Crime, Violence, and Illicit Economies in Regional and Global Perspective

Peter Andreas


When it comes to interest in the illicit underworld of traffickers, gangs, and other nonstate criminal actors, it is fair to say that journalists, pundits, and Hollywood filmmakers have been way ahead of social scientists (especially political scientists). But that has been changing, with a noticeable spike in books published in recent years by leading academic presses on topics ranging from drug smuggling and clandestine migration to criminal governance of borderlands, neighborhoods, and prisons.1

This essay reviews four of the most recent contributions to the rapidly growing social science literature in this area. Two of the books are by political scientists and two are by criminologists—disciplines that traditionally have had relatively little interaction but increasingly intersect on issues of crime and crime control. Three of the four are Latin America specialists. Together they cover a lot of ground, providing both regional and global perspectives. While all of the authors have overlapping interests in crime and illicit economies, they tackle different questions, take different approaches, and provide distinct answers. All offer deeply depressing accounts, with one even suggesting that the very fate of the planet is at stake.

Latin America as the Murder Capital of the World

Violent crime generates the most media attention and captures headlines: As the saying goes, “if it bleeds it leads.” To some extent, the same is true in academia. Much of the rise in academic interest in issues of crime and public security in Latin America in recent years can be attributed to the extraordinary high levels of criminal violence that has afflicted the region. Indeed, by the first decade of the twenty-first century, Latin America had become the murder capital of the world, with more than two million violent deaths since the year 2000—a number far exceeding the approximately 900,000 killed in the wars in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan combined. With only 8% of the world’s population, approximately a third of all murders take place there. Most strikingly, the world’s top 10 most violent cities are all in Latin America.2 To make matters worse, Latin America leads the world in not only violent crime but also crime in general. What explains these startling numbers? Why has the region become so extraordinarily criminogenic? The three Latin America–focused books reviewed here try to provide some of the answers.

In More Money, More Crime, criminologist Marcelo Berman offers by far the most ambitious account. Drawing on large-scale data sets, including surveys from inmates and victims, he attempts to develop a comprehensive, generalizable explanation for the rise of all types of crime across the entire region during the past two decades. Bergman’s argument is that rising prosperity during this period has brought with it a growing demand for illicit goods provided by illegal racketeers. And this prosperity-driven crime has thrived especially in those places with poorly functioning criminal justice institutions and anemic respect for the rule of law.
This argument is only partially persuasive. On the persuasive side, the case study of the illicit market in stolen car parts is both fascinating and convincing. A growing consumer class has included many more drivers and vehicles on the road; the number of vehicles in Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina increased by at least 50% in the 1990s alone. One consequence has been booming demand for a secondary market for bargain-priced car parts, creating a niche for illicit entrepreneurs who specialize in stealing cars and cannibalizing them for their parts. Other growth areas in property crimes, such as stolen cellphones and computers, have also reflected rising demand for illicit goods in an increasingly consumer-oriented society. In short, prosperity has unintentionally fueled criminality. This is an intriguing argument, drawing attention to more mundane crimes that attract less attention than violent crime.

It is not at all clear how much of the crime afflicting the region is prosperity driven, however. And especially when it comes to violent crime, which is arguably the leading concern in much of Latin America, the argument is on weaker empirical footing. For instance, with almost all of the region’s illicit drug supply exported to the United States and Europe, it is hard to argue that the extraordinary amount of crime and violence generated by the drug trade is driven by growing prosperity in the region. Sure, some Latin American countries, most notably Brazil, have grown as drug consumers in their own right, but this still represents a very modest percentage of overall drug demand. And it is much less evident how a variety of serious predatory crimes, such as kidnapping for ransom (with Mexico, Brazil, and Venezuela three of the top five in the world) and extortion by gangs, have been driven by prosperity-fueled demand for illicit goods. It is also problematic for the argument that some of the highest crime rates in the region are in places that have certainly not experienced much prosperity in recent years—an imploding Venezuela, in particular, comes to mind.

To be fair, Bergman goes to considerable lengths to qualify his argument. He opens with a big and attention-grabbing causal claim—captured in the very title of the book, “more money, more crime”—but then spends much of the rest of the book introducing caveats and qualifiers. As sensible as these moves are, they also create a much messier and more difficult-to-decipher account, meaning that the book ends up delivering less than advertised. Indeed, some of the highest crime rates in the region are in places that have certainly not experienced much prosperity in recent years—an imploding Venezuela, in particular, comes to mind.

In the end, Bergman arguably bites off more than he can reasonably be expected to chew, yet at the same time he certainly succeeds in drawing much-needed attention to an enormously important problem that clearly needs more chewing. Unfortunately, that task is made all the more difficult by the poor quality and unevenness of the available data. He has done an admirable job of compiling the data, generating a wealth of new data, and putting it in one place, but this does not solve the problem of how best to ingest it, let alone digest it with confident results.

The Drug Wars in Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil

Compared to Bergman, political scientist Benjamin Lessing offers a more persuasive and carefully crafted—but also more modest—argument in Making Peace in Drug Wars. He does not overclaim. He is not interested in explaining the surge in crime in general, or even criminal violence in particular, but rather a subcategory of drug-related criminal violence: drug violence directed at the state. This has been the source of some of the most spectacular violence in the region since the drug wars heated up in the 1980s, with the targets ranging from cops to judges to presidential candidates. But as Lessing himself readily admits, most drug violence is actually directed at others within the drug trade, not at the state. Bracketing such within-trade violence (the main limiting scope condition of the book) not only limits the explanatory power of the argument but also greatly restricts the plausible universe of cases to which it can be applied. Indeed, his three cases—Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia—are not only the only cases of intense state-directed drug violence in Latin America; they are the only cases in the entire world. The Pablo Escobars who declare war on the state are an extreme exception to the rule. For the most part, traffickers seek to bypass and buy off the state rather than bully it.

So, what explains these rare but hugely consequential bullying cases where heavily armed traffickers violently confront the state? This is Lessing’s main question. His answer, based on considerable fieldwork and dozens of interviews with key actors, is that when states engage in brute-force crackdowns (as is the case in present-day Mexico and Brazil, and was the case in Colombia starting in the early 1980s), trafficking organizations have an incentive to respond in kind. And this, in turn, fuels an escalatory and increasingly militarized dynamic of more crackdowns and more violent trafficker responses. In instances where state repression has been more conditional on trafficker behavior, traffickers have had an incentive to reduce violence, but for logistical and political reasons,
conditional repression policies have proven fragile and hard to maintain. This was most evident in Rio de Janeiro’s late 2000s “pacification” strategy, which for a time greatly reduced violence in the city’s sprawling favelas, but proved unsustainable. Lessing teases out variation across his three cases and within them over time. In the case of Mexico, he almost succeeds in making one nostalgic for the heyday of rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in the twentieth century, which for decades managed a conditional repression strategy that tolerated massive corruption but also kept a lid on drug violence.

One peculiarity with Lessing’s case selection is that the Brazil case is actually a city (Rio de Janeiro), whereas his other two cases are countries. The rationale is explained well enough up front, but some awkwardness in the research design is inevitable (and inevitably provokes questions, such as why Brazilian drug gangs confront the state with violence in the favelas of Rio but apparently less so in Sao Paulo and elsewhere in the country). A smaller issue is that in an effort to develop a general theory of “cartel-state conflict” that travels across his three cases, Lessing uses the term “cartel” in the Brazil case, even though no one there actually uses it. And, strictly speaking, the major drug trafficking organizations in Colombia and Mexico, which have no Brazilian counterpart, also do not actually fit the definition of an economic cartel that engages in collusive price fixing. Although commonly used, the term is controversial and misleading, helping to perpetuate many myths and misconceptions that date back to sensationalistic media coverage in the 1980s. This is all acknowledged by the author in a long early footnote (p. 2), but the concern lingers throughout the book.

Making Peace also has a lot of fancy extra packaging. Some of the charts and graphs are needlessly difficult to decipher. And it is not always evident that the elaborate formal model, which Lessing devotes an entire chapter to developing, adds value to the book. After all, the argument is clear enough, and persuasive enough, without it. Many readers will simply skip over Chapter 4. There is a considerable buildup here—one does not even get to the main cases until Chapter 5. One hopes that this does not dampen the book’s cross-disciplinary reach or reach outside the confines of academia.

Such extended reach is not Lessing’s main aim, however. For the narrower target audience within the political science subfield of comparative politics, the book will get the attention it deserves. Citing Lessing when writing about drug wars in Latin America will likely become as standard as citing Stathis Kalyvas’s The Logic of Violence when writing about civil wars. And indeed, the book seems at least partly inspired by Kalyvas. The title could have easily been “the logic of drug violence” (even though, as previously noted, Lessing addresses only one subcategory of drug violence). Studying drugs and drug violence, whether in Latin America or elsewhere, has long been a marginal topic in political science—left to those more interested in policy debates than disciplinary debates—but Lessing is part of a new generation of scholars leading the way in changing all that.

In his conclusion, Lessing reminds us of Charles Tilly’s famous argument that war making and state making went hand in hand in the rise of the modern state: “states made war and war made states.” Extending this interactive dynamic to militarized antidrug crackdowns in Latin America today, Lessing provocatively asks whether one can also say that “states make drug war and drug war makes states.” He also rightly points out that this necessarily prompts questions about what type of state is being built up. As he warns, “One danger is that drug wars may lead to an over-strengthening of certain state actors, creating entrenched stakeholders with excessive authority and discretion, who are resistant to necessary adjustments of policy once drug violence has abated” (pp. 280–81). He also reminds us that a key and often overlooked part of Tilly’s argument is that the state, operating as a protection racket, can create the very security threat it then provides protection against. Although not what Tilly had in mind, this can be extended to the drug war: The state act of criminalizing drugs creates the threat—by sharply inflating drug profits and driving the business underground into the hands of heavily armed criminals—and this, in turn, provides the rationale to respond with an increasingly militarized drug war. And since the eliminated traffickers and seized drugs (the “body counts”) are easily replaced, and politicians and bureaucrats have powerful incentives to persist and escalate rather than reevaluate, the drug war grinds on.

Gangs and Traffickers in Central America

In Homicidal Ecologies, political scientist Deborah Yashar turns our attention to violence-plagued Central America, which has received far less attention than the cases examined by Lessing. Although at first glance one might anticipate overlap between the two books, they are actually more different than similar. Not only do they look at different cases in different parts of Latin America, but they also tackle different questions: Lessing asks why and when drug traffickers violently challenge the state. Yashar asks why homicide levels surged and why they have varied so much across and within cases. Yashar’s book is more ambitious and tackles a broader and more complex question, but partly for this reason is also less tightly argued and empirically conclusive.

The core of this book is a comparison of three Central American countries representing divergent cases (Guatemala and El Salvador as high-violence cases, and Nicaragua as a lower-violence case). The introductory framing chapters and the brief extensions in the conclusion
suggest, but do not develop in detail, the broader regionwide generalizability of the argument. In terms of unpacking illicit economic activities, the book focuses mostly on local-level extortion rackets by rival urban-based gangs, and the transit trade of U.S.-bound cocaine by rival trafficking organizations. These two dominant types of criminal economic activity intersect but are largely distinct, both in their behavior and the actors involved. Indeed, it should be noted that most analysts tend to focus on one or the other of these activities, and Yashar is therefore exceptional in trying to integrate them into one argument. It is rare to find a book in comparative politics that equally combines both local-level and transnational dynamics, and Yashar is unusually sensitive to the importance of analyzing them together.

Yashar opens with a personal confession: She actually meant to write a different book, but when she traveled to Central America to begin her research more than a decade ago, she could not help but be stunned and overwhelmed by the sheer number of homicides. Compelled to try to make sense of the carnage, she adjusted her research agenda accordingly. The topic is not only gruesome but also enormously complicated and difficult to study.

Indeed, even figuring out what the actual homicide rates are within and across countries, and the trends over time, turns out to be a formidable task. Yashar and her team of researchers have done the painstaking work of scouring every possible source to provide as complete a picture as possible, presenting the data in numerous tables and figures. The data are uneven, and sometimes confusing and contradictory: Homicide rates in El Salvador decline in 2012–13 in Table 1.2 (p. 22) but soar to record highs in Figure 6.1 (p. 210). El Salvador’s homicide rates are listed as not available in Table 1.2 but are then listed in Figure 6.1.

In trying to decipher the high levels of violence, Yashar carefully and systematically reviews the scholarly literature—focusing on variables ranging from democratization and demographic trends to ethnic cleavages, access to arms, and legacies of military rule and civil war—and finds that they provide important clues but ultimately fall short. She then develops her own explanation for the startling increase in homicides, focusing on three interrelated factors: the shifting geography of illicit trade, variation in state capacity, and territorial competition among organizations (which she finds to be the most proximate mechanism explaining where and why homicides increase—the greater the competition, the greater the violence). In their deadliest form, these three factors come together in what she calls “homicidal ecologies,” defined as subnational areas most prone to violence.

Parts of this argument will be familiar to those who follow the drug literature closely. For instance, the U.S. interdiction-induced geographic shift of cocaine trafficking routes from the Caribbean to Central America and Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s (a crucial part of Yashar’s first factor) and the competitive organizational scramble that this unleashed for control over new cocaine transit territory (a crucial part of her third factor) are detailed in many accounts of the transformation of the Latin American cocaine trade in recent decades. Yashar draws on and frequently quotes at length (often in long block quotes) much of this literature in her empirical chapters, but does not engage it up front in her survey of existing explanations. In a footnote (p. 119), she acknowledges the close overlap between her argument and a 2011 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report. In some sections, this or other UNODC reports appear in almost every paragraph (there are more UNODC entries in the bibliography and index than any other source). Her main goal here, it should be stressed, is not to contribute to the drug literature or engage the drug policy debate, per se, but rather to bring the issue of skyrocketing violent crime more front and center in much broader political science debates about the trajectory and fate of third-wave democracies. And in this regard the book largely succeeds.

Yashar’s other sources include a systematic coding and analysis of newspaper coverage in the three Central American countries—one newspaper per country—for the years 2000, 2005, and 2010 (the results are often inconclusive, and it is not clear why this compiling was not extended to include 2015 to make the book more up-to-date). The research is also supplemented with interviews carried out by the author or a colleague, although it should be noted that almost all of the interviews are at least a decade old.

The book’s focus on Central America is especially welcome given the disproportionate attention to such countries as Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil in discussions of criminal violence and illicit economies in the Americas. Nevertheless, the case selection within Central America is somewhat puzzling given the author’s emphasis on the cocaine transit trade. Two out of three cases, El Salvador and Nicaragua, are secondary players in this transit trade compared to some of their neighbors. Tellingly, they are not even included as case studies in Julie Marie Bunc and Michael Ross Fowler’s 2012 book, Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation: Drug Trafficking and the Law in Central America, which is probably the most comprehensive and authoritative account of Central American drug trafficking dynamics (and oddly missing from Yashar’s otherwise impressively detailed bibliography).6

Including cocaine-saturated Panama as a case study, for instance, would have been an appropriate test of the importance of transit trade in determining homicide levels; and the fact that Panama has had much lower homicide rates than some of its neighbors to the south and north would also perhaps present a challenge to Yashar’s argument. Panama’s long-standing importance in all sorts of illicit transit trades in the region, including as...
the bridge between Colombia and Central America, makes it all the more puzzling that it is rarely even mentioned in the book. It seems that Yashar wanted to limit her core cases to the postconflict countries in Central America, but it is not entirely clear why doing so is the best way to evaluate her argument.

Yashar also contends that it was when cocaine primarily transited the Caribbean in earlier decades that this region experienced surging homicide levels, yet no evidence of this is actually presented and no specific Caribbean countries are mentioned (pp. 81–82). This would be useful data to have, since water trafficking routes, which are more dispersed and go through less populated areas, generally tend to generate less violence than land routes. Further fleshing out how differences among air, land, and sea transport and routes shape territorial competition, the geography of illicit economies, and levels of violence would have added more power and nuance to Yashar’s argument. For instance, illicit transit trade via speedboats from Colombia through the coastal waterways of Central America may induce less competitive violence than the use of roadways. Indeed, to the extent that El Salvador is a transit zone for cocaine, much of this cocaine moves offshore. It is quite possible, therefore, that the illicit economy-related spikes in homicides in El Salvador are more about extortionist gangs fighting over local turf (well covered by Yashar) than about transnational criminal organizations competing to control transit territory.

**Beyond the Americas: The Growing Global Reach of Illicit Trade**

In sharp contrast to the regionally grounded accounts in the previous three books reviewed, Louise Shelley takes us on a sweeping global tour of the dark side of illicit trade, from fake pharmaceuticals and smuggled cigarettes to looted antiquities and black market arms. Violent crime is not her main focus, though there is plenty of violence and crime throughout. Shelley is a criminologist, but her main argument will sound familiar to political scientists who have followed the now well-worn debates about globalization. She falls squarely in the “sovereignty at bay” camp, but instead of globe-trotting multinational corporations, the most important actors in *Dark Commerce* are illicit transnational traders who mock state laws and enforcement efforts (often facilitated by corrupt government officials and legitimate businesses willing to look the other way).

Also in contrast to the previous three books, Shelley’s main audience is the policy world and broader public sphere, not academia. She makes no effort to situate herself in a particular academic literature or even acknowledge counterarguments to her many bold claims. And the policy audience in her case is not only Washington, where Shelley is embedded, but Brussels, Geneva, Vienna, and the much broader global community of international agencies and nongovernmental organizations involved in various aspects of combating illicit trade (with some of which she has a long-standing relationship, as noted in the acknowledgments). Indeed, it is fair to say that this book is a polemic—an urgent call to do more, much more, about a rapidly growing global threat that she says endangers our very survival.

In this regard, *Dark Commerce* is in many ways an updated version of Moises Naim’s equally polemical 2005 book, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers, and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy.* Although Shelley provides much more historical depth, many more citations, and far more coverage of the many types of cybercrime that have proliferated in recent years, the message is basically the same as Naim’s: Illicit trade represents a rapidly growing and unprecedented danger, one with which we are woefully unprepared to deal, and if left unchecked, it will bring ever-growing chaos and devastation. Her most important departure from (and improvement on) Naim is in providing several insightful historical chapters that date illicit trade to the origins of trade itself. And it is certainly clear from her two-thousand-year survey not only that illicit trade is not new but also that it has played a major role in building up states and empires, fomenting rebellion and revolution, and creating a global consumer economy. In fact, the author does such a convincing job of demonstrating the central importance of illicit commerce throughout history that it ultimately detracts from the main claim of the book that “a new illicit economy is threatening our future.”

In Shelley’s account, much of what makes the illicit economy of the past three decades new is transformative technologies, particularly the role of the Internet in dramatically enabling illicit transactions and even creating entirely new types of them. In other words, just as the Internet has revolutionized licit commerce, so too has it revolutionized illicit commerce. The author documents the many nefarious ways in which illicit trade has reached new frontiers through cybercrime, greatly enabled by cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and Tor software that enable anonymous communication in the shadiest corners of the Dark Web.

Nevertheless, from a longer historical perspective, the disruptive impact of new technologies is an old story. In this regard, it is worth asking if the Internet is much more transformative than previous illicit commerce-enabling technological innovations, such as the invention of the steamship, railway, airplane, telegraph, and telephone. And Shelley does not consider the possibility that in some cases, there may actually be an upside to taking illicit trade off the streets and conducting it online: The street-level violence associated with open-air retail drug markets, for example, may be reduced if the consumer can simply place an order online for home delivery. Of course, this presents a considerable challenge for drug enforcement.
(for every online marketplace that is shut down, such as Silk Road, new marketplaces spring up), but may actually be a positive development from the perspective of reducing some forms of drug violence at the retail distribution level.

Shelley also devotes considerable attention to illicit trade that damages the planet, including illicit mining and logging, and the poaching of endangered species (an entire chapter focuses on the illicit trade in rhino horns, the only place in the book where she is able to go into much depth). It is difficult to disagree that these are serious environmental threats deserving much more serious attention. At the same time, focusing exclusively on the illicit trade dimensions of the problem arguably risks losing sight of the much larger environmental threats of human encroachment, habitat loss, and global warming.

The author certainly recognizes some of these bigger challenges. Indeed, some of her prescriptions are truly radical, going well beyond a narrow targeting of illicit trade to include restructuring the corporate world in order to focus on accountability, abolishing offshore financial havens, launching Marshall Plans for the developing world to create employment opportunities for would-be migrants, and much greater government transparency in both poor and rich countries alike.

Yet in other respects, Shelley is far from radical, often simply restating the conventional threat assessments about illicit trade found in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, INTERPOL, the World Economic Forum, and U.S. State Department reports. Early on in the book (p. 16) she poses a crucial, tantalizing question: “Are there areas of illicit trade that we should either decriminalize or regulate less in order to concentrate on the most severe threats to the global community?” Unfortunately, she never provides an answer. Even the concluding chapter, which focuses on the way forward, does not engage this question, although the overall take-away message is the need for much more regulation. Shelley does not seem to have much faith that more repressive enforcement can adequately curb illicit trade, but she also fails to consider the possibility that in some cases, enforcement has not only not worked but has actually made the problem worse as well—as evident again and again in the “war on drugs” (well documented in the Latin America–focused books under review). The drug trade appears throughout her wide-ranging survey of illicit commerce, yet she avoids any discussion of the possible need to fundamentally rethink our supply-focused drug control strategies.

Similarly, when it comes to migrant smuggling, Shelley is quick to blame greedy smugglers who take advantage of their desperate human cargo, but says little about the role of states in forcing migrants to turn to smugglers in the first place. For instance, she points to the spike in migrant deaths at sea in the Mediterranean as evidence of the cruelty of smugglers, yet the reason migrants have increasingly turned to perilous sea routes is because states have cracked down on land routes. She also does not adequately acknowledge that state efforts to roll back access to asylum may have something to do with the reasons so many refugees have turned to smugglers as their only hope for escape from their violence-plagued home countries.

Shelley blames states for being corrupt, complicit, and compromised (and therefore inhibited from adequately policing illicit trade), yet she does not place much blame on states for sometimes pursuing costly and damaging policing strategies that often chase symptoms rather than root causes. In this regard, while she concludes with many sensible ideas for regulating illicit commerce beyond familiar get-tough remedies, she has relatively little to say about dealing with the demand side that ultimately drives such commerce.

**Conclusion**

The four books reviewed here show how far we have come in making sense of criminal violence and illicit economies in Latin America and beyond, but also how far we have left to go. We still have many more questions than answers. Within the Americas, for example, we still do not have a good enough understanding of why some illicit economic activities, most notably drug trafficking, generate so much more violence than others. And even within drug trafficking, it is not sufficiently clear why some drugs, most notably cocaine, seem more closely associated with violence than others. It is similarly not entirely clear why the sort of heavily armed trafficking organizations found in Mexico and Colombia are not nearly as fully developed in other countries. Even the rival gangs that have come to dominate the criminal (including drug trafficking) landscape in Brazil have lacked the same transnational reach and influence.

Following Yashar’s lead, the next steps should arguably involve more focused, systematic attention on identifying and explaining variation in illicit economic activities and related criminal violence across place, including at the subnational level. In particular, mirroring the logic for Yashar’s inclusion of Nicaragua in her study, a good argument can be made for greater attention on the less violent cases—places that do not capture the headlines the way the bloodshed in Juarez or Rio de Janeiro do. For example, the Rio case so well examined by Lessing begs for a more systematic comparison to Sao Paolo—a much larger city but with much lower levels of drug violence. Similarly, the Colombia case begs for more comparison to Peru and Bolivia, countries deeply enmeshed in the Andean cocaine industry, but which have had strikingly low levels of drug violence (a contrast noted by Yashar but not examined in detail). And the tri-border area of Paraguay-Argentina-Brazil
has long been a bustling transit zone for illicit trade, yet violence has remained relatively modest.8

Equally important, the Latin American crime and violence dynamics examined by Bergman, Lessing, and Yashar should be evaluated from a more cross-regional and global perspective. Bergman rightly points to Latin America’s striking exceptionalism in the wider world of crime, and offers some illustrative data to support this argument, but we still need more in-depth cross-regional research and analysis. Shelley rightly pushes us to look at illicit economies as a global phenomenon, but by simply stressing the dangerous proliferation of illicit commerce everywhere, she does not provide the sort of fine-grained and nuanced account needed to try to explain variation within and across countries and regions.

These four books here nicely illustrate how criminological and political science research agendas can converge and fruitfully interact to address some of the most pressing issues of our time. Formidable obstacles to doing research in this area remain, ranging from severe data limitations to personal safety concerns, and they are difficult to overcome. But for scholars interested in addressing the critical governance, development, and security challenges facing the world, it has become increasingly difficult to ignore illicit economies and related criminal violence, whether at the local, regional, or global level.

Notes
5 For an earlier Tilly-inspired account of state making through the policing of illicit economic activities, see Peter Andreas, Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade Made America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
8 Social scientists have devoted too little attention to this area. But see Ieva Jusionyte, Savage Frontier: Making News and Security on the Argentine Border (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).