

# history of organized crime in canada

History of organized crime in Canada is a complex and intriguing narrative that intertwines with the nation's socio-economic landscape. The roots of organized crime in Canada trace back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as waves of immigration, urbanization, and the Prohibition era laid the groundwork for illicit activities. Over the decades, various criminal organizations have emerged, evolved, and adapted to changing societal norms and law enforcement tactics. This article will explore the historical development of organized crime in Canada, its key players, the impact of legislation, and the ongoing challenges that law enforcement faces.

## Roots of Organized Crime in Canada

Canada's organized crime history can be categorized into several key phases, each marked by distinct influences and developments.

### Immigration and Urbanization

- Late 19th Century: The influx of immigrants from Europe, particularly Italians, Irish, and Jews, contributed significantly to the rise of organized crime. Many of these immigrants faced economic hardships and found themselves marginalized within society.
- Prohibition Era (1918-1933): The introduction of Prohibition in Canada created a lucrative black market for alcohol. Criminal organizations quickly capitalized on this demand, leading to the establishment of powerful syndicates.

## Prohibition and the Emergence of Syndicates

During the Prohibition era, several key criminal organizations began to form:

1. The Italian Mafia: Originating from Sicilian immigrants, the Mafia established itself in major cities such as Montreal and Toronto. The infamous Cotroni crime family emerged, engaging in bootlegging, extortion, and gambling.
2. Irish Gangs: The Irish community also had a significant presence in organized crime, with gangs like the West End Gang in Montreal becoming prominent players in the illicit trade.
3. Jewish Syndicates: Jewish organized crime groups, such as the Koshers Nostra, participated in bootlegging and other illegal activities, often collaborating with Italian and Irish gangs.

# Post-Prohibition Developments

With the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, organized crime in Canada did not dissipate but rather transformed and expanded its activities.

## Expansion into New Criminal Enterprises

- Narcotics: The 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of drug trafficking as a primary focus for organized crime, with Canadian groups establishing connections to international drug cartels.
- Gambling: As gambling became more prevalent, organized crime syndicates took control of illegal gambling operations, leading to significant profits and influence.

## The Role of Law Enforcement

Law enforcement agencies began to recognize the growing threat of organized crime and took steps to counteract it:

- Creation of Specialized Units: In response to the increasing sophistication of criminal organizations, police departments established specialized units to combat organized crime.
- Collaboration and Intelligence Sharing: Canadian law enforcement began collaborating with international agencies, particularly the FBI, to address cross-border crime.

## The Rise of Notorious Crime Families

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, several crime families rose to prominence in Canada, each playing a pivotal role in organized crime.

### The Cotroni Family

- Founded in the 1920s in Montreal, the Cotroni family was one of the first Italian crime families in Canada.
- Led by Vito Rizzuto in the 1970s, the family became deeply involved in drug trafficking and money laundering, establishing connections with the Sicilian Mafia.

## **The Rizzuto Crime Family**

- Leadership: Under Vito Rizzuto, the family expanded its influence beyond Montreal, reaching across Canada and into the United States.
- Conflict: The Rizzuto family faced challenges from rival gangs, including the Hells Angels and the West End Gang, leading to violent conflicts and power struggles.

## **The Hells Angels Motorcycle Club**

- Established in the 1960s, the Hells Angels became one of the most notorious organized crime groups in Canada.
- Involvement in drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and violent crime solidified their reputation, leading to ongoing confrontations with law enforcement.

## **Legislative Response to Organized Crime**

As organized crime continued to flourish, Canadian lawmakers recognized the need for stronger legislation to combat these criminal enterprises.

### **Key Legislative Measures**

1. Criminal Code Amendments: Revisions to the Criminal Code in the 1970s and 1980s added harsher penalties for organized crime-related activities.
2. The Organized Crime Act (1997): This act provided law enforcement with additional tools to investigate and prosecute organized crime, including provisions for wiretaps and increased penalties for gang-related offenses.
3. Anti-Money Laundering Regulations: The establishment of regulations aimed at curbing money laundering practices, particularly in the financial sector, became a focal point in the fight against organized crime.

## **Current Trends and Challenges**

Today, organized crime in Canada continues to evolve, adapting to technological advancements and shifting societal behaviors.

### **Emergence of New Criminal Organizations**

- Asian and Indigenous Gangs: New groups, including Asian organized crime

syndicates and Indigenous gangs, have emerged, diversifying the landscape of organized crime in Canada.

- Cybercrime: With the rise of the internet, organized crime has expanded into cybercrime, including identity theft, online fraud, and hacking.

## **Ongoing Law Enforcement Challenges**

Despite significant advancements in law enforcement strategies, several challenges remain:

- Resource Limitations: Many police forces struggle with limited resources, making it difficult to effectively combat sophisticated organized crime networks.
- Corruption and Collusion: Instances of corruption within law enforcement agencies can hinder efforts to tackle organized crime.
- Community Relations: Building trust between law enforcement and communities affected by organized crime is essential for successful intervention.

## **Conclusion**

The history of organized crime in Canada is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of criminal organizations in the face of societal change. From the early days of bootlegging during Prohibition to the complexities of modern cybercrime, organized crime remains a significant challenge for law enforcement and society as a whole. As Canada continues to evolve, so too will the strategies employed by both criminal enterprises and those dedicated to combating them. Understanding this dynamic history is crucial in developing effective policies and strategies to address the ongoing threat of organized crime in Canada.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What were the origins of organized crime in Canada?**

The origins of organized crime in Canada can be traced back to the early 20th century, particularly during Prohibition in the 1920s. This era saw the rise of bootlegging and smuggling operations, primarily by Italian and Irish immigrant groups.

### **Which criminal organizations have had a significant impact on organized crime in Canada?**

Major criminal organizations in Canada include the Hells Angels, the Italian Mafia (specifically the 'Ndrangheta and the Sicilian Mafia), and various

street gangs such as the Bloods and Crips, all of which have played significant roles in the landscape of organized crime.

## **How did the Canadian government respond to organized crime in the 1970s and 1980s?**

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Canadian government implemented stricter laws and created specialized police units, such as the Organized Crime Agency of British Columbia, to combat the growing influence of organized crime.

## **What role did the Montreal Mafia play in organized crime in Canada?**

The Montreal Mafia, particularly the Cotroni and Calabrian factions, was a dominant force in organized crime in Canada, controlling various illegal activities, including drug trafficking, extortion, and illegal gambling, especially during the mid-20th century.

## **How has organized crime in Canada evolved in recent years?**

In recent years, organized crime in Canada has evolved to include cybercrime and drug trafficking, with a significant rise in the production and distribution of synthetic drugs like fentanyl, often involving both domestic and international criminal networks.

## **What is the significance of the 'Project Convalesce' investigation?**

Project Convalesce was a significant law enforcement operation in 2018 that targeted the Montreal Mafia, resulting in numerous arrests and the dismantling of key operations, highlighting ongoing efforts to combat organized crime in Canada.

## **How has the relationship between organized crime and politics manifested in Canada?**

The relationship between organized crime and politics in Canada has manifested through corruption and bribery allegations, with instances of organized crime groups attempting to influence political decisions and gain protection from law enforcement.

## **What impact has organized crime had on Canadian society and economy?**

Organized crime has had a significant impact on Canadian society and economy, contributing to violence, public safety concerns, and economic losses from

illegal activities, while also influencing the drug trade and associated health crises.

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