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Dear Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). My name is Siya Goswami, and I will be your Assistant Director for Session I for NHSMUN 2025! This is my first year on staff, but my fourth year attending the conference. I attended NHSMUN for three years in high school as a delegate in ECOSOC, UNHRC, and ILO, leaving me with a lasting love and passion for MUN.

I am a freshman at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., pursuing a double major in international affairs and computer science. Although vastly different interests and avenues, I hope to find the intersection of technology and global policymaking, using technology as a tool for international development. Outside of academics, I love reading (my favorite genres are thriller, fantasy/romance, and historical fiction), writing, listening to all kinds of music (my Spotify is a little crazy), and traveling (I love to explore new places). I am also a huge avgeek, or aviation geek/enthusiast, which means I love planes. Seriously, for my birthday, I went to a field and watched planes land!

It is safe to say that MUN has been one of the most important aspects of my life. It is what inspired me to even think about pursuing a career in the field of international relations and diplomacy, and it gave me the tools I needed to expand my awareness about the world, present myself as a confident public speaker, build my conflict-resolution skills and extrapolate them to real-world scenarios, and make long-lasting connections with my fellow delegates. It helped challenge my limited worldviews and beliefs, as I began to understand how other countries and individuals make decisions based on their respective contexts, historical backgrounds, and cultures. I eagerly awaited the start of every conference, as I would be one step closer to the nourishing debate and discussions I so loved and cherished.

The main topics of this committee this year are: “The Influence of the Taliban on the Narcotics Trade” and “Addressing Money Laundering by Non-State Actors in Latin America.” Both topics require a nuanced, multi-faceted approach that can only be achieved through rigorous research and debate. I highly anticipate the phenomenal debate that will take place and the solutions that will emerge. I wish you the best of luck, and I look forward to meeting you all very soon!

Best,

Siya Goswami

United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime

Session I



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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)! My name is Fiona Wong, and I'll be your Assistant Director for Session II of NHSMUN 2025. While this is my first NHSMUN as a staff member, this will be my fifth year participating in NHSMUN! I began my NHSMUN journey as a freshman in 2021, where I attended online as a delegate of UNICEF. I have gone on as a delegate of UNHRC, ASEAN, and the South Korean National Security Council for the rest of my high school years. I fell in love with the environment and experience the delegates and staff provide at NHSMUN. I cannot wait to see your contributions and talents!

I am a freshman at Rice University in Houston, Texas, studying Biosciences (Biochemistry). I also have a passion for International Relations and Constitutional Law, inspired by my experiences in Model UN! Outside of school, I enjoy listening to and playing Classic Rock or J-Pop. I play snare drum in my university's marching band known as the MOB – the band that never marches! I am also a huge cat lover, with four cats at home.

Whether this is your first conference or one of many along your MUN journey, I encourage you to keep an open mind and be flexible as you write your position paper and discuss these critical topics during sessions. Everyone comes to NHSMUN with a unique perspective, and by listening to and incorporating these perspectives, delegates can design successful and inclusive solutions.

My fellow Assistant Director, Siya, and I are very pleased to bring you Update Papers that contain relevant and updated information on your UNTOC topics. In addition to the previous Background Guide, this paper provides helpful things to remember when preparing for the conference. We encourage you to keep researching and staying up to date on these topics in the months before the conference!

Sincerely,

Fiona Wong

United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime

Session II





UNTOC

NHSMUN 2025



TOPIC A:

THE INFLUENCE OF THE TALIBAN ON THE NARCOTICS TRADE

Photo Credit: Fwd

Introduction

The narcotics trade is a pressing issue within Afghanistan, with negative repercussions for the global community. Since the 2000s, many groups have been fighting for control of the region. One group includes the Taliban, which Mawlawi Akhundzada currently leads. During this time, the United States also invaded the region in search of the al-Qaeda group and its' leaders that were responsible for the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York City. During this time, Afghanistan's narcotics trade continued to grow as the economy became poorer. Additionally, as long droughts troubled the region, it became difficult to cultivate many crops. Between 2002 and 2020, poppy cultivation in the region tripled. Many farmers also began to grow methamphetamines, using the ephedra plant.¹

Following a continuous fight for control and several attempts at a legitimate government, the Taliban rose to power in 2022. Before the regime began, the opium sector and poppy production accounted for more than 85 percent of total economic activity in the country.² To regulate this industry, the Taliban enforced severe bans on poppy cultivation to control the opium trade. However, these were found to be largely unsuccessful. Once foreign aid and law enforcement removed their efforts from the region in 2022, it became difficult to enforce many of the Taliban's policies. Additionally, the harm to the economy because of the bans led to a lack of financial support for the Taliban's government to rely on. As farmers attempt to transition to other crops, the lack of government assistance and the soil conditions have made it increasingly difficult.³ The areas in which the bans were successful were mainly rural and poorer areas, in which Taliban forces entered and destroyed large opium fields. These strict regulations affected women and rural farmers the hardest, especially those already struggling financially.⁴

The Taliban government also shut down many of the major drug-trading pathways that ran through and along the country. The Balkan Route runs from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey along to Europe, and is the largest methamphetamine and heroin pathway in the region. Through planned and unannounced seizures, Afghanistan has seized upwards of

seven tons of drugs.⁵ However, many of these drug raids have not been coordinated with the other countries in the network, which has caused further conflict.

Combined with a failing economy, widespread poverty, and repressive laws, Afghans have no choice but to continue to engage in illicit trafficking. Today, the issue continues to worsen, with more illicit drug cultivation and subsequent crackdowns.⁶ The socioeconomic picture remains grim, and the consistent human rights violations by the Taliban continue to erode the quality of life. Without action, these conditions will worsen, likely driving more drug trafficking.

Current Effects of the Drug Bans

Narcotics have been present in Afghanistan as early as 1994 when it had already been producing large amounts of opium. However, the drug trade directly conflicted with fundamentalist Islamic beliefs, and in 2000, the Taliban's supreme leader instituted a total ban on poppy farming. However, in the tense political and economic climate after the 9/11 attacks and the US military intervention in Afghanistan, poppy farming and the drug trade thrived. The Taliban, although religiously against the drug trade, considered it a short-term necessity to successfully take power. Thus, after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban established

1 Rupert Stone, "Afghanistan's drug trade is booming under Taliban rule," *The Atlantic Council*, August 4, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/afghanistans-drug-trade-is-booming-under-taliban-rule/>.

2 International Crisis Group, "Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs," *International Crisis Group*, September 12, 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/340-trouble-afghanistans-opium-fields-taliban-war-drugs#:~:t>.

ext="The%20Taliban%20have%20instituted%20a,not%20further%20undermine%20vulnerable%20populations."

3 International Crisis Group, "Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs,"

4 International Crisis Group, "Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs,"

5 Rupert Stone, "Afghanistan's drug trade is booming under Taliban rule."

6 International Crisis Group, "Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs,"

a ban on cannabis cultivation in their controlled regions. This expanded to a complete ban on the cultivation (i.e., manufacturing), consumption (i.e., use, transport), and trade (i.e., import and export, sale and purchase) of all intoxicants, including opium, heroin, alcohol, methamphetamine, and cannabis. The industry, which had been supporting the currency and employing hundreds of thousands of Afghans, essentially collapsed.⁷

The Taliban continues to pursue an aggressive policy toward drug trafficking. The ban on poppy farming in 2022 led to a 95 percent decrease in poppy harvests in 2023.⁸ This was reflected in the farmers' revenue from opium production, which dropped from USD 1.36 billion to USD 110 million. The UN estimates that the halt in opium farming has affected almost seven million people.⁹ As a result, these farmers have taken a severe hit. The economic shock worsens as the Taliban limits the opportunities for alternative work. Other cultivation options are limited. This is because crops such as cereals, and beans require more maintenance. Opium, which is derived from the opium poppy, needs far less water and is significantly more profitable. Others have begun cultivating wheat or

cotton but struggle to make ends meet.¹⁰ To increase farming options, infrastructure needs to be improved. This includes greater irrigation systems, better roads, and cold storage facilities. However, the Taliban does not have the budget for these improvements.

Raids on opium farms began in the Southwestern provinces. This is where the Taliban has had the strongest influence. This region also produced most of the Afghan's opium. The grace period for cultivation ended in mid-2022. Taliban officials then began traveling through Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, and the Nimroz provinces.¹¹ They identified and destroyed any poppy plants planted after the ban took effect. These raids were conducted to send a message to farmers in the south warning against the further plantation of opium in the next season. As a result, opium production declined, accounting for 70–80 percent of the country's production.¹² Despite the ban, many continue opium cultivation. Enforcement of the ban was less successful in the north. These areas were more difficult for police to access. Key regions of resistance include the highlands in the east and northeast including the Nangarhar and Badakhshan provinces. Farmers in these

7 International Crisis Group, "Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs,"

8 Vibhu Mishra, "Rise in Afghan opium cultivation reflects economic hardship, despite Taliban ban," *United Nations Global perspective Human stories*, November 6, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1156566>.

9 International Crisis Group, "Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs,"

10 International Crisis Group, "Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs,"

11 International Crisis Group, "Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs,"

12 International Crisis Group, "Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs,"



A poppy farm in Afghanistan

Credit: Mark Stroud

areas reported ignoring the ban due to limited alternatives to support and feed their families. Furthermore, plantations exist in the mountainous and desert areas in the south.¹³

In the first week of December 2024, more than 100 people were arrested for growing poppy plants in northeastern Afghanistan.¹⁴ There has been an upward trend in poppy cultivation by 19 percent in 2024. Of this, 59 percent take place in the northeast provinces. These areas exist outside the Taliban's geographical regions of influence and support. The increase can be attributed to the drastic increase in the market price going from USD 100 to USD 730 per kilogram. With the widespread poverty in Afghanistan, the farmers are more likely to violate the ban to ensure that their families do not experience hardship.¹⁵

In rural Afghanistan, female opium farmers have been particularly affected. Before the ban, women played large roles in running family-owned farms. Opium cultivation was their primary source of income. This allowed them to retain financial autonomy and stability in a country with limited economic opportunities. The Taliban's crackdown on opium production has caused economic hardship for many women. Due to restricted access to education and employment, women have few alternative income sources. Women are disproportionately affected by the Taliban. The World Bank Private Sector surveyed the labor force between 2020 and 2023. The results show that in 2023, firms reduced 42 percent male and 67 percent female employment. Women lost more than 240,000 jobs.¹⁶ The ban worsens existing gender inequalities. Women who are isolated in Afghanistan are now left with fewer resources to support their families. As a result of the new policies, the country faces greater widespread poverty, food insecurity, and a lack of options for women.

The Taliban's war against drugs comes with a rehabilitation component. Afghanistan continues to face significant problems with substance abuse. An estimated four million people, 10 percent of the population, struggle with addiction.¹⁷ There is also a troubling trend exhibited in the drugs used. While heroin and opium remain, the main drugs leading to treatment admissions, the growing use of synthetic methamphetamine is also straining resources. The Taliban frequently use violent tactics. Drug users are kept for a minimum of forty-five days after being forcibly caught with guns and whips.

Due to overcrowding, many drug users are being housed in the same prisons that housed Taliban fighters during the previous administration. There are barely any modern drug treatments. Medicines such as methadone are vital for managing withdrawal symptoms but are rare. Furthermore, since the Taliban took back control international assistance has been non-existent. Doctors Without Borders is one of the only remaining international organizations in the country. Last June they reported the struggles Afghanistan's healthcare system faces. Specifically, specialized hospitals struggle to afford staff salaries, medicines, medical supplies, fuel, and an oxygen supply. These struggles are due to a lack of structural support for the health sector in Afghanistan.¹⁸

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported limited operational services. 32 out of the 34 provinces have rehab programs. However, out of the 82 facilities, only 17 percent have services for women. Furthermore, 72 percent of facilities have or are almost at full capacity.¹⁹ The struggles faced by thousands of drug-addicted women in Kabul are particularly difficult. Only 150 addicts can be housed for 45 days at a time in the women's drug treatment center. Their conditions are worse and are often hidden from the public and separate from the men's. Women centers are also overcrowded

13 International Crisis Group, "Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs,"

14 Hein, Shabnam von, 2024, "Taliban Poppy Ban Is Economic Hit to Farmers," *Dn.com*, Deutsche Welle, December 6, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/taliban-poppy-ban-leaves-afghan-farmers-angry-jobless/a-70977767>.

15 "Rise in Afghan Opium Cultivation Reflects Economic Hardship, despite Taliban Ban," 2024, UN News, November 6, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1156566>.

16 Aman Farahi, "Assessing Key Trends in The Afghan Economy Three Years into The Taliban," Afghanistan Policy Lab, September 2024, <https://spia.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/2024-11/Assessing%20Key%20Trends%20in%20The%20Afghan%20Economy%20Three%20Years%20into%20The%20Taliban%20Rule%20-%20by%20Aman.pdf>

17 Manija Mirzaie, "Afghanistan's Drug Users Face Violence, Stigma and Segregation," Health Policy Watch, August 30, 2024, <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/afghanistan-addiction-violence-stigma/>.

18 Manija Mirzaie, "Afghanistan's Drug Users Face Violence, Stigma and Segregation,"

19 "Afghanistan: Surge in Synthetic Drugs Could Threaten Public Health," 2024, UN News, November 27, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1157551>.

with hundreds of women sleeping in hallways with barely any food to eat. Survivors compare these conditions to prison. While the Taliban has begun efforts to combat drug addiction and abuse these efforts have been insufficient and require further action.

Rehabilitation facilities are unable to handle the scale of addiction due to a lack of funds, personnel, and equipment. International aid is needed to supplement Afghanistan's health sector. Additional funding and resources will allow for adequate treatment and prevention programs. Without this assistance, the cycle of addiction continues making many Afghans unable to recover in the long term.

The Taliban's ban on poppy cultivation has had a profound effect on Afghanistan's economy. Rural farmers and women were especially harmed. Before the ban, opium generated a large amount of revenue and income for the country. Now, many Afghans struggle with financial instability, and food insecurity as they struggle to find other work. While the Taliban has supported rehabilitation programs, these plans are violent, underfunded, and lack a proper framework. As a result, Afghanistan's addiction crisis continues to worsen, largely due to a lack of international support. This has added to the country's existing fragility, increasing its political and economic challenges. In creating solutions, delegates should focus on fostering cooperation between the Taliban and the international community. This collaboration can aid infrastructure development, have targeted interventions, and make treatment services accessible.

Security Issues in Afghanistan

Following the Taliban's return to power, internal and national security in Afghanistan have been threatened. Internal security refers to the stability of infrastructure, police forces, food security, citizens' quality of life, and maintaining laws in the region. National security refers to military strength,

foreign relations, and maintaining sovereignty.²⁰ Afghanistan's economy has been declining and increasingly unstable since the Taliban regained power. The country has faced devastating sanctions in the form of asset freezes, arms embargoes, and travel bans. Afghanistan has been heavily dependent on foreign aid, however, some of this aid has stopped as some countries do not recognize the Taliban's government as legitimate. This has led to large security issues in the region. Examples include high inflation, the economic damage caused by COVID-19 on small businesses, unemployment, and the continuous political instability.

Prior to the Taliban's ascension to power, international aid contributed to upwards of 40 percent of Afghanistan's gross domestic product (GDP). Additionally, outside aid financed almost four billion dollars for government development and almost 90 percent of the country's public projects.²¹ However, since the Taliban came into power, the amount of foreign aid Afghanistan receives has drastically decreased. This is largely because of sanctions. The international community has largely excluded the Taliban due to its label as a terrorist organization. Furthermore, their unwillingness to accept diplomatic negotiations or compromise on its repressive laws has left them isolated. The US provides limited humanitarian aid, which is diverted to the Taliban's internal purposes. This makes foreign aid ineffective in assisting with economic and humanitarian needs. It also is potentially enabling drug trafficking.

As of recently, however, the international community has signaled a shift in its relationship with the Taliban. For instance, Russia's lower house of parliament approved a bill that removes the Taliban from the list of terrorist organizations, reflecting its interest in strengthening relations with it.²² Considering its role as a global power, Russia could create an example in which other countries follow suit, eliminating the isolation of the Taliban that has been in effect for more than two decades. Additionally, China has welcomed the Taliban

20 Kim R. Holmes, "What Is National Security?", The Heritage Foundation, 2015, https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/2015_IndexOfUSMilitaryStrength_What%20Is%20National%20Security.pdf.

21 Daniel F. Runde, Annie Pforzheimer, Thomas Bryja, and Caroline Smutny, "The Future of Assistance for Afghanistan: A Dilemma", CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies), June 13, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/future-assistance-afghanistan-dilemma>.

22 McDonagh, Shannon, 2024, "Russia Moves Closer to Taking Taliban off 'Terror List,'" *Newsweek*, December 10, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-vote-taliban-removal-afghanistan-terror-list-1998679>.



A vehicle of the Taliban and its recruits in the capital city of Kabul

Credit: Voice of America News

diplomat as an ambassador from Afghanistan.²³ This pattern shows a growing desire among countries to find common ground with the Taliban. However, not all demands and views, especially those related to women’s rights, will be accepted and implemented. Increased diplomatic ties could also lead to more fruitful discussions about preventing the narcotics trade. These discussions could also support the Afghan economy and people. Overall, the international security of Afghanistan is largely dependent on cooperation with other countries and their ability to deliver aid in developing the country.

To ensure internal security, Afghanistan must achieve economic stability. The Taliban’s Interim Administration (TA) has generated revenue close to that of the previous government, earning AFN 193.9 billion (USD 2.2 billion) compared to the former administration’s AFN 210.7 billion (USD 3 billion). Much of this revenue has been collected due to stricter government control and consolidation, increased taxes, and regulations. However, despite considerable revenue, this has not been invested into healthcare, education, and infrastructure—contributing to the widespread poverty. The diplomatic isolation staged by the international community

continues to have its negative consequences, as Afghanistan cannot enter global markets and engage in beneficial, self-sustaining trade with others.²⁴

Additionally, despite the strengthened Afghani (native currency), the economic conditions for citizens have not improved. Approximately 85 percent of Afghans live on less than one USD per day, which provides crucial reasoning for why drug trafficking is such a favorable and profitable endeavor. Therefore, the Taliban’s added restrictions on the narcotics trade have resulted in financial consequences for many people in Afghanistan. The Taliban enacted opium and poppy bans across Afghanistan, as well as enforced harsh and severe punishments for farmers who continue to participate in these cultivation jobs.²⁵ These bans may be referred to as “blanket bans” and are the most widespread and powerful ban any Afghani government has enacted. However, because the Taliban did not offer alternative jobs or plans for economic relief, many rural communities will become displaced, economically devastated, and have no government support. The lack of security and government protection for citizens has resulted in short-term consequences for many citizens

23 Goldbaum, Christina, 2024, “World Opens to the Taliban despite Their Shredding of Women’s Rights,” *The New York Times*, October 24, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/24/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-diplomacy.html>.

24 Gul Maqsood Sabit, 2024, “Evaluating the Taliban’s Economic Policies,” *The Diplomat*, September 13, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/09/evaluating-the-talibans-economic-policies/>.

25 International Crisis Group, “Trouble In Afghanistan’s Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs”, September 12, 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/340-trouble-afghanistans-opium-fields-taliban-war-drugs#:~:text=The%20Taliban's%20strategy%20of%20banning,growing%20desperation%20among%20the%20poor.>

and farmers especially. The group that these bans devastate economically the most are women. Women are the largest group that makes up rural farmers in Afghanistan.²⁶ While these bans are an attempt to legitimize the Afghani economy and promote foreign relations, they have disproportionately harmed the poorest groups in the nation.

Although the World Bank reported a GDP growth of 2.7 percent, this was largely induced by private consumption and decreased food prices. However, imports—such as fuel, food, and machinery—rose sharply from 2023 to 2024, widening the trade deficit and potentially harming the already fragile economy in the long term.²⁷ According to the World Bank director for Afghanistan, a successful recovery will consist of strengthening the private sector, with increased investment in small businesses and entrepreneurs. It will also consist of the inclusion of women, who comprise half of the population and therefore represent untapped economic potential. Overall, it is essential to provide economic security and stability for citizens to rebuild after the restrictions on the narcotics trade.

Conclusion

Afghanistan's involvement in the narcotics trade is intertwined with a complicated political, economic, and social history. The Taliban's government has attempted to control the narcotics trade through strict bans and aggressive enforcement. This is recognized as one of the largest anti-narcotics campaigns in the last century.²⁸ These strict bans have also required many of the new government's security resources to be directed towards enforcement. This has left large gaps in other areas of infrastructure that require funding and further development.

To encourage development in the region, foreign assistance will be required. Most of the international support pulled back from the region following the Taliban's control. However, the opium bans have successfully helped draw back in some foreign support. Nonetheless, many countries still do not recognize the Taliban's government as legitimate and do not

allow Afghanistan to receive international aid because of this. To further development across Afghanistan, international partnerships and financial support will be necessary. Therefore, it is important to facilitate collaboration.

While the Taliban's policies have helped to limit opium production, they have also economically devastated many rural communities and left many without financial support. Many of the farms were in rural areas that were economically dependent on the growth of poppies for the narcotics trade. The Taliban burned and damaged many of these farms to enforce their policies. Nevertheless, this left many farmers without a source of income and no government assistance programs to turn to. Overall, it is important to provide sustainable and economical solutions to protect vulnerable populations in Afghanistan while still enforcing narcotics bans.

26 International Crisis Group, *Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs*.

27 PRESS, THE ASSOCIATED. 2024, "Afghan Economy Shows Modest Signs of Growth but Recovery Remains Fragile, Says World Bank," *AP News*, December 5, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-economy-world-bank-women-58edd3fde8c6b642756d8623be28902b>.

28 International Crisis Group, "Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs,"



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TOPIC B: ADDRESSING MONEY LAUNDERING IN LATIN AMERICA

Photo Credit: ironypoisoning

Introduction

There is a growing concern among the global community regarding the danger of cartels. Cartels including the Sinaloa, Jalisco, and Tiguerones grow in power as they control small geographical areas.¹ Modern technology has also allowed organized crime groups to operate outside their territories. Recently, there has been a greater use of artificial intelligence (AI) and cryptocurrency. The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) assessed that these advancements have “resulted in more sophisticated and professional fraud campaigns (...) at relatively little cost”.² As a result of this, it is now easier for cartels to fund and continue to expand their operations.

This growing awareness has strengthened the stance on anti-cartel activity. In recent months, there has been an increase in joint operations against organized crime. These include Operation Crete II and Operation Destabilise. Both operations were successful in taking steps to combat cartel networks and disrupt their activities. Local police were trained to investigate and seize fake goods. These initiatives involve multiple organizations or states. Previously, it was difficult for Latin American countries to work with the global community. This is due to a lack of standardized development rates between these countries.³ Money laundering has impacted all Latin America. Certain countries, including Brazil, Columbia, and Peru, are less affected due to experience and ties with the international market. These states have greater incentive to fight financial crime and achieve a stable economy.³ Latin America has recently become more connected with organizations targeting organized crime. This is part of the Strategic Vision for Latin America, and the Caribbean proposed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The focus is on countering crime through international cooperation instead of individual efforts.⁴ These organizations, such as

INTERPOL, an inter-governmental anti-crime organization consisting of 196 member states, and the National Crime Agency (NCA), have launched global operations to disrupt money laundering.⁵ Members include Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, and other Latin American and international states.⁶ INTERPOL aims to connect and help international police combat crime. It does so by using databases and collaborative operations.⁷ The operations aim to work directly with local governments and agencies.⁸

The political scene of Latin America has also changed in the past few months. In June, Mexico elected a new president, Claudia Sheinbaum.⁹ Her predecessor, Andrés Obrador, has been criticized for his ‘hugs, not bullets’ approach to handling cartel violence. The previous leader believed the root of the problem came from poverty.¹⁰ Therefore, his approach focused on helping poor citizens instead of arresting cartel leaders. Obrador’s “hugs, not bullets” approach has proven ineffective. Obrador’s policies focused on reducing violence instead of confrontation. Organized crime groups were able to use violent tactics to counter Mexican security. This was seen in October 2019, when hundreds of cartel members

1 Mia Irene, “The Expansion and Diversification of Mexican Cartels: Dynamic New Actors and Markets,” The International Institute for Strategic Studies, last modified December 12th, 2024, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/armed-conflict-survey/2024/the-expansion-and-diversification-of-mexican-cartels-dynamic-new-actors-and-markets/>.

2 Interpol, “INTERPOL Financial Fraud assessment: A global threat boosted by technology.” *Interpol*. March 11, 2024, <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2024/INTERPOL-Financial-Fraud-assessment-A-global-threat-boosted-by-technology>.

3 Oscar Solórzano, *Targeting illicit wealth through non-conviction based forfeiture: Identifying human rights and other standards for Latin America* (Basel: Basel Institute on Governance, 2024), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep63785>.

4 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Strategic Vision for Latin America and the Caribbean 2022-2025* (Vienna: UNODC, 2021), https://www.unodc.org/res/strategy/STRATEGIC_VISION_LATIN_AMERICA_AND_THE_CARIBBEAN_2022_2025_ENE17_EDsigned.pdf.

5 “What is INTERPOL?” Interpol, Accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/What-is-INTERPOL>.

6 “Member Countries” Interpol, accessed December 27, 202, <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/Member-countries>.

7 Interpol, “What is INTERPOL?”

8 UNODC, *Strategic Vision for Latin America and the Caribbean 2022-2025*.

9 Vanessa Buschschlüter, “Mexico elects Claudia Sheinbaum as first female president,” *BBC*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp4475gwny1o>.

10 Associated Press, “Mexico’s president lays out a plan to combat cartel violence. But it looks like more of the same,” *Associated Press*, October 8, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/mexico-president-sheinbaum-cartel-violence-strategy-d7c03d1bdf3985f58b1f5a935c564af#>.

fought for the release of one of their own.¹¹ The Mexican government met their demands to avoid violence in Culiacán, the Sinaloa region's capital. This only showed drug cartels that "if they show up to a fight with enough firepower, they will win."¹² Venezuela also saw the continuation of Nicolás Maduro's presidency after a tense and uncertain election cycle.¹³ Elections and leadership changes can alter the landscape of organized crime groups. Global leaders may adopt new policies and approaches to targeting crime. They may also foster new alliances and expand their collaboration efforts. These changes and continuations can have positive or negative effects in the future. While more in-state actors have taken measures to address money laundering, the problem is still far from being solved.

El Mayo's Arrest: Effects on Sinaloa and Beyond

On Friday, September 13th, 2024, Ismael 'El Mayo' Zambada was indicted in Brooklyn, New York. El Mayo was a high-ranking member of the Sinaloa cartel. He is charged with seventeen counts, including drug distribution, firearm trafficking, and money laundering. The arrest of one of the most feared and powerful drug traffickers creates leadership implications for the Sinaloa Cartel. Furthermore, now lies a power vacuum for rival organizations to exploit, such as the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG).¹⁴ El Mayo was one

of the co-founders of the Sinaloa cartel alongside Joaquin 'El Chapo' Guzman. He was responsible for continuing cartel operations after El Chapo's 2019 conviction.¹⁵

The circumstances of El Mayo's arrest sparked controversy. Sinaloa cartel members are usually arrested while conducting cartel business or during police busts.¹⁶ Instead, El Mayo was arrested on US soil when a private plane landed in El Paso, Texas, in July. Another cartel member, Joaquín Guzmán López, accompanied him. López is the son of 'El Chapo,' who took over his father's role after his arrest.¹⁷ A letter released by El Mayo's lawyer claimed that the cartel leader was ambushed before a meeting with a Mexican official. He was then betrayed by López and taken to the airstrip to be flown out to New York against his will.¹⁸ The letter caused tensions in US-Mexico cooperation. Mexican officials were outraged by the arrest. They believe the arrest is unlawful and have launched an investigation. They suspected possible crimes of "illegal flight; illegal use of air facilities; violation of immigration and customs legislation; kidnapping; [and] treason."¹⁹ Mexico's penal code has a specific clause saying that treason involves "illegally abduct[ing] a person in Mexico to hand them over to the authorities of another country."²⁰ Intervention by outside state actors, such as the US, is discouraged.²¹ Former President Obrador has expressed his frustration and skepticism of the US role in El Mayo's arrest. He also believes that the arrest will not help with the greater opioid crisis.²² The Mexican

11 Gladys McCormick and Linnea Sandin, "Abrazos no Balazos"—Evaluating AMLO's Security Initiatives", Center for Strategic and International Studies, published December 13, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/abrazos-no-balazos-evaluating-amlos-security-initiatives>.

12 Gladys McCormick and Linnea Sandin, "Abrazos no Balazos".

13 "Venezuela: Reversing the Slide into Dictatorship," International Crisis Group, published October 15, 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/venezuela/venezuela-reversing-slide-dictatorship>.

14 Elias Camhaji, "The Sinaloa Cartel after 'El Mayo' Zambada: Mexico fears outbreak of violence after arrest of drug lord," *El País*, August 5, 2024, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-08-05/the-sinaloa-cartel-after-el-mayo-zambada-mexico-fears-outbreak-of-violence-after-arrest-of-drug-lord.html#?rel=mas>.

15 Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Justice, "Ismael 'El Mayo' Zambada Garcia, Co-Founder of the Sinaloa Cartel, Arraigned in Brooklyn on International Drug Charges," Press release, September 13, 2024, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/ismael-el-mayo-zambada-garcia-co-founder-sinaloa-cartel-arraigned-brooklyn-international>.

16 Homeland Security Investigations, "Forty-Seven Defendants Charged in HSI-led Drug Trafficking Investigation Linked to Sinaloa Cartel," press release, last updated September 10, 2024, <https://www.dhs.gov/hsi/news/2024/06/05/forty-seven-defendants-charged-hsi-led-drug-trafficking-investigation-linked>.

17 CBS, "Sinaloa cartel leader Ismael 'El Mayo' Zambada's case takes strange twist after he's jailed in the U.S.," *CBS News*, August 13, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/sinaloa-cartel-leader-ismael-el-mayo-zambada-jailed-us-strange-twist/>.

18 Elias Camhaji, "The letter from 'El Mayo' Zambada that widens the scandal in Mexico: A murder, a capture and a secret meeting," *El País*, August 13, 2024, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-08-13/the-letter-from-el-mayo-zambada-that-widens-the-scandal-in-mexico-a-murder-a-capture-and-a-secret-meeting.html>.

19 Fiscalía General De La Republica, "FGR Press Release 415/24," Press release, August 11, 2024, https://www.fgr.org.mx/es/FGR/Prensa/_rid/61/_mod/story?p=1&ord=desc&f=0&suri=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.FGR.swb%23fgr_Boletin%3A14798.

20 CBS, "Sinaloa cartel leader Ismael 'El Mayo' Zambada's case."

21 CBS, "Sinaloa cartel leader Ismael 'El Mayo' Zambada's case."

22 Peter Appleby and Parker Asmann, "Truth or Lie? A Letter From El Mayo Fuels Mexico-US Tensions Over Sinaloa Cartel Arrests," *InSight Crime*, August 14, 2024,



Arrest of Joaquin “Chapo” Guzman en route from Colombia to Mexico

Credit: U.S. Department of Justice

government has previously discouraged outside intervention in cartel activity. Both countries’ authorities are focused on gathering information on El Mayo’s arrival independently rather than working together.²³

Since El Mayo’s arrest, the Sinaloa region has erupted in chaos. The Sinaloa Cartel has two factions. One faction, the ‘Chapitos,’ is controlled by López. The other faction, the ‘Los Mayos’ was controlled by El Mayo before his arrest.²⁴ Tensions peaked between both factions due to suspicions that El Mayo’s kidnapping was done by the Chapitos. As a result, there have been several murders caused by cartel in-fighting. In the past three months, hundreds of people have gone missing in Sinaloa.²⁵ Over 400 have been killed in the gang war between the Sinaloa factions.²⁶ Before El Mayo’s arrest, the cartel had an alliance between El Mayo’s faction and the Chapitos’ faction. Culicán was relatively peaceful even with the cartel operations. The factions had a mutual agreement against

harming civilians. El Mayo served as a mediator between the cartel and local governments. However, after suspicions of betrayal surfaced, that agreement was broken, and the cartel split.²⁷ Violence targeting civilians has swept Culicán. Some civilians believe the absence of El Mayo, who ‘kept the peace’ better than any government security, triggered this gang war.²⁸

President Sheinbaum has dispatched her security chief, Omar García Harfuch, to try and stop the ongoing violence. Growing international criticism has caused her to change her stance. She described her administration as taking a ‘zero tolerance’ approach until the violence ceases. Since she has taken office, Mexican security forces have seized a record amount of fentanyl in Sinaloa, worth over USD 394 million. Sheinbaum is trying to increase pressure on the cartel to stop its war.²⁹

It is unclear what the effects of the Sinaloa Cartel’s conflicts will be once the dust settles. This development demonstrates

<https://insightcrime.org/news/truth-or-lie-a-letter-from-el-mayo-fuels-mexico-us-tensions-over-sinaloa-cartel-arrests/0>.

²³ Appleby and Asmann, “Truth or Lie?”.

²⁴ Associated Press, “Sinaloa cartel infighting rises in northern Mexico following the detention of 2 drug lords in July,” *Associated Press*, August 20, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/mexico-sinaloa-cartel-succession-battle-mayo-zambada-battle-8ea5acf7e66f26a4edd84f5947bc7aea>.

²⁵ Vanessa Buschschlüter, “Disappearances double in Sinaloa amid Mexican cartel rift,” *BBC*, December 5, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdr0dg4g11do>.

²⁶ CBS, “Hundreds dead in Mexican city since cartel leaders’ September arrest in U.S.: ‘Scared out of our wits,’” *CBS News*, December 4, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/culiacan-mexico-hundreds-dead-missing-cartel-fighting/>.

²⁷ Benjamin T. Smith, *The Dope: The Real History of the Mexican Drug Trade* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2021).

²⁸ Mary Beth Sheridan, “How a U.S. drug arrest made Mexico more violent,” *The Washington Post*, November 16, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/11/16/mexico-sinaloa-cartel-power-struggle/>.

²⁹ Buschschlüter, “Disappearances double in Sinaloa.”

that instability can be found in even the oldest cartels. The Sinaloa, one of Latin America's most influential cartels, is filled with struggles for power and influence.³⁰

Other organized crime groups have also been gaining influence or facing challenges. These include Venezuela's Tren de Aragua, which saw several main leaders arrested in Colombia.³¹ Another emerging group is the CJNG. The CJNG has employed community efforts to gain favor and influence among civilians. They also have partnerships with drug trafficking groups, such as the Huistas in Guatemala. This has resulted in their rapid expansion, as well as monetary support from powerful individuals and corporations. These connections also allow the cartel to control synthetic drug trade across South America, Southeast Asia, and even the United States.³² Organized crime is filled with internal conflicts that can harm innocent people. Delegates must find solutions to address and prevent the dangers of cartels laundering money. These solutions must be balanced against further regional collapses and continued violence.

Operation Destabilise and Operation Crete II

There has been an increase in joint operations between nations to combat organized crime. One of these operations is Operation Crete II. It took place throughout August and September of 2024 and was led by INTERPOL. Operation Crete II was aimed at "targeting the trade of fake and pirated goods" across South America. Twelve countries were involved in the operation. These included Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela. INTERPOL worked with the Intellectual Property KEY Latin America Project (IPKEY)

and the International IP Crime Investigators College (IIPCIC) to launch a series of training sessions and intelligence-sharing meetings. Previously, authorities were not given the resources needed to succeed. The intelligence-sharing sessions focused on how to identify and seize fake goods. These included counterfeit fashion items, medicine, and digital content.

These increased the efficiency of local police in conducting independent investigations.³³ The Brazilian police reported dismantling a crime group smuggling more than USD 250 million in counterfeit cigarettes.³⁴ Involved suspects and assets were arrested and seized by the police. Similarly, in Chile, their investigations focused on seizing hundreds of thousands of USD worth of counterfeit jewelry. While each country focused on specific counterfeit goods, each investigation was coordinated internationally.³⁵ This form of centralized collaboration is becoming more common. To counter the growing global influence of money laundering schemes, delegates should consider how to standardize nations' responses. Operation Crete II showed that given proper training and resources, police forces can launch successful operations. UNODC has also taken a similar approach in recent years. The Global Programme Against Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism has launched online and in-person cash courier training. A successful cash seizure in Cambodian airports proved the success of the UNODC's direct engagement with local authorities.³⁶

Another collaborative program, Operation Destabilise, was recently launched by the National Crime Agency (NCA). This operation targeted two Russian money laundering networks that have funded organized crime worldwide. These networks, Smart and TGR Group, use cryptocurrency exchanges to transfer funds overseas.³⁷ The purpose of using cryptocurrency

30 Nathaniel Parish Flannery, "The Violence In Sinaloa, Mexico Is Getting Worse," *Forbes*, October 22, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nathanielparishflannery/2024/10/22/the-violence-in-sinaloa-mexico-is-getting-worse/>.

31 Alejandra Rodriguez, "The 5 Most-Read Criminal Group Profiles in 2024," *InSight Crime*, December 16, 2024, <https://insightcrime.org/news/the-5-most-read-criminal-group-profiles-in-2024/>.

32 "Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG)," *InSight Crime*, published May 27, 2024, <https://insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/jalisco-cartel-new-generation/>.

33 Interpol, "Over 11 million illicit and counterfeit products seized in South American operation," *Interpol*, November 20, 2024, <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2024/Over-11-million-illicit-and-counterfeit-products-seized-in-South-American-operation>.

34 Interpol, "Over 11 million illicit and counterfeit products".

35 Interpol, "Over 11 million illicit and counterfeit products".

36 "Highlights," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/money-laundering/global-programme-against-money-laundering/highlights.html>.

37 National Crime Agency, "Operation Destabilise: NCA disrupts \$multi-billion Russian money laundering networks with links to, drugs, ransomware and espionage, resulting in 84 arrests," news release, December 4, 2024, <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/news/>

is to evade sanctions placed by states. By giving organized crime groups access to markets, they wouldn't normally have access to, the networks allow money to be transferred across borders. This is especially helpful for criminal organizations to gain global influence.³⁸ Operation Destabilise was able to uncover and expose these networks. As of December 2024, the NCA made 84 related arrests and seized over 20 million euros worth of assets. Though the collaboration mainly took place in the United Kingdom, the investigation results harmed many organized crime groups outside of Europe.³⁹

Operation Destabilise used a similar model to Operation Crete II. In proposing solutions, Delegates should consider the strengths and weaknesses of these combative models. Both Operation Crete II and Destabilise exposed the cross-border activities of criminal organizations. International collaboration was then used to combat these activities. Delegates must also consider the strategic partnerships that would allow for successful initiatives. Nations such as Brazil, Fiji, and Micronesia have held strategic planning workshops alongside the UNODC.⁴⁰ These workshops aimed to “align the expectations of the parties involved and define cooperation priorities between 2025 and 2029.” One such workshop established a working relationship between the UNODC and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency. This partnership emphasizes cooperation between the Global South, not just Brazil.⁴¹ The foundation has been laid for future cooperation. Delegates must navigate cross-nation relationships to allow these initiatives to be successful.

Changing Political Climate and International Relationships

Latin America has seen several political changes in the past few months. These include changes in presidencies or uncertainties with the election process. Politics plays a significant role in organized crime. Often, criminal organizations take advantage of political weakness to gain more influence. Others try to maintain the current political scene if it benefits them. Some politicians are involved in money laundering or organized crime activity, so these organizations want them to stay in power.⁴²

Mexico elected its first female president, Claudia Sheinbaum, in June 2024. During Sheinbaum's campaign, she promised to combat the growing influence of cartels in Mexico with a new approach. This plan focuses on reducing poverty and inequality to address the causes of cartel activity. She also plans to increase intelligence and investigative work and mobilize the National Guard. Furthermore, Sheinbaum intends to increase coordination between state and local authorities and increase youth programs. These programs would focus on keeping Mexican youth out of organized crime groups.⁴³ Leadership changes have not only affected Mexico. The reelection of President Donald Trump presents increased pressures for Sheinbaum to take a stronger approach. There is a lack of satisfaction in Washington with Mexico's methods of combating drug trafficking.⁴⁴ The Trump administration has increased talks of intervention due to the recent outbreaks of violence in Sinaloa. Since 2020, Mexico's bilateral security

operation-destabilise-nca-disrupts-multi-billion-russian-money-laundering-networks-with-links-to-drugs-ransomware-and-espionage-resulting-in-84-arrests.

38 “NCA Disrupts Multi-Billion Dollar Russian Money Laundering Network, OFAC Sanctions Related Individuals and Entities,” Chainalysis, published December 4, 2024, <https://www.chainalysis.com/blog/nca-disrupts-multi-billion-dollar-russian-money-laundering-network-2024/>.

39 National Crime Agency, “Operation Destabilise”.

40 “UNODC Brazil and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency of the the Ministry of Foreign Affairs discuss strategic alliance to promote South-South and Trilateral cooperation,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Brazil, published August 2024, <https://www.unodc.org/cofrb/en/noticias/2024/08/unodc-brazil-and-the-brazilian-cooperatoin-agency-of-the-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-discuss-strategic-alliance-to-promote-south-south-and-trilateral-cooperation.html>; “The Pacific's Evolving Threat: Transnational Organized Crime,” UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, published November 21, 2024, <https://www.unodc.org/roseap/en/pacific/2024/11/evolving-threat-transnational-organized-crime/story.html>.

41 “UNODC Brazil and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency of the the Ministry of Foreign Affairs discuss strategic alliance to promote South-South and Trilateral cooperation,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Brazil, published August 2024, <https://www.unodc.org/cofrb/en/noticias/2024/08/unodc-brazil-and-the-brazilian-cooperatoin-agency-of-the-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-discuss-strategic-alliance-to-promote-south-south-and-trilateral-cooperation.html>.

42 Alberto Alesina, Salvatore Piccolo, and Paolo Pinotti, “Organized Crime, Violence, and Politics,” *The Review of Economic Studies* 86, no. 2 (March 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdy036>.

43 Associated Press, “Mexico's president lays out a plan to combat cartel violence.”

44 Juan Rojas, “With Trump in the White House, Can Mexico Avoid Making the Drug War Even Bloodier?,” *The Nation*, November 22, 2024, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/drug-war-cartel-violence-mexico-trump-sheinbaum/>.

relationship with the United States has decayed. Former Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador criticized US involvement in fighting drug trafficking in Mexico for a lack of transparency and communication. As a result, Sheinbaum's new policies appear to be taking a stronger approach. She has also insisted that while Mexico is open to collaboration with U.S. authorities, the country will not enter "a relationship of subordination."⁴⁵

Another political development in Latin America is President Nicolás Maduro's continued administration in Venezuela. The most recent election saw Maduro facing opposition candidate Edmundo González. For the first time in decades, it appeared that Maduro's United Socialist Party may lose the presidential position. However, the National Electoral Council declared the incumbent president the victor without providing details regarding the vote distribution.⁴⁶ This outcome has sparked criticism from other nations like the United States, Ecuador, and Peru. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has also ordered the National Electoral Council to "refrain from destroying the voter tallies." Even though Venezuela faces

increasing pressure to release the voting data, the Electoral Council claims technological failures and voter fraud have rendered the data unreliable.⁴⁷ President Maduro has alleged connections with Venezuela's "Cártel de Los Soles." An indictment in a New York court claimed that Maduro's role in the cartel only increased as he gained more political power. It also claims his involvement with the cartel was interlinked with his policies as President.⁴⁸ Though these claims have not been proven true, Maduro's continued position of power may impact money laundering practices throughout Venezuela.

Given the United States' proximity to Latin America, the results of the 2024 Presidential election will affect cartel policies. Much like the previous president Joe Biden, President-Elect Donald Trump has verbalized a "hardline" stance against organized crime and drug trade in Latin America. Trump's stance is even more direct, filled with threats to "bomb" cartel facilities. While a direct violent approach by the US is unlikely, pressures on Latin American governments will continue or increase in the next four years.⁴⁹ Other US government officials have expressed the desire to label cartels as foreign terrorist

45 Iker Seisdedos and Zedryk Raziel, "The red line that Trump wants to cross in the fight against Mexican cartels," *El País*, December 24, 2024, <https://english.elpais.com/usa/2024-12-24/the-red-line-that-trump-wants-to-cross-in-the-fight-against-mexican-cartels.html>.
 46 International Crisis Group, "Venezuela: Reversing the Slide into Dictatorship."
 47 Vanessa Buschschlüter, "UN orders Venezuela not to destroy election vote tallies," *BBC*, December 4, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdr0jpgr4yjo>.
 48 Antonio Maria Delgado, "Maduro played a hands-on role in Venezuela's drug cartel, unsealed indictment says," *Miami Herald*, July 10, 2024, <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/venezuela/article289927469.html>.
 49 Jorge Casteñeda Gutman, "What Awaits Latin America after the U.S. Presidential Election," *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development* 28, (Autumn 2024): 148-155, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48794587>.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum with Colombia President Gustavo Petro

Credit: Photographer of the President of Colombia



organizations and declare “wars on cartels” to grant military authority.⁵⁰ Other countries have a history of previous US involvement regarding organized crime. After the extradition of Honduras’ former President Juan Orlando Hernández for drug trafficking ties, organized crime largely remains in power. The US government has also been cautious about involvement with Guatemala. Outside nations could threaten stability if involved with the current regime transition.⁵¹

Delegates should consider how persisting or changing political dynamics will impact cartel activity. These examples demonstrate that a cartel’s level of power can change depending on leaders’ policies. If delegates hope to curb money laundering activities from crime organizations successfully, they must address any political or social instability that could arise from leadership changes.

Conclusion

Money laundering remains a significant concern for Latin America and the international community. Recent advancements in technology, including AI, the availability of the internet, and cryptocurrency, have allowed illicit financial activities to grow. These technologies make it harder for criminal networks to be detected and traced. The anonymity and nature of digital currencies and AI-based methods expand the opportunities for organized crime groups. This includes crossing borders, and exploiting vulnerable groups, and fragile institutions. As a result, nations must be more proactive in their methods of combating money laundering. When creating solutions to combat money laundering, the potential for violence must be considered. The current power struggle in the Sinaloa cartel has caused a delicate situation. Even though its leader El Mayo has been arrested, Mexico has suffered several disturbances in recent months.⁵² Security infrastructure and international relations are necessary to strengthen the global framework to fight crime. Delegates must work to find ways of inhibiting the cartel’s illegal activities while preventing regional instability and violence

from persisting.

Recently, nations and organizations have increased their anti-money laundering efforts. The trend of increased international cooperation and program growth is promising. Successful examples of these efforts include Operation Crete II and Operation Destabilise. Without these coordinated efforts, organized crime groups have an easier time exploiting a state’s economy, their rule of law, and asserting violence. To counter the growing global influence of money laundering, delegates should focus on strengthening international ties. Through collaboration, there will be an increase in information sharing, more success in tracking, and punishing these crime groups, and greater anti-money laundering regulations. Finally, delegates should take shifting political environments into consideration. Changes in administration can impact the policies of foreign governments. Persisting power can also halt progress in combating cartel influence. Delegates should also consider the nuances of how policies against organized crime can impact the sociopolitical scene of Latin America.

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51 Carlos Heredia, “Mexico and Central America in Trump’s Second Term,” *Wilson Center*, December 11, 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/mexico-and-central-america-trumps-second-term>.

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