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WEBINAR

WOMEN'S ROLE AND INFLUENCE IN ORGANIZED CRIME

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FEATURED DISCUSSION

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**Felbab-Brown:** Good morning. Good afternoon. Wherever you are joining us today, thank you very much for your participation in our event today. On the role and influence of women on organized crime. You are specifically focusing on women offenders, women who have joined criminal groups as soldiers or who have come to lead organized crime groups. We are not in our seminar today going to be talking about women as victims, although that's certainly a theme that will perhaps also emerge, but it's not the principal focus. I am Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. But I direct the Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors, which is the initiative that's hosting you today. The initiative explores a wide range of issues from homeland security to terrorism, insurgency, organized crime, illegal economies and a variety of other transnational and subnational threats. I'm also the co-director of the Africa Security Initiative. For centuries, women have been integral to illegal markets, including the drug trade and human trafficking, as well as human smuggling. Women have become significant actors in criminal groups, spanning a wide range of activities, from being couriers and smugglers to being money launderers. And in some cases, we are even seeing an increased number of female assassins, particularly in a place like Latin America, but something that's not unheard of in Asia as well. In Europe, the criminal underworld is shaped by women leaders as well as soldiers as well. And in, um, Asia, women have at times become some of the most notorious, and I would also say some of the most accomplished and feared criminals. This is certainly true in organized crime. It's also true about white collar crime. We just have to think about Elizabeth Holmes in her capacity to con wide segments of publics that some of the top leaders with her schemes, even if her criminal career was relatively short by the standards of criminal careers and certainly some of the female criminals that we will hear about today have had criminal careers that have ran for decades. Yet there is often little policy focus given to the role of women not as victims, but as active participants. Active leaders, foot soldiers in organized crime. And does this matter? I mean, it matters to me from the perspective of justice and gender equity. What does it matter in terms of policies? What policies would be more effective if they were specifically focused on the role of women, or are, in fact, the women who rise to top positions of crime or the roles they perform in crime, behaving in ways that are identical to that of men. So we have an absolutely terrific panel to explore those issues with us. Three women who have done some of the most accomplished, highly acclaimed work on the role of female offenders. And I will turn to them just in a second. But before I introduce our speaker and hand the podium to her, the virtual podium to her, let me just give a vignette of one of my favorite female criminals, and that is Olive Young, also known as Olive Hairy Legs. Although she gets none of the notoriety as traffickers like Pablo Escobar, for example. She was one of the most accomplished drug traffickers ever in history. Born in Burma in the late 1920s to an elite family. She resisted female gender stereotypes very early on in her career. She was sent to a convent school, and that is a story that she did not want to do female specific tasks at the time, or conform to stereotypes such as foot binding that she resisted and resisted. She brought a gun to the school. And that incident, I think, defined the fact that at the end of a 19 course, she became a leader of cocaine forces, ultimately established some of the most longlasting powerful opium smuggling routes in the Burma China area, ultimately partnering up with a government tank and really dominating a significant amount of opium trade, commanding thousands of soldiers and being essentially a ruler of a very large area as well as a prime drug trafficker. She was ultimately arrested, spent some time in prison, but even that didn't end her career. She managed to get out of prison and later on was called on to negotiate ceasefires with the various ethnic groups. And to me, a hallmark of a accomplished criminal is that they get to enjoy the richness of that. They get to enjoy the spoils of their crime. And she certainly did. That ended up spending her last year's wealth free living more or less as she wanted, even though. It's is that not only was this she this woman that became the top criminal, she also had many female partners and defied the expectations of being married and producing heirs and had a very self-defined sexual lifestyle. So with this wonderful character, let me turn to one of our speakers, Deborah Bonello, whose new book "Narcos" is full of wonderful female characters from Latin America. And I'm absolutely delighted that we have Deborah to join us today. She's the editorial director for Vice News Latin America. She has been based in Mexico City since 2006, but she has reported extensively on organized crime. Before joining Vice, she was a contributor to The Guardian, Los Angeles Times, BBC, Financial Times and other top media outlets. But then Deborah over to you, to your study of wonderful female organized crime types and as well as many other dimensions of this issue.

**Bonello:** Thanks, Vanda and thanks very much for hosting this. Both, you know, Elaine and Felia have been on this for a number of years now, so it feels good to have it at the front of stage. So as you said, you know, I've been in Latin America now nearly 20 years. I arrived when the then president, Felipe Calderón, was launching the drug war in 2006. And so the collateral damage of organized crime and the government crackdown upon it was always was always like a massive part of my beats as a journalist. And I worked for, you know, as you said, a number of media owners, but also inside crime, and, you know, I did kind of very deep dives, deep investigative dives into organized crime across across the region. But as I did that, you know, it really, really occurred to me how male nearly all of the protagonists that we were covering were, and those that won were largely sort of the sort of romantic interests, the the girlfriends, the people who are attached to these kingpins sexually or romantically. And that was kind of the main focus in terms of the women that we were seeing, as well as the fact that when I was reporting on, you know, mass graves,

shootouts, that those sorts of issues that were very common in the drug war. I was very often the only woman there and certainly met from disapproval from some of the male colleagues around me in terms of whether I had any right to be there and whether that was what I should be focusing on. So for me, the the the presence of women in organized crime has existed right from the word go from the day, you know, from the moment that the narcotics trade was born between Mexico and the United States. I'm not going to dive deep into this because that's very much Elaine's territory. But my point is it's not something new to see women bossing it in the trade. The point is the perspective and the book is very much conceptual in that sense. I think if we continue to see women simply through the lens of being victims or co-opted or dragged into organized criminal networks via a gun to their head, not only is it deeply condescending, but it really sort of ignores their agency in terms of their decisions. You know, the presence of ambition, the desire for status, as well as the socioeconomic factors that push women into organized crime, you know, namely grinding poverty and, you know, the need to feed their children. But this idea that it's always sort of put upon them and never a choice on their part is like saying that women aren't interested in getting into football or banking or any of the other sort of male dominated industries that we have in the world. And I think it's to really kind of fundamentally limit and limit our view of them and misunderstand their importance. So I think it's just important to say that. First up, I like both Elaine and Felia, have already said that in their work, I won't elaborate. But I think we as women researchers and male researchers really need to kind of reset how we're approaching the subject as a research topic. And you know, one of the main women I focus on and I won't talk for much longer, but Guadalupe Fernández Valencia was the only woman on the indictment that helped put Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, probably the most famous drug lord in the world at that time, behind bars for life. She was his chief money launderer. She worked she worked very closely with his sons, namely Jesús Guzmán, also known as Alfredo, who remains at large in Mexico and has a \$5 million bounty on his head. She was arrested a month after Chapo in 2016. She pleaded guilty in Chicago, and then she kind of disappeared from view a couple of months ago. She was let out of jail. But this is not a household name. But in the book, I went back and thought, oh, well, maybe no one's writing about her because we don't know anything about her. But her entire criminal history, which spanned between 3 to 4 decades, was documented on the plea deal, the transcriptions, the interchanges with prosecutors and criminal lawyers that happened during her time in custody. So really, the reason no one had written about her life was because there wasn't the interest, because that this tendency to discount their, you know, women's involvement. And she was involved from everything to logistics and acquiring weapons to, you know, transportation. Money laundering was a huge part of her of her job, you know, moving value from contacts she had established in Los Angeles because she went she first went to the U.S. as an undocumented migrant. She got into drug dealing in California. She did ten years in jail after she was arrested for that and she was deported back. Then she got back into the drug business big time, working with her brother, Manuel, who at that point was working with El Chapo's organization. Both Chapo and his sons. So, you know, she sort of did small time work and then she got back when she got deported back into Mexico, she went big time. And so, you know, it's just, she and, you know, I've spoken a number of times to people who have been involved in her case. I do have an understanding that during her trial, she very much played on, you know, she looks like a typical Mexican abuelita. She's she looks like a grandmother. She's in now in her early 60s. She was very apologetic, talked about regret. Talked about how, you know, she felt that she didn't have a choice. And people who represented her said, you know, this is this is very common for women in the drug trade now. It's always a lot of factors. Right. There's women who come from poverty, I think do have different limitations to women who don't. And there all women in my book who did not come from such grinding poverty as people like Guadalupe and did have a high level of education. But the point is, you don't spend 30 to 40 decades in the drug trade, 30 or 40 years in the drug trade, sorry, without at least at least partially some consciousness of making decisions to do that. So I think she's a good example that I want to talk to more. And like obviously people can read the book for the details, but she was one of 6 or 7 other women who really did buck this idea that women are getting dragged into it kicking and screaming.

**Felbab-Brown:** Thank you very much. This is a very important caution for us, emphasizing the agency, also a very important theme for our next speaker, Elaine. You know, Elaine, I started by using an example of a drug trafficker who started in the 1930s and died only several years ago with criminal career, who ran essentially 4 or 5 decades of which is highly accomplished. And one of the things that you have studied and focused on very much is this historic background, giving us a sense of history. So I look very much forward to hearing that from you. Professor Elaine Kelly is a professor of history and the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Oakland University. She is the author of numerous books. Let me just speak to "Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender Power and Terror in 1968 Mexico" and the award winning book "Women, Drug Traffickers, Mules, Bosses and Organized Crimes." She edited a number of other books and wrote many articles and really has pioneered the research on female offenders in organized crime. Elaine, over to you.

**Carey** Thank you, Vanda. Thanks so much for inviting us to join you today. You know, I want to kind of build on what Deborah just mentioned about, you know, women in organized crime and questions of

agency. So even that question of the three of us or the four of us here in this room, in this virtual room, having the agency and the audacity to actually research organized crime is part of that continuation. I would like to think so. My work actually began I started as a social historian looking at women in the 68 student movement, but spending a lot of my childhood outside of the U.S. and a lot of time in Mexico and seeing women in street marketing and vending and things like that. I began to consider some aspects of difference. So if women dominate the informal economic sector, why are they absent from the question of drug trafficking? And that was the beginning of that work. And so women's history teaches you women and gender histories. If you ask a different question, you begin to see the evidence, especially as a historian. So by posing a series of different questions, even about some of the same from the same sources, all of a sudden the evidence began to emerge that women have been actively involved, as Deborah mentioned, in organized crime since it began. And so so and the other thing is, is because they're there, as Deborah was mentioning there in the records, by asking the question, you begin to see them there hiding in plain sight. So what I began to just research was women involved in all areas. So I was looking in Mexico because I am a Mexican historian, but I was also looking hemispherically. So and women have been involved in, you know, they've run consignments, worked as and had what would be technically a franchise and beginning in the teens and the 20s to sell drugs. They've been mules, smugglers, fixers, distributors, managers, logistics managers, distribution managers, financial whizzes, money launderers, and as well as bosses. And I think that so their role is as complex within the organization as any man. The other thing is, is that we always talk about women coming in from their family members, but so too do men, right? And we don't belittle that role for men, but we also make some assumptions. We assume that women come to the drug trade via their fathers and their husbands or their partners. Is that true? Yes. But it's also true that sometimes men come in via their mothers and their partners, too. So I think that's the work on kind of asking questions about women. You start to see some greater complexities. And I want to give to brief case studies from my work, you know, of a women who were operating prior to the modern era, who started to sell drugs in the early teens and 20s. So María Dolores Zuleta, Estévez Zuleta, also known as Lola La Chata, was a boss in Mexico City. Her mother was a street vendor who was selling chicharrón and coffee, but then also diversified to sell morphine and marijuana. So she worked as her mule or her burro in Mexico City. But she also it's a lot of it's very unstable at this time. She ends up in the northern part of Mexico, close to the U.S. border with a former partner, and she begins to understand transnational trafficking. She makes her way back to Mexico City, setting up shop there. She has legitimate business as well as the illicit business. And that is when she does meet her partner, Enrique Jaramillo, who is also a drug trafficker and a former police officer. What is interesting in the U.S. documents is they are recognized as partners, but running parallel organizations, they are she is not supporting him. He is not supporting him. They are running parallel organizations as well as working together. So her work, he was based outside of Mexico City. They eventually would part ways. And her, she would continue to operate. And her business was on the from Mexico City on the eastern side of Mexico running through Monterrey into the United States. Another one, Ignacio facility, the other they Gonzalez also operating in operating out of the Juarez. Again, she had a partnership, a perfect partnership with her husband, Pablo. He is killed, but she is the one who was from a part of Mexico that had introduced and had expanded in the poppy production. So a lot of this whether he brings her in, but many think she brought him in. Right. She had the access to the product to build the vertical structure, business structure. So she obviously was involved in production processing, transporting distribution and selling, and he died years before the family is at that level. So she's the one who's bringing in her children and her grandchildren. And she would be operating until the 1980s. Both of these women were hiding in plain sight. William Burroughs wrote about Lola La Chata, very famous Mexican writer Jose de Valdez, who wrote this, did the same thing. Ignacio Gonzalez was written about in newspaper. She was denounced on the floor of the Congress. H.J. Anslinger would talk about them, but he would never mention they were women. Why? Because he couldn't capture these two grandmothers. Very similar to what Deborah is talking about. It didn't look great that the top cop, the top narco cop could not capture these women. And so I think that's part of that aspect of why we see where men will kind of enter into the myth. And their names will be repeated over and over again. The women disappear from the record, in part because it's frequently men who are doing the policing in this case. The other thing, I think, is that women have a greater longevity if we're looking at Estévez and Chaso, they had a long period of time in the drug trade. Even if we look at more contemporary women and there's a lot written about Griselda Blanco working with the Medellín organization and was very violent. But there's also Mery Valencia in the Cali organization who was not violent, who was money launderer, business manager, logistics. And then with Griselda Blanco was Lilya Parada, who was running her logistics and her stash houses and all of that in New York City. And these women are equally as important within these organizations. But again, their names have somewhat disappeared, only appearing maybe in a handful of works. So again and again, they had years within the trade, far longer than many, many men. And I think that's the other thing. We see women sometimes building their businesses more incrementally and slowly, in part to ensure there isn't a tension there. And there's always fear of male competition and violence not only happening externally, but also internally as well as some women using violence. But what I have seen is this ability to kind of navigate those systems in different ways and maybe building their businesses a little more incrementally, creating alliances, stepping away from

those alliances when they aren't necessary or needed and moving on into other areas. So I think that, again, asking those different questions about the role of women is you start to see their complexity within organized, organized crime being it's just as complex and just as significant as that of men.

**Felbab-Brown:** Started highlighting many themes that I hope you return to. Certainly the issue of pathways is one of them and of the fact that many women enter through some sort of familial network or sort of relationship is in fact analogous to what we know about recruitment for terrorist groups, whether it's men or women. It is personal networks that are frequently critical for recruitment. But it's something that I also look very much to Felia to hear more of further from just the example of the women and their long careers, long criminal careers. This is certainly something that I think echoes across other areas. Perhaps with some selection bias, we tend to focus on two women that stayed long and not focused on the women that were killed three months into their career. So there might be some selection bias, no doubt. In Asia, certainly women have played a very crucial role in human smuggling networks to some extent, I would even say dominating them, if not necessarily in leadership positions, certainly in the the role of recruitment and facilitation. And in Africa, when we think about sexual trafficking, sexual enslavement in West Africa, in Nigeria, women are often critical. And not just women. It is often family members, female family members who are critical to recruiting their victims and trafficking them. It is aunts, the sisters, the sisters from the wife number three that are primary actors in one of the most brutal forms of organized crime, entrapment and sexual exploitation. Before I turn to Felia, let me just highlight one other character and kind of reinforce the issue of this is not new. This has historic background, and that's Zheng Yi Sao known as Ching Shih, who is one of the most famous or one of the most accomplished pirates ever. She was a Chinese pirate, came from a poor family, was born in the late 18th century and married a pirate. But very quickly, her husband was killed. And here is where the story echoes. Elaine, what you are saying very quickly, her pirate husband is killed and she's in her mid-twenties when she takes over the enterprise and builds it up into a massive enterprise. At one point, she commands a confederation of pirates that number 60,000. She dominates and raids often very brutally the entire coast of South China Sea. She takes on the East India company, the Portuguese empire, and the retaliation from the powers in their pack. And ultimately, she is arrested. But that again, shows her capacity. But in a few months, you negotiate a surrender, essentially. That leaves her with vast command of still a flotilla. She's supposed not to engage in criminal activity, know continue engaging in piracy. And by the way, piracy is not just robbing ships. It's razing entire villages. It's a very, very bloody enterprise that she dominates. So she's able to keep a significant flotilla that she supposedly uses for legal purposes and lives many decades enjoying a righteous evilness. At one point, she is history's, one of history's most successful pirates ever. Felia, with that, please bring us to Europe and the role of women there. Pathways to organized crime there.

**Allum:** So thank you, Vanda. And thank you again for inviting me to to this panel and this discussion with Elaine and Deborah. It's always a privilege and I always find it very strange to listen to Elaine because we're very different in terms of our research paths. But a lot of what she says always resonates with my own research, and it really kind of reinforces a lot of the things that I have come to, the conclusions that I've come to. So I'd just like to give you a kind of sense of my own personal journey in this area, and then I'll elaborate a bit on what's been said so far. So I kind of I'm a political scientist by training more political sociology perhaps today, although very multidisciplinary. And five years ago, I was very lucky to win an important grant in the UK, which allowed me to remove myself from the university and to focus on specific domestic organized crime groups and transnational organized crime groups, too, thanks to the Leverhulme Trust, I was able to look at domestic groups in France, the UK and Italy, the three countries I know best, and also a transnational organized crime groups for various reasons, reasons with Covid. I had to slim down, but I spent a lot of time looking at the Italian mafias, looking at British home made domestic organized crime, and also looking at the Nigerian cult groups that you've already mentioned specialized in human trafficking and also Albanian speaking organized crime groups. And I started looking at these groups and I started looking at the data and the material. And again, some of the things I'm going to say I'm going to start and I feel I'm repeating myself. But the thing that struck me straightaway was that in the narratives that we had, whether it was police reports, newspaper articles, the women were presented as victims, the women were presented as victims, and they were presented not having their own agency. And even if they did have their agency, it was subordinate to men. It was always in subordination to men. They were only an extension of the man. They couldn't think for themselves. They were just completely kind of out of the picture. And it was kind of circumstance rather than design. They just were not able they were incapable of having any kind of own their own process of thinking in this in this criminal landscape. So we can talk about them being bystanders, being passive, being irrelevant actors and players within this context. And and Campbell wrote a really interesting book about gangs in the UK and in the US where she talked about footnotes. Women remained footnotes to the story about organized crime. And I think this is one of the things that I keep coming back to Elaine's work, which is very much the fact that we need to be asking the right kinds of questions. If we keep asking the wrong questions, we'll just keep on this path of ignoring the importance of women. So I started looking. I looked at the Italians in particular because that's my my basic point. But I also elaborated and I kept thinking

about how we're just talking about ghosts. We keep looking and we keep thinking and we keep seeing, but these women are there and they're not there. They're not there for the male world, but they are there for those of us who look. And as Elaine says, she's spot on again and again. Historically, they're there. It's just that we have this kind of general amnesia when it comes to women's roles. And that's not only criminology, it seems to me it's generally in the social sciences, the importance of women are downgraded. It's the man that always remains. And that happens for all sorts of series of politicians, artists, it carries on. And when it comes to organized crime, that is even clearer, even clearer. So I started looking around. I started looking, and it struck me that the whole context of law enforcement around organized crime was around men, men looking at men and writing prosecutions around men. So women were just not taken into account. Women weren't looked at at all. But if you went and had a look at the data, you started to see the women. The women were there if you started to concentrate on what was actually going on, women were there obviously it would mean that we would have uncomfortable conversations because someone sometimes women were victims. They were also perpetrators. At the same time, when we look at the Nigerian context, we can very clearly see that there are some madams who have been perhaps victims of the Human Trafficking Organized Crime Network, but then they become part and parcel of it and they have a role and they make decisions. So I kind of was very confused by all of this. And I started to sort of say, how can I unpack this complicated a picture of the women at there, but we're just not seeing them. So I tend to adopt a grounded theory approach. I don't really like to start with having a specific theory that's going to confirm the data that I have. Obviously, it makes life harder because you're collecting all this information, constantly renegotiating ideas and theories and thoughts. But what also struck me was the necessity and the importance to talk to the women actors. We can't understand the picture if we're not collecting the life stories of women to be able to understand how they see the world, how they think. So in my journey, I've been lucky enough to talk to six former mafia women of the Camorra, to have time with them, to talk to them, and to get their insight as perspective where they show me and they explain to me what they see, how they see their decisions, good and bad. And the ironic thing is, actually, the six women I talked to were not born into organized crime. They weren't born into the mafia. They became the wife of they became the daughter of somebody who decided to come into organized crime. So the family link wasn't as important as as it could be in the Italian literature. There's a lot of thinking around women being oppressed, not having necessarily the agency, but if they do have agency, it's related to pseudo emancipation. They have temporary delegation of power. It's not theirs. They don't have their agency. And that really kind of perpetuating that really perplexed me to a certain extent because the data that I was looking at, the women I was talking to, the conversation was different. In other words, they were intelligent, they were bright, and they knew what they were doing. So I think my pick my my whole position in a way around organized crime is that we continue to if we continue to have half of the picture and if we continue to miss half of the participants in the picture around organized crime, we're never going to understand organized crime. And I think that the picture we've had of organized crime up until now is a male history of organized crime. Women are completely forgotten. They're voiceless, they're powerless. And the agency lists in the accounts that we have. So I just want to make a few reflections, if I can, just to reiterate and reinforce from my own research, which is obviously Italian organized crime, as I said, British domestic organized crime, which is less structured, very much more chaotic than other forms. And also the Nigerian groups and the Albanian groups where for me, the roles are very similar to the men's right, where there isn't a distinction. We have this idea of gender stratification, of glass ceiling of glass elevator. I didn't find any of this. I found that if I could change my perspective, if I moved beyond the male categories and the male focus, they were there, as Elaine says, they were there in plain sight. If we want to change our understanding, we just have to look slightly differently and all of a sudden we see them. So again, I found women at street level drug dealers, but also as managers, but also as leaders as well as brokers. We have South American brokers active in in Europe constantly. They're being as intelligent as the men taking the men to task, etc. So for me, the roles and tasks are not gender stratified at all. They're not gendered to a certain extent, although we keep having that image. The second issue that comes to mind is whether we have an increase of women in leadership and whether it's linked to the family. And this I think, is really interesting. And again, it reiterates a bit what Elaine says. From my perspective across Italian organized crime, but all the other groups, I looked there wasn't a feminist revolution. There wasn't a pink, pinkification overnight that women all of a sudden appeared, which is part of the narrative in the Italian context, women appear when the men go to prison and when the men are killed. No women appear because police start looking at them. When the men are in prison, we don't see what happens before. And so we have this ideology of separate spaces for me where we keep the women in the private sphere and we're not really interested. And in the public sphere, it's dominated by strong masculine men who know what they're doing. It's a male dominated world. And I think that if we start all of a sudden to look at the private sphere and the family not as a negative as Elaine says, but as a positive, all of a sudden we see the influence of women. All of a sudden we really understand the actually the domestic, the domestic household is their power, which then can seep into the criminal family and the criminal organizations. So I think that for too long we used male categories, leadership, violence, we use male terms. But if we turn on its head and we look at things like governance or coordination, all of a sudden we see that women are skillful, intelligent, and they know much more than the men. I interviewed the daughter of a boss and she said very clearly to me, I don't need

my my dad to tell me what to do. I'm much more intelligent than he is. I will do what I want when I want because I am in charge. Her father was in prison and he told her what to do and she said he's in prison. He's stuck there. I'm outside. So we've really got to get that kind of nuance. And I really do think even if we look at Nigerian cult groups active in Europe, we can again, the the police investigations focus on the men. But if you take a step back, there are the women, there are the partners who are doing exactly what the men are doing. It's just that we're not looking because the person who's looking is a man and he therefore is obsessed with his own image, which is that of a man. So I think family is more important. I think we've got to go back to family because family links us everywhere, not only organized crime in all sectors. And for some reason we don't like it perhaps is because the male gaze tells us that families are bad because they're ruled by women or because women are strong in families and we don't like it. So the last thing I suppose I kind of want to reiterate in a way is that I, from my research, have found that women are underestimated, they're ignored, they're marginalized. Society is not interested in women. It's the society that is sexist to a certain extent. Organized crime isn't sexist. And as Elaine's already mentioned, organized crime groups have been really intelligent to use that. They've trapped us because we think, hey, women aren't capable when in actual fact women are very capable. And I would carry on saying that, you know, for me, women are the backbones. If we don't look at the women, we're just not going to understand organized crime. And therefore, we've got to really unpack and go back to the value of the family and understand what the family is about. Because if we understand that, then perhaps we'll start to understand organized crime and I'll stop there. And I hope that was uh helpful as thoughts.

**Felbab-Brown:** Oh, absolutely. Terrific. Felia, thank you so much. In your emphasis on family, it reminds me of when I first went to Colombia more than two decades ago. On my first trip, I was in Medellín and I was looking at criminal patterns and the demise of Don Berna, changes to the markets there or actually was still the height of Don Berna coming into what would be the demise. And I was told about the place of culture and of the essentially said, look, women tell their sons your responsibility as a son to make a lot of money. If you make money through legal well, that's fine as long as you make money. If you make money through illegal way, well, then you are really great. Now, you know, I don't want to suggest that this is nonetheless common. But this this narrative, this notion that there was a perpetuation of some sort of criminal, cultural, cultural, disobeying rule of law, it was simply common theme at the time, more than two decades ago in Medellín.

**Allum:** I just wanted to add just one last thing. Going back to what Elaine said is that we focused on the men and I and I totally agree with her. But we look at kind of women marrying into organized crime groups, into mafias, and we don't see the men who marry into organized crime, a group, again, we're kind of obsessed with the women kind of, you know, being extensions of men. And there are so many cases of men becoming important because they marry into an organized crime family. They are nothing to do with organized crime, but they marry and they become something. But that doesn't seem to be kind of comfortable or important. It's about, oh, women marry in, women can only become something because they're married as though they don't have the intelligence to do it or the capabilities to do it by themselves. And I think that that is something we really need to tackle.

**Felbab-Brown:** Or in the Colombian case or the Medellín case, I should say, because the role of the mothers, we have only 20 minutes left and tremendous amount of really terrific questions from the audience. I have a policy question, but let me postpone it because of all the questions from the audience that have been coming, I will come back to the policy questions. And we have received many questions live and two previously about what is different about women, how they act. Are there any differences in women leadership? Do they behave in different ways than men? And Felia very much prefaced the conversation. So I will ask all of us, starting with Deborah to reflect on that. Are there any differences in women leadership in organized crime for women? And let me also combine it and specifically add with violence. Do we see significant differences in the violence that women are willing to perpetrate as a result of their decisions or or acting out the violence themselves? No, I talked about to the shame, but you could be an outlier in the way she was brutal. That is Phoolan Devi, who had great notoriety for the brutality, again, the outlier. So any differences in how women act in leadership and the differences in what kind of violence women order or perpetrate? Deborah, let me start with you. And please, you know, at this point, keep it kind of two, two minute, three minute answers. No more than that.

**Bonello:** Yeah, I'll be brief. I would say women are as capable of violence as men because protecting their businesses, protecting their family and due to the proliferation of the use of weapons, you know, guns to dispense violence. You know, many of the women that I covered in my book were delegating and, you know, sending out hits on people. No problem. It's very it's very hard to generalize like between you know, in terms of the differences in some way, I think we see women at all levels of the different ranks of organized crime as we do men. It has been my experience that the women I have covered do not like the attention. With a few exceptions, Marixa Lemus, who was operating on the border of Guatemala and El

Salvador as an important player in the political narco nexus. When I spoke to her in a Guatemalan prison, she seemed very proud of her achievements and unabashedly violent. But not all of the women were like that. I generally have had pushback from some of them since the book came out because they don't want the attention. But as both Elaine and Felia have said, there is the use of the stereotypes around women and the minimalization of them, that I think all of them have used to their advantage, to further their interests and criminal activities, which is which is different to the men, the men. The way the men operate, obviously, because men are kind of expected to be bad, whereas women are expected to be good so they're they're less suspect.

**Felbab-Brown:** Elaine, please.

**Carey:** I would like to jump in. This kind of gets to the point that that Felia was mentioned. Leadership, I think, is this idea that somehow a woman has to, you know, a daughter has to kind of, you know, fight her way up. Well, sometimes they're identified by their fathers as being more capable than their brothers. And that's work that José Carlos Cisneros Guzmán, and I've done ethnography in Sinaloa that women can be recruited because they are the most capable out of the children. So a father who's in the business recognizes that his daughter is more competent and he's going to elevate her. And you can see that with a mother who's in that position, who's going to elevate the son. One of the things is I think women's leadership in organized crime is as complex as that of men. I do agree with as what Deborah was saying about not wanting the attention, because we know that the business thrives in anonymity. So attention undermines the ability to be successful. And I think that women are, as one woman said to José Carlos Cisneros and I is like the men want to eat the world in what she described as she wanted to survive - she wanted longevity. And that was a strategic and very smart decision. If I grow my business incrementally, if I don't kind of if I'm not splashy, I don't I don't dress like, you know, a narco's girlfriend. I'm a boss. I dress like a businesswoman and I operate like a business. And so part of that is to ensure that there's longevity, maybe to the point that they're so successful that they're out of the illicit business and more operating in their licit or their licit businesses such as real estate or or, you know, shops, whatever they're doing. So I think there is an aspect of being careful in a different way. But their role in leadership is as complex. The question of violence is different, right? So you have some women who are going to employ violence more than others, other women who will hire men or other women to execute that violence, in part because that is they are the boss and they're running the organization and they are delegating things to others just as they delegate the sale of the drugs, just so they're keeping as much distance from the actual crime because that allows them to thrive and it builds their longevity.

**Felbab-Brown:** Felia, please, violence and leadership are there any differences?

**Allum:** So yeah, so I'm referring to the Italian mafia cases that I looked at. What was interesting was the way that those who were looking from the outside in to look at their behavior weren't really noticing or were kind of trying to underline or emphasize their leadership skills. So there were many, many occasions where you could see that the women were very kind of in tune and aware of police investigations or law enforcement, and therefore they took action. But it was never underlined as actually a leadership decision. It was just seen as, oh, she suggested to her son that she should do that, they should do this, when in actual fact, time and time again, the women were already kind of had a foresight of where to navigate to avoid potential investigations, potential arrests, where to place the money. So the the the leadership, I think, as Elaine and Deborah have said, is complex, but it's very similar to men to a certain degree in the Italian context. They're not necessarily interested in business, but it's about territory. And that leads me on to my question around a little. Do your question around violence. I mean, women will undertake violence if they need to. Some groups are more. I found that, for example, groups in the in the suburbs tended to perhaps be more violent or outright violence. But women were very good at ordering violence. And there was a lot of also psychological violence and torture towards other members or to women or to state witnesses. So it is complex, but to sort of say that it's non-existent, it comes back to that. It's kind of complex and how women navigate and occupy that space. It's also about reputation and it's about kind of showing themselves to a certain degree to the members around them so that they are kind of respected and listened to. I just found that they were more intelligent and that's some of the things that I got from my own interviews where the women sort of said, I don't need to go and be violent. I can tell someone to do it. I'm more intelligent, we are more intelligent. We think more we have more time to think. We're not so kind of impulsive and we're not so kind of, you know, going to do things. And therefore, I think that kind of know women kind of are able to sort of take time in making their decisions. The thing is, again and again, they're not being seen as leaders, and that's where they have space to move and to grow as leaders.

**Felbab-Brown:** You know, certainly I have written in a lot of my work that any terrorist group, any criminal group needs to make a decision how it will rule. Will it rule through brutality only, or will it rule through brutality and political capital? And those basic decisions are equally true at an organizational level,



as they are at the individual level. That equally true for men and women. And even the issue of Boston spaciousness and visibility staying in the shadows is, of course, something that very much varies against men. We can only think of the examples of El Mayo and El Chapo and the degree to one man is far more visible and another is far more hidden and far more quiet, employing different means. And there is value to ostentatiousness. Ostentation is embraced and this brings intimidation, brings the raw power. It's shocking. Or it's not simply foolishness, but the ability to calibrate how much violence one becomes with the negative consequences of violence, such as bringing too much attention of law enforcement. It's really bad decisionmaking quality shows up. So with that, with perhaps us showing that there might not be that many differences between how women behave, what kind of role they have then men. Let me ask a policy question. So with the greater recognition of women's role, do we need to change policy? So one of the obvious implications that has come across is that we don't pay enough attention to women. So from the perspective of intelligence gathering, network mapping, there might be a need to adjust policies significantly. But beyond that, add that other dimensions. If you want to design a prediction strategy, would we be necessarily designing them differently because we think of women? What about a prison policy? So one aspect is rehabilitation, where there is some awareness of gender sensitivity. But what about the recruitment by women in prison, women offenders in prisons, recruiting other females? Do we need to do something differently or do we simply need to apply same policies to a wider set of people? Deborah, let me start with you again.

**Bonello:** I mean, I'll be really brief on this because I'm a journalist and policy is not my strong point. But I would say that just needs to be a fundamental shift in the the the way that women in organized crime are perceived conceptually. And I think as long as women are seen mostly as victims, mostly as coopted, mostly minimized and used mainly as collaborators to get to higher up male kingpins, I think there's just a fundamental failure to understand, as film has already mentioned, the role of the family within the organization, the role of women coming at it from that family role. And I think that that, you know, obviously I see mostly the work of the DEA and the law enforcement in Latin America, and they have failed time and time again, overlooked women time and time again, which has been to the detriment of really clear creating this very clear picture of what organized crime is. But in terms of direct policy recommendations, I wouldn't I wouldn't go there, but I'll leave Elaine and Felia to carry on.

**Carey:** So I think some of the aspects I mean, we're seeing a greater attention, for instance, in Mexico of recruitment of women into policing. And again, but it's not that they can't just be at the lower levels, right? If you have women who are rising up the ranks and are able to understand organizations at a significant level because they have spent a lot of time studying them. That that will be helpful. And I think that's one aspect. Women have been the first police officer, women, police, all undercover police officers came in in narcotics in the NYPD. Has that made a substantial difference? No, because they have to have the time to be able to rise up the ranks and have greater experience. And I would say that's in policing broadly defined. So so we're seeing some of that happening in Mexico of trying to diversify and bring more women into policing. But there are stereotypical views around that, right? Well, they're not as easily corruptible. You know, they they can be trusted more. Well, we know, too, there's great examples of women who've been co-opted by organized crime groups who have been involved in policing, whether on the U.S. or the Mexican side. So those stereotypes continue. And so this gets to that point of having a greater recognition of, you know, the fact that women do have agency and and may need to have agency within policing and diplomacy in those areas where they're actually creating the policies as well as that they have agency within these organizations that we've been talking about. And being able to recognize that and ask those different questions actually will help to develop those policies. But it is an uphill battle. For many women, this is the only option. It was the same thing for, you know, María Dolores Estévez, you know, as a literate woman. And for many, it is the only option. It is the way to get out of poverty, as we talked about. There are very few other options. So 100 years ago, that was the case and we're currently in the same situation.

**Felbab-Brown:** Thanks very much, Elaine. So one policy recommendation is think of women greater, change your intelligence patterns, change your network. But the mapping mapping segment is more women in police, not just for equity, but because perhaps this will generate some unique police policing and the organized crime insights. Felia, any additions.

**Allum:** Yeah. So first of all, I think that we need to we need to gender we need to collect gender specific data. Why do we not have a big picture? Because gender specific data is not being picked up in a police level and therefore there's that whole missing missing aspect. We need to develop, as we said, a holistic and inclusive approach, which means which puts women at the center or at least at the center of the discussion. We talk about mainstreaming gender. I would talk about engendering our research so that it's not just organized crime and then women that women are part of it, but there's also a lot of prevention work, right? If we want to help these women who are part of these groups, get out. We need to do prevention work

to understand and deconstruct the male gaze, to be able to see where these women are. So I think there's a lot of prevention work around helping women remove themselves from these situations. A state witness protection program. If we have a look at the state witness protection program in Italy, it's still not really based on helping women. Women are seen as the partners of rather than having their own specific state witness protection program. And then there's another aspect I think we need to take into account. We have a look at the criminal justice system. It is also still I'm talking about the UK in this particular example, still quite sexist and misogynistic. So when a judge has a young woman up in front of her who's a drug dealer and a mother, she's going to be punished doubly, whereas a drug dealer will not be punished because he's a man. So we need to be really careful around how we engage with that. I think there's a lot of prevention work. I think we need to have more gender specific data, and I think we really need to sort of start thinking where there are the women and how can we pull them out of organized crime. But we need to make sure that we do that in a holistic and inclusive way. State Witness Protection program. But we need to start with specific gender specific, gender specific data, which is still missing because I think society is still not interested in women enough.

**Felbab-Brown:** You know, and certainly from the work on counterterrorism, countering violent extremism, disengaging from violent extremism, disengaging with the gang, there is far greater awareness that some of the support system that women that are being rehabilitated and that the effort is to reintegrate into society need different support structures, including because society's often will ostracize them in far greater ways, far more intense ways than with men. So some of that might carry to the criminal context as well, although setting, of course, will depend will play a very big role. Nigeria and Somalia are very different places than Canada. So my last question and we have four minutes and we need to finish on time, so I'll ask you each to be succinct please. Is a question that asks about methodology. So we have received many questions, both live today and in earlier days about methodologies such as do journalists have to investigate female offenders and organized crime in different ways than they would be investigating men? What precautions would you suggest for doing research or journalistic investigation on female criminals? Any tips on methodology? How to do it safely, how to do it effectively, what questions to ask. Deborah, your last words on that?

**Bonello:** I'll be brief. I mean the women that I chose were the women that had any visibility at all. So I had to choose women who had who were in the U.S. justice system at the time because it's extremely difficult to get hold of documentation and cases in Latin America's justice system. In terms of safety, I definitely focused on women who were out of the game. It wasn't in my interest security wise to be focused on women who were still currently working in organized crime in the region. I don't think any story is worth so much risk, and I definitely took risks. But calculated ones, those those would be my main my main points, I think.

**Felbab-Brown:** Thank you. Elaine.

**Carey:** So my work has mostly been archival and then also working with ethnographers in and contemporary scholars and journalists in Mexico. And I think, you know, so I have partnered with people, which has been, I think, very helpful, particularly in the modern period. But I have also interviewed the people I've written about. Their family members have reached out to me. And again, you know, it's been considerate of of what they may encounter if if the stories are known and their tie to, you know, somebody who was a major organized crime figure, even if that person has long been dead. But there is that that fear. So again, I think an aspect I always keep in mind is is being respectful of them and the impact it can have on their lives. And I do think that's an important consideration that you have to keep working with a partner who is an expert in the area is also really helpful. I would never go to Culiacán and just start asking a lot of questions. You have to be smart. But I also wouldn't do that in certain places in Detroit either. So that's keeping it's again, being authentic, understanding, working with other people who are experts, too, and also being respectful of people who you're interviewing and talking to.

**Allum:** This is such a huge question and I realize that we're running out of time that I would just to reiterate what Elaine said, I totally agree this on the question of respect and also trying to get different lived experiences and perspective, but it's about respect and trusted, trusted relationships. And I'll leave it at that. But it's a huge question and a very interesting one that we think about all the time.

**Felbab-Brown:** Well, in a different context. I have written about how to do field work on highly dangerous topics and in highly dangerous settings, and the issue of gender features very prominently in getting access to women in Taliban is a very different proposition than getting access to men in some groups. But while the social construct or the role of this, the prism through which society defines women plays a role, I wouldn't say that it's necessarily so different from, you know, dealing with a female criminal or female insurgents than it is dealing with a male one, even if getting access might become a completely

different proposition. So with that, I want to give enormous thanks to our absolutely brilliant panel for giving us a very rich conversation and really opening a conversation, one that leaves us with many questions. And these opened an agenda for research, for journalism, for policy rethinking, perhaps, but also leaves us with some fascinating insights and answers already, one of which may be that although the focus might be narrow, the actual behavior and roles might be very similar. And with that, I am deeply thankful to our audience for joining us for another webinar of the Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors. This is the last seminar for this year. We will have many more starting soon in 2024, and thank you very much for your questions. I look forward to continuing our conversations on the issues of crime, insurgency, civil war across the world.