a part of Latin America. This means that vast amounts of drug traffickers travel and create business through the area. To add, in Latin America, poverty, and weak/corrupt governments allow for drug cartels and trafficking to thrive. Law enforcement in Latin America is also poor which enables these drug networks. There has been little progress in stopping the booming coca plantations and marijuana plantations, which continue to enrich the supply chain of global drugs.

The popularity of drugs in the area has posed a threat, as the supply exported into the world is taking its toll on powerful countries, such as the United States, Canada, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran. These nations are considered to be amongst the top 10 most 'drug addicted' (the nations which consume the most illicit drugs) countries, according to the World Population review. Narcotics ending up in the hands of consumers and addicts are the primary cause for drug flows, having drugs travel through couriers to the regular civilian.

Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia are where the majority of the world's cocaine is created, and Mexico is where a large portion of the world's marijuana is farmed. Given the transnational nature of the production, transit and consumption of drugs, international cooperation and aid is required to address the problem. As some drug elements are addressed, new and more complex drug trafficking routes have emerged.

The operation of cartels in these locations have posed a nuanced issue in the region. Cartels are essentially the criminal organisations behind drug trade, and use various forms of networks, trade routes, uses of violence, and the black market in order to keep the supply of drugs going. The main threat with cartels are the violence and other illegal activities that go along with them, in order for the drug trade to happen, money laundering, blackmail, hostages, and various other dangerous networks.



The Economist

Fig 1, Diagram of Cocaine trafficking routes globally, The Economist, www.economist.com

Definition of Key Terms:

1. **Coca Plant:** The plant which the recreational drug cocaine is cultivated from. It can also form various other forms of drugs. The plant is native to South/Latin America.
2. **Marijuana:** Marijuana is a drug which is cultivated from the cannabis flower. When taken, it has a psychoactive effect due to the actives in the drug, THC and CBD. It is used both medicinally and recreationally, with contrasting enforcements on its use globally.
3. **Cocaine:** Cocaine is the drug which is cultivated from the coca plant. It is mostly illegal in all states and is only used illicitly and recreationally. It has extreme stimulant capabilities when used and is extremely addictive. It causes many health risks and is responsible for many drug-related deaths.
4. **Andean countries:** Andean countries are located around and beside the Andes mountain range. This location in Western South America, has the perfect geographical capabilities to grow and cultivate coca plants.
5. **Trafficking:** Relating to drugs, trafficking is the global black market of the harvest and supply of recreational and illegal drugs.
6. **Drug Cartels:** Drug cartels are criminal drug organisations which supply and traffick drugs locally and around the world.
7. **Synthetic drugs:** Synthetic drugs are drugs which are made chemically as opposed to being cultivated by a crop or having natural origins. These drugs tend to be significantly more detrimental for health and are usually more addictive. These tend to be the most 'effective' and popular drugs.
8. **Opiates:** Drugs which are cultivated from the opium poppy. Some of which include heroin, some amphetamines, etc. The opium poppy is cultivated mostly in the Middle Eastern and Golden Triangle regions, and fuel the world's opiate networks.

Background Information

How Trafficking in the Region Began

Several factors contribute to the proliferation of drug trafficking in Latin America. Drug trafficking emerged in Latin America in the late 19th century when coca plantations were discovered in Peru. The plant was popularised by travellers, who spread myths about its properties to boost productivity.

In the 1860s, a German University student created the first evidence of cocaine derived from the coca plant after an importation of the coca plant into the country, and 20 years later it began to be used as an anaesthetic for surgery in Germany, followed by the rest of Europe, the United States and later the world.

By the 1890s, there was a fully legal market for cocaine/coca plant production in the Andean region. Coca exportation provided a major economic boost for Peru, along with the other exporting nations. By the 1900s, the US recognized that there were issues using cocaine and the impact on health. The Harrison Act in 1914 was the first step in prohibiting cocaine nation-wide, it being banned six years later, and the rest of the world followed in their footsteps.

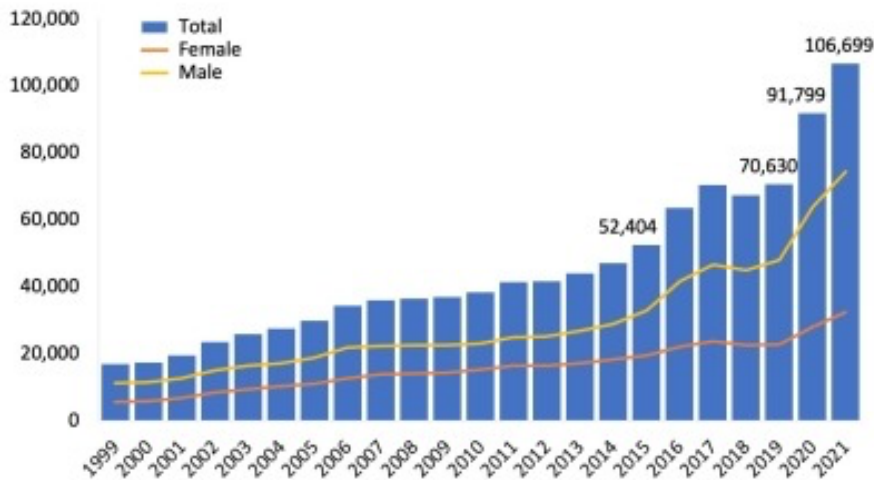
Although it became illegal, the demand to use the drug recreationally continued to increase. This is what started the illegal drug networks, which now spread drugs including cocaine, marijuana, and now synthetic drugs.

The Networks/Trafficking Explained

In the 1940s, the United Nations were implementing many regulations and international laws against the cultivation and trade of illegal drugs. These mainly included regulations against coca trade as well as creation of cocaine. There were also smaller regulations against marijuana, however they were not enforced as thoroughly as cocaine.

All of these restrictions increased the demand and value of the drugs, and many in Latin America saw this as an opportunity to increase the prices and sell the drugs illegally. These restrictions are even stricter today, and therefore the profit opportunity is much greater than it was 100 years ago. The issue with this trade both then and now is the crime associated in circling the drugs around. The illegal export of drugs depends on money laundering, human trafficking, and corruption. Also, many other illicit products are transported through the same networks as drugs, which means that there is a lot of crime associated. Drug trafficking therefore has a great impact on the social fabric of society in countries of origin, transit and destination.

Figure 1. National Drug-Involved Overdose Deaths*, Number Among All Ages, by Gender, 1999-2021



*Includes deaths with underlying causes of unintentional drug poisoning (X40–X44), suicide drug poisoning (X60–X64), homicide drug poisoning (X85), or drug poisoning of undetermined intent (Y10–Y14), as coded in the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Multiple Cause of Death 1999–2021 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released 1/2023.

Why Latin America?

Latin America accounts for the largest proportion of the world's drug supply globally, and there are many reasons why. Start with geographical factors. In the Andes, the altitudes are high, which is where coca plantations thrive. It is also native to Latin America and only really grows there naturally. Marijuana is mass-grown in Mexico and some other regions of Latin America, as they have appropriate climate and soil for it to thrive. Also, in most nations in Latin America, governments have traditionally been unstable with either weak or corrupt law enforcement, meaning that traffickers and cultivation of the drugs remains prevalent. There is also widespread poverty in Latin America, therefore it is a place where crime and networking can take place. Many drug cartels often meet up in Latin America and use the routes due to the lack of police enforcement and the enabling environment.

Current Situation

Current Issues Linked to the Trafficking

Access to the Drugs and Their Supply Chain

As of now, there are many issues which are linked to the networking and trafficking of drugs in South and Latin America. The main issue of drug networks in Latin America is its supply chain and who the drugs end up reaching. Regular civilians globally can quite easily gain access to any of these illicit products, and can ruin their lives and fall into addiction.

Addiction

According to Interpol, they are the “victims of a powerful and manipulative system”. Addiction means that a person has an unhealthy reliance on a drug, and to be consistently using drugs such as cocaine and amphetamines can be extremely harmful to physical and mental health.

Social Degradation

The illegal nature of drug trafficking also impacts the social fabric in countries of origin, transit and destination as its trade depends on money laundering, blackmail, corruption, and violence. The trade routes used are shared with those of other illicit and ‘black market’ products, which are often linked to human trafficking.

Fig 2, National Drug-Involved Overdose Deaths, nida.nih.gov

Political Corruption

Finally, drug networks in Latin America undermine the political establishment. Drug cartels and networks have become increasingly powerful and governments have shown little success or political will in addressing the issue head on. Attempts to take measures have thus far failed, which has led to increasing criticism of Latin American governments and their ability to deal with drug trafficking. Meanwhile, Latin American countries often maintain that the problem of drug trafficking cannot be addressed without countries like the US and the United Kingdom addressing the demand for drugs within their own countries.

Varying Factors Which Make Stopping Networks Challenging

Economical

Currently, there are a plethora of factors which make finding a solution extremely difficult. Firstly, for Latin America, the drug markets are a huge source of income for the economy, which makes it difficult for Latin American states to take full action against it. To add, under strict bans, the demand for drug cultivation grows higher, and traffickers see it as an opportunity to make more money, therefore boosting the nation's national economies.

Socio-Economic (Employment)

Also, throughout the supply chain, are workers who will lose jobs and become unemployed in the process of cleansing the networks. This means that poverty rates would soar, and without proper re-employment strategies, it could create dire impacts on Latin American lives and economies. These workers include farmers, producers, couriers, etc.

Environmental

To add, there are vast amounts of farmlands of these products (coca plants, marijuana, etc.) which would turn into wastelands if there was a prohibition on cultivating the crops. Also, drugs are generally a very popular product globally, so even if there are bans, individuals will still find ways to create drugs. Considering Latin America is relatively rural, there would be many farms that could be created under the noses of governments.

Fig 3, Coca Plantations in Colombia, www.wsj.com



Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The UNODC

The UNODC is the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and they focus on both preventing drugs from effective people globally, along with informing people on drugs and crime. They are extremely involved in this issue as they centralise on spreading information, especially online, providing online resources to the public. They have many statistics and reports which they share online about countless issues, but also specifically have resources on Latin American drug networks and how they impact the world. They have also helped with a lot of drug and crime control, and since they are connected to the UN, there have been many UNODC-aided seizures of drugs in Latin America. They play an important role in this issue due to their ability to take control.

Interpol

Interpol is the International Criminal Police Organisation, and is thoroughly involved in this issue due to their presence in stopping drug flow in Latin America. They have the utmost jurisdiction over its members and hold immense power. Interpol deals with international crime, and since the prevalence of crime and trafficking is high in Latin America, they have seized countless amounts of drugs, and arrested traffickers. They have also been known to disrupt and investigate stages of the supply chain to help prevent the spread of these drugs. In the past, 15 different countries have been a part of Interpol's investigations. Interpol has the action to make change and is incredibly powerful. They have

Andean Nations (Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia)

The Andean Nations are especially involved in this issue as this is where most of the trafficking, cultivation, and production of drugs happens in Latin America specific to cocaine and amphetamines. They are struggling with this issue, and as times change, the more variations of drugs there are, and with that it becomes more challenging to counter every single drug in the area. The Andean Nations have not been taking avid action to stop their drug networks, and therefore leaving it up to the hands of other nations and organisations to help. They acknowledge the issues yet are aware that drug networks are fueling their employment and economy, hence why they are refraining from dealing with the issue from the root. Furthermore, the law

enforcement in these nations is exceptionally poor, and haven't seen any major changes as drug addiction and networks have grown worse. A few reasons for this include general inertia (not much motivation to change law and enforcement), hesitance to give up a major source of revenue, and the possible social impacts of implementing harsher punishments. To add, a large portion of drug trafficking is out of the governments' control, as the majority of the money and trade which occurs are undeclared and difficult to detect.

Mexico

Mexico is heavily involved in this issue as they are responsible for the majority of the marijuana dispersed into Northern America. Marijuana is a booming business in Mexico, and it is fully legal, although many countries which supply it have extremely strict laws on cannabis use and imports. Mexico also enables travel into northern America from the Andean Nations, allowing trade routes and drugs to flow smoothly.

The United Kingdom, United States, Iran, Russia (TOGETHER)

Although these nations have contrasting views politically, regarding drugs they are in the same position of involvement. These nations are amongst the top 10 most 'drug addicted', meaning that many of their residents are users of drugs, fueling the supply chain in Latin America. These nations want to reduce their number of addicts, and by aiding in seizures and investigations (through their inter-governmental organisations), they reduce the amount of drugs leaving Latin America.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

There has been a lot of past UN involvement in this issue. Firstly, in UNODC, the entire website is dedicated to the prevention of drugs and crime, and they have many resources to aid in seizures and investigations. They are the primary international organisation dedicated to drug networks and trafficking. They have had many meetings specific to drugs in Latin America and resolutions.

- South American Agreement on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances : Argentina, Brazil and the United States of America, 19 Feb 1979, Held in Geneva at the UN. **(E/CN.7/L.467)**
- Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2019, International cooperation to address and counter the world drug problem, **(A/RES/74/178)**
- The Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Promotion of measures to target new psychoactive substances and amphetamine-type stimulants **(Resolution 59/8)**

There are similar resolutions in the UNODC and UN libraries, however there aren't any which target Latin American networks. All the above resolutions are ones which would generally impact the area, however it is evident that there should be action taken.

Possible Solutions

- Imposing a tax on coca cultivation and marijuana cultivation throughout Latin America
 - This would help to reduce the amount of plants cultivated, however it wouldn't stop trafficking
- Legalising all drugs and cultivation within Latin America
 - This is **extremely** controversial, however this will allow for less violence and secretive black market trade (would only benefit Latin America)
- Tightening border security
 - This will ensure that less drugs leave the borders
- Developing frameworks for collaboration between various drug enforcement organisations
 - Holding partnerships and joint actions between Interpol and other organisations such as UNODC, or INCB will allow for more power and resources in order to drive away drug trade
- Stricter enforcement of previous laws
 - This will help deter and put pressure on traffickers and couriers
- Increasing addiction rehabilitation
 - This will help reduce the demand for drugs
- Increasing Investigations and Stationing Police at Known Trade Routes

- This could mean organising 'surprise' attacks and launching seizures when drug traffickers least expect
 - Government-Replacement Crops
 - To help unemployed farmers get new jobs in the event of being caught.
 - Re-employment Plans
 - Reemployment opportunities in Latin America for farmers or various other workers to drive manpower away from drug cultivation
 - Bettering working conditions for police
 - This will ensure that police feel motivated to enforce the laws, and will therefore act with less corruption and be less susceptible to bribes or blackmail.
 - This will also ensure that drug traffickers are actually caught instead of being let go
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Useful Links

Hezbollah's involvement in Latin American trade: [Link](#)

UNODC Introduction to Latin American, Caribbean, and Mexican Drug Trafficking: [Link](#)

A Recent Seizure of Drugs in a Latin American Operation: [Link](#)

Information on Cocaine Production: [Link](#)

Information on how Latin American Drug Trafficking is Changing: [Link](#)

The Cannabis Industry in Mexico: [Link](#)

Introduction to Drug Trafficking: [Link](#)

Interpol's Role in Drug Trafficking Networks: [Link](#)

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