

Criminal Trajectories, Gang Activity and Entrepreneurial Ventures into Britain's Illegal Drug Trade

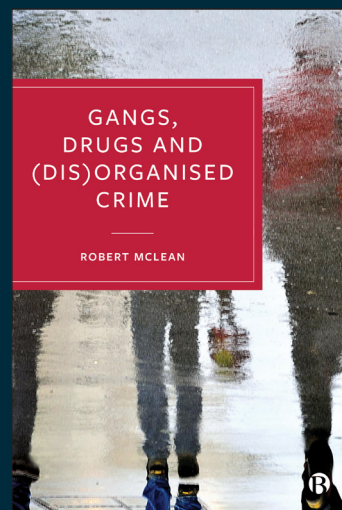
SUMMARY

This briefing presents data on contemporary British gang activity at all levels. Emphasis is given to involvement in organised crime, and in particular the illegal supply of drugs.

Findings suggest gang organisation as a means for gang business is on the rise. Resultingly, gang structure/activity are evolving.

The decline of youth gangs in recent years has simultaneously coincided with an increase of more organised, and criminally driven, gang formations. This process has been primarily fuelled by complex processes apropos globalisation and greater access to a now globalised drugs trade. Situated against a backdrop of continued welfare cuts, austerity, insecure employment, and an increasingly disenfranchised, and marginalised, population living in a consumer society, has proved detrimental.

This briefing draws upon insights from two combined studies by the author, and forwards recommendations.



Gangs, Drugs and (Dis) Organised Crime by Robert McLean is published by Bristol University Press, August 2019.

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KEY MESSAGES

- Persistent offenders involved in organised crime seldom arise from nowhere but rather typically follow criminal trajectories from youth which share correlation with certain variables.
- Gangs exist on a shifting continuum: some retain potential to progress and evolve over time into more organised outfits.
- Choice of intervention needs to be tailored to specific levels of gang organisation to be effective.
- The most prevalent form of organised crime in Britain is illegal drug supply: although often overlap exists with other organised crime types, including illegal-governance, fraud, money laundering and prostitution.
- Britain's illegal drugs trade is growing and diversifying in response to technological advances, access to global markets and digitalisation.
- Scottish Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) are largely high-level wholesalers and primarily exist across Glasgow and the West, but have strong affiliation with criminal networks in Liverpool, Manchester and Belfast.

INTRODUCTION

Despite occasional lulls, over the past 25 years there has been a continual vocalised concern that youth offending has been on the increase across Britain. This has primarily been framed in the mould of gang related violence. Subsequently there has also been growing recognition that organised crime has steadily risen.

This is perhaps most evident in Britain's illegal drugs trade where new practices such as 'county lines' has seen gang proliferation from urban to rural communities, increased knife crime, and the exploitation of vulnerable populations. Such activity has had profound effect on the country. Not only are populations in marginalised communities living in fear, addiction rates and related deaths are high, and modern slavery rising, but in addition millions of pounds is drained annually from the British economy: occasionally, being used to fund terrorism.

The report presents data on the subject from two studies: first, 2012–2017, involving 47 interviews with (ex)offenders and practitioners in the West of Scotland; the second, 2017–2019, involving 29 participants across Scotland and few English nationals.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, findings suggest gangs are evolving: becoming primarily driven by economic gains. Involvement in illegal drug markets has helped fuel gang organisation and proliferation. Recommendations suggest:

- Knife crime in England and Wales related to 'county lines' is not evident in Scotland as, given Scotland's rural landscape, such lines have existed, and have been settled amongst OCGs, long ago. Should history repeat itself, England and Wales will follow suit, as OCGs carve out spheres of activity and cease conducting 'proxy wars' in rural areas.
- To effectively tackle gang organisation, business, and organised crime more generally, governmental effort must move beyond a law enforcement model alone and address wider root causes of crime which create the 'breeding grounds' for criminality.
- Given the growth of market-based organised crime activities, there needs to be an adopting of the 5-point proposition, which includes 4 EU mandatory propositions, along with 'illegal-governance'.
- Gang intervention can prove detrimental and counterproductive if intervention strategies are applied universally across typologies. Young Criminal Gangs (YCGs) should be left to disband naturally, although attention and additional support must be given to core members. YCGs require 'welfarist' intervention backed by punitive action. Paths of desistance must be found and encouraged. OCGs are embedded and require full punitive intervention. Key members must also be monitored in prisons as incarceration may do little to cease OCG activities.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Drawing upon unique empirical data based on interviews with high profile ex-offenders and experts, this book sheds new light on drug markets and gangs in the UK.

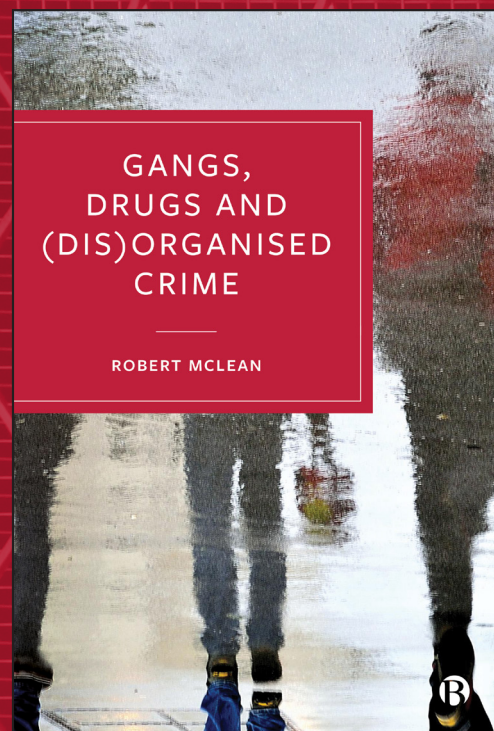
The study shows how traditional methods of tackling gang violence fail to address the intertwined nature of those criminal activities which can overlap with other organised crime spheres.

McLean sparks new debate on the subject, offering solutions and alternatives.

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