

Abstract

Transnational Crime

Why do groups shift from organised crime to political violence? The links between organised crime and terrorism are well-established. These range from transactional cooperation for specific services to hybridisation of groups as objectives shift under the pressure of robust counter-terrorist operations, political redundancy and the corrosion of internal discipline. Most cases involve the transition from terrorism towards crime. Less documented is the shift by criminal groups in to the political sphere beyond tactical use of political violence for profit maximisation or asset protection. This paper deploys a range of case studies from Europe, Latin America, East Asia and the Middle East to explore how the state (or elements within it), an entity commonly left out of crime-terror nexus modelling, plays a critical functional role in moving criminal groups into the political space. The paper argues that state facilitation or sponsorship of political violence by organised crime groups typically stems from strategies of power projection, containment of alternative security threats and the imperative of regime survival. Finally, the paper also questions under what circumstances politicisation either provides effective cover for continued organised criminal activity or can actually constrain both profitability and political objectives.