

indicating a high degree of sophistication. High levels of participation by citizens of transit countries, on the other hand, suggest that the drug has been re-sold in transit. While there may be other explanations, this suggests the groups involved at the outset did not have the capacity to deliver the drugs all the way to their final destination. If arrests in transit countries involve primarily the nationals of these countries, this also indicates that the international drug flow is, in fact, merely the sum of national drug flows, percolating slowly toward higher value markets. Of course, when the user country and the destination country are the same, or immediately adjacent to one another, no such conclusion can be reached.

**Provincial drug price data** in drug producing countries can be useful in evaluating the degree of organization at the start of the market chain. Large regional price differentials which cannot be explained by geographic or law enforcement barriers suggest strong local controls over the supply. If the supply were not well controlled by regionally based interests, national price equilibrium would quickly be achieved by competition between these local markets. In other words, stark price differences in drug producing countries indicate an unseen barrier to competition, likely a regional monopoly held by a powerful organization. Of course, nationally homogeneous prices could be indicative of a single, all-powerful cartel. Price stability is likewise an indicator of large organisations, resistant to the vagaries of changes in production and interdiction rates, possibly holding drug stockpiles. High levels of volatility in prices, on the other hand, are indicative of competition or vulnerability to shocks, both of which could be indications of contested markets and thus possibly less organized criminal groups.

Another indicator of poor transnational delivery capacity is the **presence of drug users in transit countries**. The goal of drug trafficking organizations is to gain profits, and this is best achieved by delivering the drugs to the markets where they command the highest prices. Any “spillage” of drugs before reaching their highest-value destination represents the kind of inefficiency typical of under-resourced groups, who may pay couriers in drugs rather than cash. This manifests itself in drug use problems in transit countries with lower value markets. As a result, low levels of drug usage in these transit countries indicate that the drug flow is either highly organized or relatively new.

While all of these indicators – the size of seizures, the techniques and routes involved, the nationality of the traffickers, local prices in production countries, and the levels of drug use in transit countries – can be deceptive in some cases, their use in combination can provide an

important supplement to qualitative criminal intelligence. In order to explore the potential of using seizure, price, and drug use figures to get a sense of the extent of organisation in contemporary drug trafficking, two of the most important drug flows in the world are discussed and compared in the remainder of this chapter:

- the traffic of cocaine from Colombia via Central America to the USA; and,
- the traffic of heroin from Afghanistan via Central Asia to the Russian Federation.

These two examples were chosen to contrast a well established drug flow involving a number of large drug trafficking organizations (cocaine via Central America) with a relatively recent pattern of trafficking where the groups involved appear more diffuse (heroin via Central Asia). These are also the two drug flows where governments have contributed comprehensive data for several affected countries, including detailed information on a large number of seizures in Colombia and the Russian Federation.

This analysis is not intended to provide the final word on the level of organization in either of these trafficking areas, but rather to “test drive” the indicators to see how they might work in application to a real world situation. Despite excellent data in some instances, there remain great gaps in what we know about both trafficking patterns. In the end, this analysis is less about providing definitive answers than suggesting the kind of questions that should be asked.

### 2.3 Cocaine via Central America to the USA

The organizations involved in trafficking of cocaine to the USA have traditionally been highly organised. During the 1980s, the groups involved were even dubbed “cartels”. A cartel is a consortium of businesses whose combined domination of an industry is so complete that they can collaborate to set prices and otherwise manipulate the market to their mutual benefit. While some dispute the applicability of this term to the Colombian groups, at its peak the Cali cartel is said to have been responsible for up to 80 per cent of cocaine trafficking to the USA, then, as now, the world’s largest consumer of the drug.<sup>23</sup>

The cartels were subjected to the full weight of international law enforcement during the 1980s and 1990s: their assets were seized and their leadership extradited and imprisoned. Insofar as the organizations were concerned, this strategy worked, and the Medellin and Cali cartels were effectively eliminated. In their place sprung

**Map 1: Central American countries affected by cocaine trafficking from Colombia to the United States**

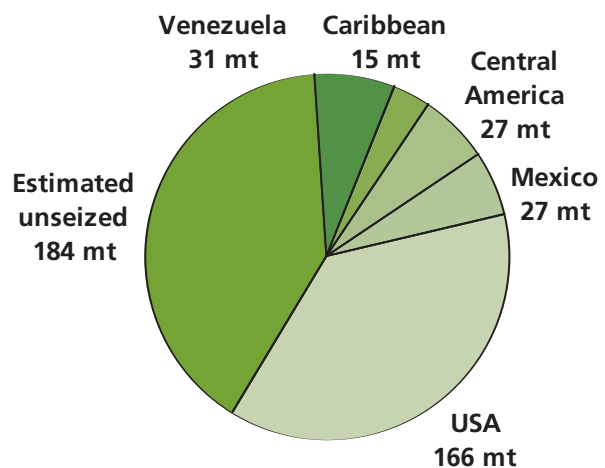
a large number of lower-profile groups, the so-called “baby cartels”, said by some to number in the hundreds.<sup>24</sup> While some of these have achieved more prominence than others, there are no organizations comparable to the Cali and Medellin groups today. In fact, Colombian groups have lost their monopoly over cocaine trafficking altogether and currently most of the drugs reportedly enter the USA in the hands of Mexican organized crime groups. The respective roles of the Colombian and Mexican syndicates are discussed further below.

Most of the world’s cocaine still comes from or through Colombia, and most of the world’s cocaine is still consumed in the USA. UNODC estimated global cocaine production to be 1,008 mt in 2004, of which 640 mt was produced in Colombia, 270 mt in Peru, and 98 mt in Bolivia. In 2004, Europol estimates about 200 mt went to Europe<sup>25</sup> and the US National Drug Intelligence Agency estimates between 325 and 675 mt went to the USA.<sup>26</sup> Based on previous years’ estimates, this total is probably in the order of 450 mt.<sup>27</sup> If all of these 450 mt were wholesaled in the USA, they would be worth just under US\$12 billion today, and three to five times that at retail level.<sup>28</sup> Some 80 per cent of this flow travelled by private boats.<sup>29</sup> The fact that so large a share is mar-

itime suggests high levels of organization, as shipments are likely to be sizable and sea craft are a relatively expensive means of transport, given the risks of asset forfeiture.

According to US estimates, some 88 per cent of the cocaine destined for the USA transits the Central America/Mexico corridor, about 50 per cent along the Pacific and 38 per cent along the Caribbean coast of Central America.<sup>30</sup> This is in keeping with what the Colombian authorities report: about 60 per cent of the seizures in Colombia occurred at the ports, 60 per cent on the Pacific and 40 per cent on the Atlantic.<sup>31</sup> In more concrete terms, this would be equal to about 250 mt along the Pacific and 200 mt along the Caribbean. Of this flow, the US estimates 196 mt were lost or seized in transit, and 34 mt were seized at the US border, in 2004.<sup>32</sup> In other words, about half the cocaine destined for the USA never arrived at its destination. If these estimates are accurate, data on seizures represent a very large sample of the overall flow.

Of the 2004 seizures of cocaine in the Western Hemisphere, 62 mt (about 6 per cent of total annual production) can be traced to just 26 seizures of more than 1 mt documented in the Individual Seizures Database, most of which occurred in Colombia. Today, 1 mt of cocaine

**Fig. 4: Cocaine seizures in Colombia/US transit zone in mt, 2004**

Source: UNODC Delta database

wholesales for about US \$1.9 million in Colombia, and retails for over US\$100 million in the USA. According to media reports, a seizure of 13 mt of cocaine, said to be the property of the Norte de Valle cartel, was made in early 2007 in Colombia.<sup>33</sup> Seizures of this scale suggest a substantial concentration of the market in the hands of a limited number of organizations at the outset of the trafficking chain.

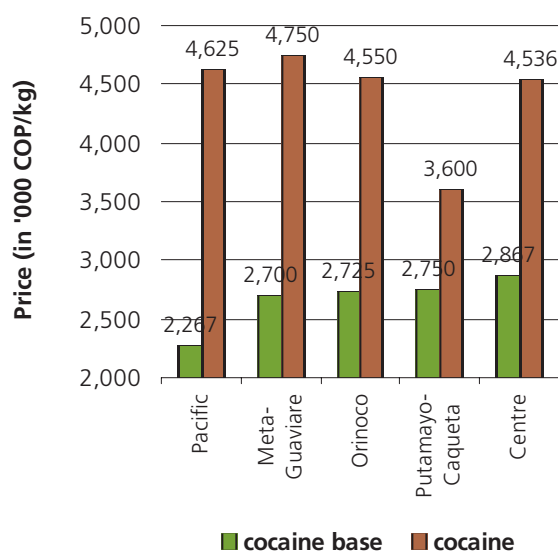
### The Colombian source

Coca is a plant, so the first link in the supply chain is the farmers. The cultivation of coca leaf is a highly decentralised activity, due to the need to conceal the crop from a continual campaign of aerial spraying and manual eradication. The average plot size is small, about one hectare, making coca growing a kind of family business. In 2005, some 68,600 households were involved in this activity, cultivating in 23 out of Colombia's 32 provinces.<sup>34</sup> No one believes that these tens of thousands of households are directly in the employ of organized crime, but neither are they simply freelance market players. Particularly in the areas controlled by insurgent or paramilitary groups, a variety of mechanisms may be used to encourage coca cultivation, and those who grow the drug are not simply peasants cultivating a traditional crop. The UNODC/Government of Colombia 2005 Coca cultivation Survey found that only one third of the farmers were just cultivators – the balance were involved in processing the plant into drugs, up to the point of creating cocaine base.

There is substantial regional variation in the price paid for cocaine base and the refined cocaine. While data are sparse, it appears that cultivators in the Pacific region, open to sea trafficking lanes, were paid substantially less for base than those in the centre of the country. If base were trafficked within the country, this would result in a paradoxical loss of value as the drug is moved closer to departure. Of course, the Pacific region is home of the Cali and its successor Norte de Valle cartels, and may still be home to syndicates powerful enough to control prices paid to farmers and resist local competition. Cocaine prices comply more closely with market logic, though regional variations of almost 25 per cent also suggest that the market for cocaine may not be competitive on a national level. Whether this is due to the regional domination of certain crime groups, to law enforcement pressure or to some other cause remains uncertain.

Coca cultivators do not create the finished drug, however. The processing of cocaine base into cocaine hydrochloride requires a laboratory of some sophistication, so these are generally operated by specialists, not

Fig. 5: Regional prices of cocaine base and cocaine in September 2005



Source: UNODC Country Office in Colombia

farmers. Each syndicate, including insurgent and paramilitary groups, runs its own laboratories, so these are directly in the control of organized crime. The Colombian government destroyed 243 cocaine hydrochloride laboratories in 21 provinces in 2004 and 163 in 19 provinces in 2005. According to the Colombian Dirección de Antinarcóticos (DIRAN), an average laboratory can produce between 300 kg and 500 kg per week, or, in theory, up to 26 mt per year. If true, total cocaine production could be handled in just 25 laboratories. Given the wide dispersion of cultivation, however, the proliferation of sites may be tied to logistic convenience, and is not necessarily an indicator of a multiplicity of independent actors.

Large amounts of cocaine are found virtually everywhere in the country, so it is remarkable that adult annual cocaine use prevalence is only 0.8 per cent of the population age 18-65, more than twice the global average, though less than a third of that in the USA. This indicates high levels of control over the cocaine supply. As is the case in many agriculture-exporting countries, export stock is not widely consumed locally.

In order to generate the multi-ton loads leaving the country, a process of consolidation must occur before trafficking, and this implies large organizations. As in many other drug producing regions of the world, there appears to be a symbiotic relationship between political instability and the drug trade. There is strong evidence to show how both the insurgency (principally the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the FARC) and

the paramilitary forces (the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, the AUC), progressed from simply “taxing” the crop in the past to assuming a managerial role over production in the regions they control.<sup>35</sup> There is also some evidence, principally concerning the AUC, that these groups have been involved in transnational trafficking, including trading drugs for arms.<sup>36</sup> This is not surprising, as many AUC units were founded with drug trafficking money. But while these groups are key in the cultivation, processing, and consolidation of the drug loads, their concerns remain highly local. The bulk of the trafficking appears to remain in the hands of a larger number of smaller professional drug smuggling groups – the so-called “baby cartels”.

Over the past two decades, Mexican groups, which had previously been used instrumentally by the Colombians, have increasingly taken control of the US market. This transfer of responsibilities has not been complete, however, and Colombian groups, as well as their Dominican associates, remain prominent in the wholesale and retail trades in the northeast part of the USA. In addition, it appears that Colombian trafficking organizations have expanded operations in Mexico, taking advantage of the disarray of the Mexican syndicates following law enforcement successes and inter-syndicate warfare.<sup>37</sup> Mexican groups have also extended their reach and have expanded presence in producer countries, Peru in particular.<sup>38</sup> Although only 20 Mexicans were arrested for drug trafficking in Colombia in 2004, several were associated with large seizures.

While there is no clear delineation of function, there has been a clear shift of roles over time, with the Colombian nationals generally forming the first part of the chain and Mexican nationals assuming responsibility for getting the drug to its destination markets in the USA. It is not clear at what point most of the cocaine leaves the possession of Colombian groups and becomes the property of Mexican groups, but most of it leaves Colombia in Colombian hands and crosses the US southern border in Mexican hands.

Large seizures are also made in Venezuela, which might be considered to be less a transit country than a sort of proxy source country, given the permeability of the borders. Under growing pressure from the government, both insurgent groups and traffickers appear to have relocated across the border, and, increasingly, suspect air and sea activity is originating in Venezuela.<sup>39</sup> A total of 31 mt of cocaine were seized in Venezuela in 2004, the fourth largest annual seizure total in the world. Individual seizures include one of 7.6 mt and at least three other multi-ton seizures totalling over 15.5 mt, or about half of the annual seizure total. This indicates that cocaine trafficking through Venezuela, as in Colombia,

involves well-organized and well-resourced groups.

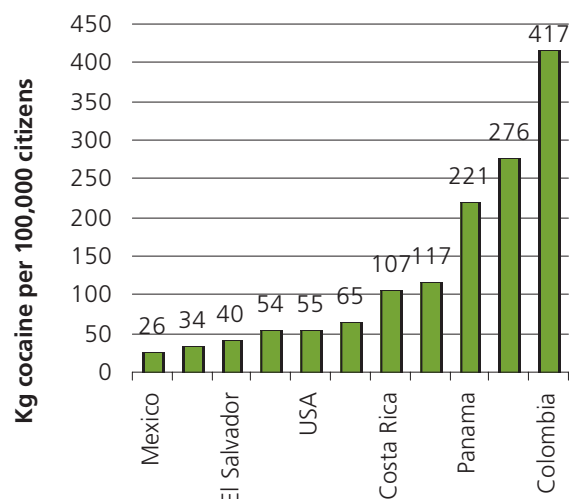
### The Central American link

Central America is comprised of seven small, under-resourced countries that serve as re-fuelling stops or transit zones for cocaine moving northward. It does not appear that Central American groups assume ownership of most of the large shipments transiting the region. The US government asserts that Central American countries are used as stockpiling locations, particularly Guatemala.<sup>40</sup> Guatemala has ports on both the Pacific and the Gulf of Mexico, as well as large wilderness areas bordering Mexico, making it an ideal spot to store cocaine destined for Mexico while avoiding the scrutiny of Mexican law enforcement. The role Guatemalan organized crime groups play in transnational cocaine traffic is unclear, however.

Lack of law enforcement capacity means that seizures, or the lack thereof, do not necessarily reflect the flow of drugs through the region. About 27 mt were seized by the Central American countries in 2004. Though comprising only 5 per cent of global cocaine seizures, this amount is remarkable when considered on a per capita basis.

UNODC individual seizure data for the region is patchy, but both Nicaragua and Honduras submitted complete reports for 2004. Along the Atlantic coast of Central America, most of the drug traffic is shuttled by go-fast boat, so re-fuelling stopovers can occur in relatively isolated areas. Large parts of the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua and the Mosquito Coast of Honduras are sparsely populated. These two countries comprise the longest stretch of coastline along the Caribbean route. In

**Fig. 6: Kilograms of cocaine seized per 100,000 citizens in 2004**

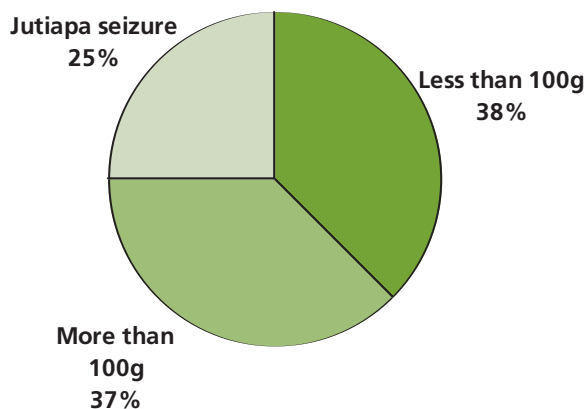


Source: ARQ

Honduras in 2004, police made 86 arrests for cocaine and 42 for crack. Since crack is bulkier than cocaine and is easy to manufacture on-site, it is rarely trafficked internationally, so crack seizures are generally indicative of local use levels, not transnational smuggling. Looking just at the 86 cocaine arrests, 21 involved quantities of more than 100 grams, comprising 62 per cent of all the cocaine seized that year. One seizure, on Jutiapa Beach, netted 1 mt of cocaine, more than 25 per cent of the cocaine seized that year. All seizures of over 100 kg were destined for the USA. Similarly, in Nicaragua in 2004, some 42 per cent of the cocaine recovered that year was seized in just two major seizures on the Atlantic coast. The size of these individual seizures in comparison to the small size of the lesser traffic suggests a high degree of organization in the movement of cocaine through this area.

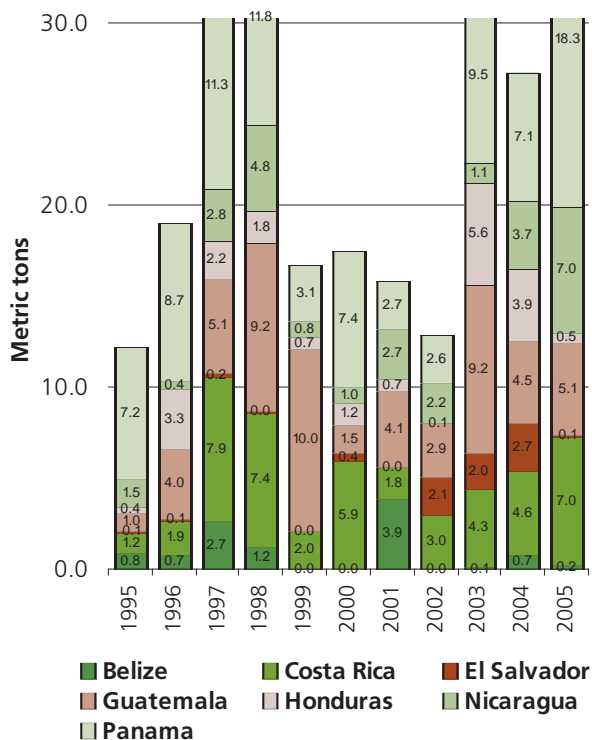
The importance of large seizures to the national seizure totals of the Central American countries is manifest in the extreme volatility of total seizure levels from one year to the next. For example, Belize seized 13 kg of cocaine in 2000, 3.1 mt in 2001, and 10 kg in 2003. Honduras seized 79 kg in 2002 and 5.6 mt the next year, a year-on-year increase of 7100 per cent. El Salvador went from 32 kg in 2001 to 2 or 3 mt from 2002 to 2004, before plunging back down to 32 kg in 2005. Even Panama's totals have ranged from about 2.5 mt in 2002 to 14 mt in 2005. It is unlikely that these variations are reflective of changes in trafficking or enforcement patterns. Rather, those years in which the large-scale traffic is untapped show that the small-scale traffic is relatively insignificant. Thus, volatility in seizure trends for small countries, in combination with other indicators, may be an indicator of high degrees of organization.

Fig. 7: Cocaine seizures in Honduras in 2004



Source: Annual Reports Questionnaire and Individual Seizure Database

Fig. 8: Metric tons of cocaine seized in Central American countries (rounded)



Source: UNODC ARQ data

While minor in impact, there does appear to be a large number of incidents of international movement of small amounts of cocaine within Central America and/or involving Central Americans travelling internationally. Central Americans have been arrested numerous times in recent years in the USA, Spain, Germany, and parts of South America for involvement in cocaine trafficking. The amounts involved are generally moderate and the techniques involved run the gamut, from intestinal couriers travelling on commercial flights to concealment in luggage on transnational bus lines and custom fitted freight vehicles travelling the Pan-American Highway. This wide range of techniques and routes suggests numerous smaller operations, as coordinating these myriad ventures would be a logistic nightmare for a centralised organization.

Given per capita seizure figures, it is remarkable that use levels in the region are quite low. Less than 200,000 people use cocaine in the seven countries of Central America every year, compared to a user population in the USA of 5.5 million. In the 2005 *World Drug Report*, the UNODC estimated that each Central American cocaine user consumed, on average, about 20 grams a year. This would result in a total demand for the region of less than four mt of cocaine per annum. As a result,

**Table 1: Some recent transnational cocaine seizures involving Central Americans**

Date	Location	Nationality	Quantity	Details
4 January 2004	El Salvador	Guatemalan	1 kg	In a residence
10 February 2004	Madrid	Costa Rican	1 kg	In baggage
21 February 2004	Nicaragua	Guatemalan	116 kg	With car parts
23 February 2004	Madrid	Costa Rican	2 kg	In baggage
23 February 2004	Nicaragua	Guatemalan	6 kg	With car parts
28 February 2004	Nicaragua	Guatemalan	18 kg	At business
3 March 2004	Nicaragua	Guatemalan	39 kg	—
6 April 2004	Venezuela	Nicaraguan	11 kg	In baggage
8 April 2004	El Salvador	Honduran	2 kg	Procured in Honduras, bound for United States
19 April 2004	Nicaragua	Honduran	7 kg	In bus
30 April 2004	Nicaragua	Honduran	7 kg	In bus
1 May 2004	Nicaragua	Honduran	33 kg	Two arrested
10 May 2004	El Salvador	Guatemalan	< 1 kg	Procured in Colombia
12 May 2004	Nicaragua	Honduran	3 kg	With Nicaraguan
21 May 2004	Venezuela	Costa Rican	< 1 kg	Swallowed
3 June 2004	Nicaragua	Guatemalan	30 kg	With Nicaraguan
19 August 2004	Managua	Guatemalan	100 kg	Commercial road vehicle
28 August 2004	Nicaragua	Guatemalan	1.7 mt	With one Colombian
9 September 2004	Barcelona	Salvadoran	2 kg	Sourced in Guatemala
4 October 2004	Madrid	Salvadorian	1 kg	Body carry
5 October 2004	Spain	Salvadorian	3 kg	Via Guatemala
10 December 2004	Madrid	Guatemalan	3 kg	From Guatemala
1 January 2005	Argentina	Costa Rican	2 kg	—
15 January 2005	Honduras	Salvadorian	1 kg	With 2 Hondurans
17 January 2005	Madrid	Salvadorian	2 kg	Via Guatemala
2 March 2005	Portugal	Panamanian	2.5 kg	With 2 Portuguese
5 April 2005	Madrid	Nicaraguan	1.5 kg	From Nicaragua
13 April 2005	Madrid	2 Guatemalans	2 kg	Destined for Netherlands
13 April 2005	Barcelona	Salvadoran	1.5 kg	Sourced in Panama
15 April 2005	Madrid	Guatemala	1 kg	Swallowed
3 June 2005	Madrid	Guatemala	4 kg	In baggage
12 June 2005	Barcelona	Guatemala	2 kg	—
17 June 2005	Frankfurt	Costa Rican	11 kg	With 2 Germans
30 January 2006	Madrid	Salvadoran	1 kg	Sourced in Peru
2 February 2006	Madrid	Salvadoran	2 kg	With Colombian and Spaniard
24 March 2006	Madrid	Salvadoran	2.5 kg	Sourced in Dominican Republic

Source: UNODC Major Seizures Database

### Street gangs and international drug trafficking

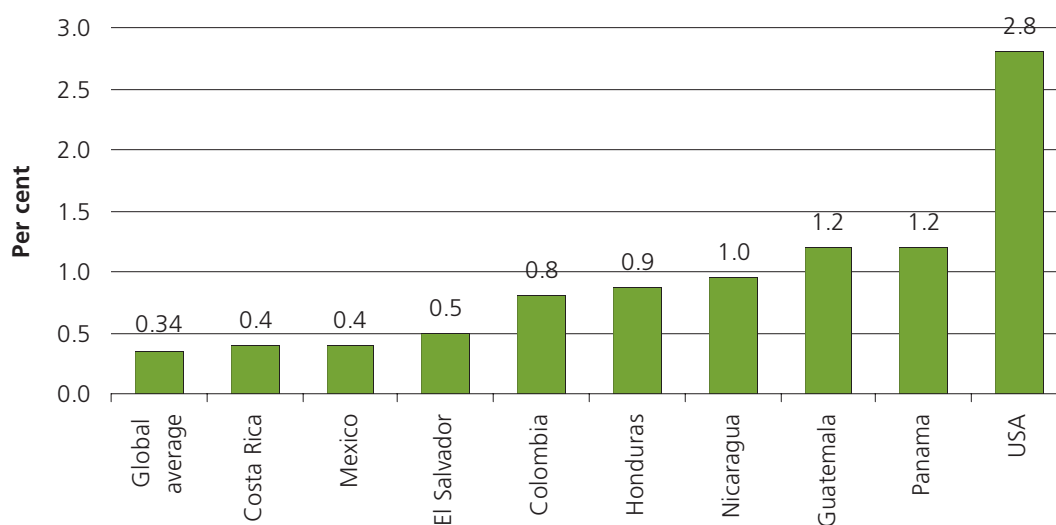
While street gangs are universally associated with drug dealing, the relationship between these groups and the traffickers is in need of more investigation. Much has been made of the possible connection between Central America's street gangs, or *maras*, and related groups resident in the USA. During the civil wars that long afflicted the region, many Central Americans emigrated northward, settling in the slums of large cities like Los Angeles and Washington, DC. Here, youth became involved in street gangs (such as the 18th Street gang) and formed some of their own (such as *Mara Salvatrucha*). These groups spread to Central America after large numbers of gang members were deported following criminal convictions under the broadened provisions of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. Street gang members are key in drug distribution in the USA, and the presence of these youth in a drug transshipment zone raised the spectre of transnational drug networks arranged along gang lines.

But it does not appear that this potential has been realised. While *mara* members are certainly involved in distributing drugs to the small markets of their home countries, the gang members themselves appear to comprise a large share of this market. Most of the areas where gang members dominate are situated inland, away from the maritime channels that carry most of the drugs. Even if they were located on the coast, it is unclear what role they would play, given that street gangsters are unlikely to have advanced nautical skills. It is highly likely that *mara* members move small amounts of drugs through the post or via couriers, but they do not seem to have the capacity to assert themselves as a new order of drug cartels.

This example highlights many common points of confusion around the relationship between drugs, gangs, and organized crime. The term "drug gangs" is common parlance, but the relationship between street gangs and drugs is highly controversial. Research indicates that although drug dealing is common among street gang members, it is not generally the primary purpose of the gang. Since most gang members are drug users, they may become involved in drug dealing in the same way other drug users do – in order to finance their habit.<sup>41</sup> Street gangs are not simply profit-motivated organized crime operations. For their members, they provide surrogate families, a sense of identity, and a means of survival. They remain chiefly concerned with local matters – defending turf and fighting for "respect", often in ways that undercut the profits from their criminal activities. Most members are in their teens and early 20s, undereducated, and not too familiar with the world beyond their immediate neighbourhoods.

Another source of persistent confusion is the tendency to assume that groups bearing the same name respond to a common command structure. While *Mara Salvatrucha* gangs exist in both the USA and El Salvador and both trace their roots to the Rampart area of Los Angeles, there has been little evidence of coordinated activity. Indeed, even within a country, individual cliques of large umbrella gangs appear to operate with a great deal of autonomy. The same may apply to other organized crime groupings bearing a common name.

Fig. 9: Share of adults (aged 15 - 64) using cocaine in the last year, 2005 or latest year available



Source: UNODC Delta database estimations

large seizures made in this region are almost exclusively in transit, bound for the USA. This suggests that well organized groups control the bulk of the flow, and most shipments pass through the region intact.

### The Mexican link

Today, Mexico is the premier gateway for cocaine entering the USA. According to US government estimates, roughly 90 per cent of the cocaine entering the country transits Mexico,<sup>42</sup> and three quarters of the cocaine seized entering the USA is apprehended along the land border with Mexico, particularly the border with Texas.<sup>43</sup> Making use of this gateway requires working with the Mexican criminal syndicates that control it.

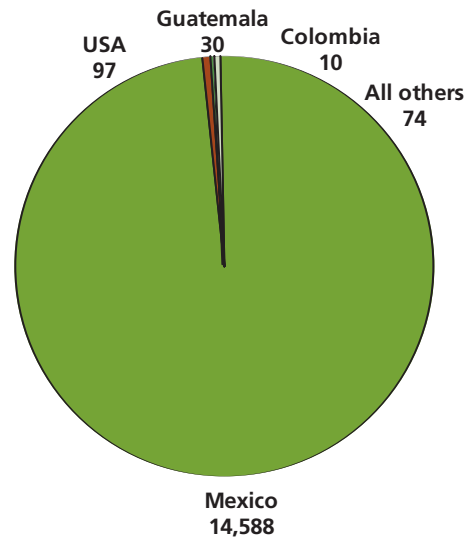
Inside Mexico, most of the drugs are controlled by one of several well-recognised “cartels”, based in provinces along the border and along the southeast coast. Northern groups have fought for “plazas”, or key border crossing areas, with syndicates forming around Tijuana, Juarez, Sinaloa, and the Gulf (Nuevo Laredo and Matamoros), for example. These battles have involved dedicated combat wings, such as the Zetas, a group of former Mexican army commandos employed by the Gulf cartel to terrorise rival groups and to assassinate prominent figures in law enforcement, government, and the press. At least 1,400 drug-related murders occurred in Mexico in 2006, most along the border with the USA,<sup>44</sup> with some sources placing the number as high as 2,500.<sup>45</sup>

Violence has recently spread to the southeast, where groups have formed in the primary docking locations for shipments entering the country. The size of the organizations is indicated by the seizure of assets and precursors. For example, in March 2007, a police raid in Michoacan resulted in the seizure of US\$206 million in cash in a single location. In December 2006, just under 20 mt of pseudoephedrine, a key precursor in methamphetamine manufacture, was seized at Lazaro Cardenas seaport in the same province.

Given the highly competitive and violent nature of the Mexican criminal syndicates, it is difficult for foreigners to operate in this market, and 98 per cent of those arrested for drug trafficking in 2004 were indeed Mexican nationals.

Like the Colombian organizations, Mexican criminal syndicates often have a dynastic character, involving multiple family members at the top of the command structure. For example, the Tijuana cartel was also known as the Arellano-Felix organization, due to the prominent role this family has played in the leadership

**Fig. 10: Nationalities of those arrested for drug trafficking in Mexico in 2004**



Source: UNODC ARQ

of the group. But this should not obscure the fact that these are large and well organized criminal enterprises, not family businesses. These groups have proven resilient in the face of “decapitation”, with deputies or enforcers taking control when prominent figures are arrested or killed. It has been argued that some Mexican syndicates have evolved from traditional hierarchical organizations to cell-based structures in response to enforcement efforts, with the Zambada-Garcia organization being a case in point.<sup>46</sup> Regardless, it appears that large and well-organised groups dominate trafficking in Mexico.

The presence of large groups is further demonstrated in the seizure figures. In the first nine months of 2005, at least five seizures of more than one mt of cocaine were made, two in Mexican waters, one at a seaport, one at a clandestine airstrip and one on the highway. There were also another dozen of more than 100 kg, worth at least a million US dollars in Mexico. These indicate highly resourced organizations. On the other hand, there were many lesser seizures, so smaller-scale trafficking also occurs. Without more comprehensive seizure data, it remains difficult to say with any precision what share of the total market these minor players command, both in Mexico and throughout the supply chain.

Finally, the high level of organization is demonstrated in the low levels of drug use in the country – only 0.4 per cent of Mexican adults used cocaine in 2002, barely above the global average of 0.3 per cent. Once in



Mexico, the allure of greater profits over the border is too strong for much cocaine to be left behind.

### Destination USA

Unfortunately, the US government has so far not submitted the individual seizures information. Given the decentralised nature of US law enforcement, there may be administrative reasons for this omission. The US reports seizing 176 mt of cocaine in 2005, but the details of these seizures are not available. It is known that only 31 mt of this total were seized at the US arrival zones,<sup>47</sup> so the balance must have been apprehended internally or on international waters.

The USA does submit detailed information on the nationality of federal drug trafficking arrestees however. In 2004, there were 11,787 people arrested for cocaine trafficking in the USA by the federal authorities. Of these, 8,814 (75 %) were US citizens. Of the foreigners whose nationality was known, 1,410 (56 %) were Mexican nationals, 378 (15 %) were Colombian, and 286 (11 %) were from the Dominican Republic. Dominican cocaine and heroin wholesalers and retailers have long been an integral part of the distribution network of the Colombian drug trafficking organizations, so these two can arguably be combined. In essence, the two major groups of rival syndicates (Colombian and Mexican) comprise 82 per cent of the arrests of foreigners for cocaine trafficking. Only five Venezuelans were arrested, and the seven Central American countries combined make up 96 arrests (4 %).

If cocaine were sold and re-sold in transit countries, Venezuelans and Central Americans would be expected to play a greater role in delivering the drugs to their destinations. While their direct role in US markets has been diminished, the fact that Colombian nationals continue to comprise a significant portion of drug trafficking arrestees in the USA reinforces the idea that the flow of cocaine is controlled by multi-national groups with the capacity to source, transport, and market the drug. All this supports the notion that the bulk of the cocaine traffic to the USA is controlled by large organizations, not small networks or the invisible hand of the market.

In summary, while cocaine trafficking to the USA is not as centralised as it was in the days of the big cartels, it appears that the bulk of the flow remains in the hands of large and well-organized syndicates because:

- Multi-ton seizures, worth hundreds of millions of dollars on arrival in the USA, are found at all points in the trafficking chain, often comprising a large share of national annual seizures.
- The trafficking chain appears to be divided between Colombian and Mexican syndicates, with

an unknown share controlled entirely by Colombian groups.

- While transit country nationals are arrested with small amounts of drugs all over the world, they do not appear to be taking control of a significant share of the drug flow.
- Cocaine use prevalence is low in transit countries, indicating that most of the drugs (less seizures) are reaching their highest-value destination.

## 2.4 Heroin via Central Asia to the Russian Federation

In contrast to the trafficking of cocaine to the USA, the flow of heroin from Afghanistan through Central Asia to the Russian Federation appears to be less organised. There are several possible reasons for this. The flow is more recent, with the use of heroin in Russia only starting in the 1980s and picking up after the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991. The recurrent conflicts and poverty in Afghanistan have provided an opportunity for illicit production to become widespread. Poverty and conflicts in Central Asia have also hindered the development of defences against trafficking. But these factors may also have retarded the consolidation of the market – it is difficult to transport large shipments of drugs when scores of feuding warlords block the way and roads are in poor repair. As a result, it is only in recent years that there has been sufficient order for larger scale groups to coalesce.

Today, Afghanistan is the source of upwards of 90 per cent of the world's heroin, but most of this is produced in the southern and eastern parts of the country. This is known with some certainty because UNODC does comprehensive opium crop surveys in each of the major heroin producing countries. Although estimating trafficking flows is more complicated, there is a strong basis to believe that most of the heroin produced in Afghanistan moves out via Iran and Pakistan toward Europe on what is known as the Balkan Route. This is based not only on drug seizures but also cultivation patterns and interviews with drug market actors in Afghanistan. But while the exact amounts are subject to debate, about a fifth of the Afghan heroin produced, estimated to be about 100 mt in 2005, leaves the country to the North through Central Asia toward the Russian Federation. It would appear that only a small share of this flow is seized – around 10 per cent. If this were true, the seizure figures would be a less reliable gauge of the underlying undetected flows in this region than they are in the Americas. In particular, this lower interdiction ratio leaves open the possibility that large shipments are occurring under the protection of corruption, and that