Smuggling of migrants and the convergence with other transnational crimes

An open source media analysis

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The present research

› The present study builds on related paper by same authors (AA, MJ, MM) submitted to IMR currently under review

› Takes the best from two projects:

- **FLOWS**: Displacement and Convergence of Illicit Flows (funded by PMI Impact)

- **MOSAIC**: Mapping with Open Source Analysis to Investigate Crime

Background

Background

› **Convergence**: simultaneous occurrence of the smuggling of migrants and other transnational crimes → serious threat

› **European Migrant Smuggling Center 2018**:

- 46% of OCG operating in the Mediterranean Area involved not only migrant smuggling but also in other illicit activities

- For instance: drug trafficking, money laundering, corruption, document falsification
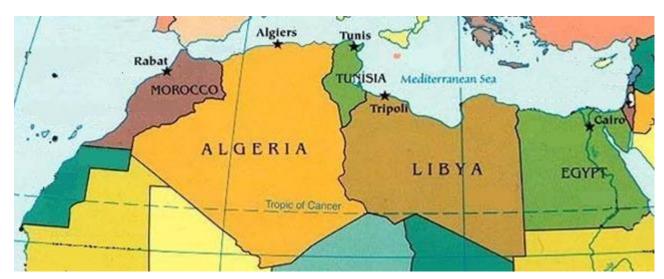
› **Reasons for convergence**:

- Profitability (multiple trafficking activities)

- Resilience (diversification of activities, less vulnerable to police actions)

North Africa and the Mediterranean

› Difficult social, economic and political conditions

› Demographic growth, high unemployment, widespread corruption, no political stability, social conflicts, climate change

 → Growth of migratory flows

› Migration industry is an important source of income

› Economies of scale: same routes, expertise, infrastructure, contacts

Source: Ghenghesh, Khalifa & Franka, Ezzedin & Tawil, Khaled & Wasfy, Momtaz & Ahmed, Salwa & Rubino, Salvatore & Klena, John. (2009). Enteric Fever in Mediterranean North Africa. Journal of infection in developing countries. 3. 753-61. 10.3855/jidc.606.

Current study

Objective

1) Test whether convergence occurs between migrant smuggling and other transnational crimes, particularly illegal trafficking of goods

2) If so, to what extent

3) Investigate whether COVID-19 had an impact on it

Elements

North Africa and the Mediterranean

Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Western Sahara

Human Smuggling

Illegal transportation o migrant human beings

Other transnational crimes

Drugs, Weapons, Tobacco, Fuel, Wildlife, Medicines, Cultural goods
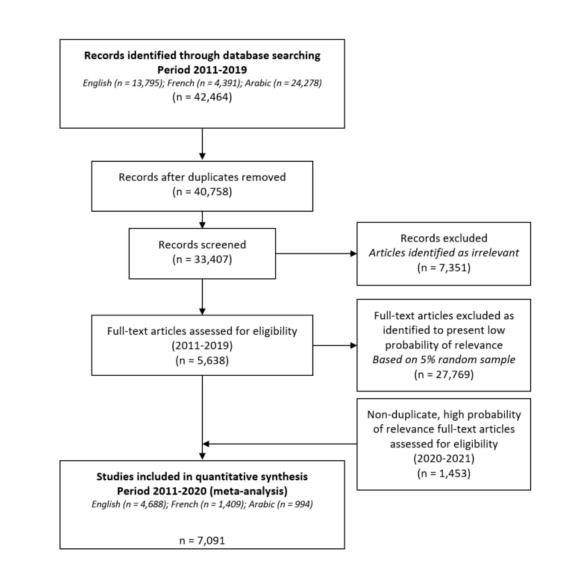
Methodology

Data

LexisNexis ® Metabase

- News articles from open sources
- English, French, Arabic
- Two time periods:
  - Jan 2011 to Dec 2019
  - Jan 2020 to Dec 2021
- Data extraction, process, assessment and correction

Identification

Records identified through database searching
Period 2011-2019
English (n = 13,795); French (n = 4,391); Arabic (n = 24,278)
(n = 42,464)

Screening

Records after duplicates removed
(n = 40,758)

Records screened
(n = 33,407)

Records excluded
Articles identified as irrelevant
(n = 7,351)

Eligibility

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility
(2011-2019)
(n = 5,638)

Full-text articles excluded as identified to present low probability of relevance
Based on 5% random sample
(n = 27,769)

Non-duplicate, high probability of relevance full-text articles assessed for eligibility
(2020-2021)
(n = 1,453)

Included

Studies included in quantitative synthesis
Period 2011-2020 (meta-analysis)
English (n = 4,688); French (n = 1,409); Arabic (n = 994)

n = 7,091

Methodology

Manual assessment:
- Representative sample (10%)
- Classification of *positives*

Extraction of news articles:
- Ad hoc queries
- Language adjustment

Convergence estimation:
- Bivariate frequency analysis
- Statistical correction (5%)

Text processing:
- Processing raw data
- NLP

Machine learning:
- Univariate Naïve Bayes: identification of most discriminative words
- Cross-validation for optimal numbers of words
- Multivariate Naïve Bayes: identification of most likely positives (out-of-sample)
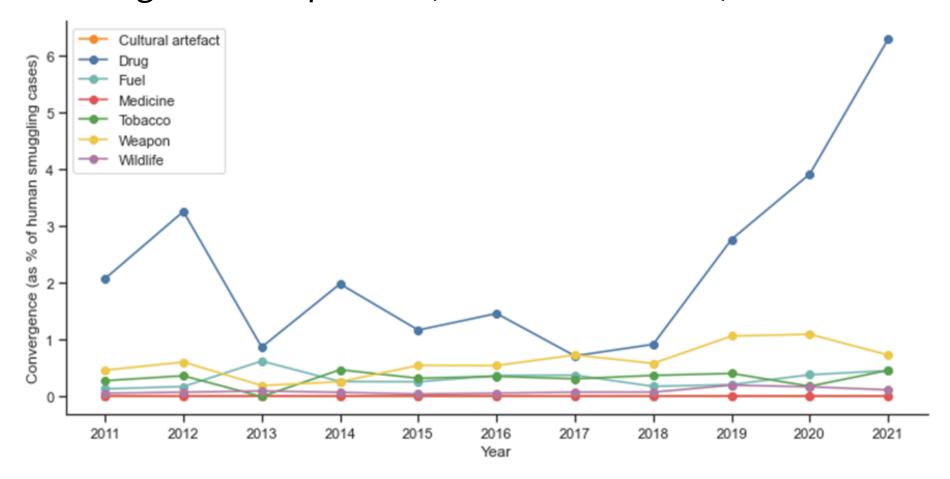
Results

1) Is there convergence?

› Convergence between migrant smuggling and other transnational crimes is marginal and episodic (3.4% in 2011-2021)

2) Extent of convergence

› The highest estimate of convergence is related to drug trafficking (2% on average 2011-2021)

› To a lesser extent: weapons, fuel and tobacco

› No convergence with medicines and cultural goods

3) COVID-19 impact on convergence

› Upward trend of convergence with drug trafficking since 2018, which increases in 2020

› Nevertheless, the increment difference with previous years is not large enough to support a significant impact of COVID-19 on convergence

Contact info

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