



A police officer stands next to graffiti portraying mafia boss Matteo Messina Denaro, Palermo, Sicily, April 2008. © Alessandro Fucarini/AP Photo

Guns in the Family

MAFIA VIOLENCE IN ITALY

INTRODUCTION

In the span of 52 days in 1992, two horrific bomb attacks in Palermo killed Sicilian judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, Falcone's wife Francesca Morvillo, and eight police agents who were part of their armed escorts. The murders provoked mass demonstrations against the mafia in Italy and marked the beginning of a stunning escalation of violence by the Sicilian mafia against the Italian state. Tensions culminated with a terrorist bombing campaign on the mainland in 1993, when bombs planted in Florence, Milan, and Rome killed ten people and wounded more than 70 (CPIFCOMS, 2010a, pp. 10–11). The impressive amount of explosives used in these 'military-style' actions provoked public astonishment and harsh law enforcement countermeasures, unprecedented in the contemporary history of Italian mafia operations.

The Sicilian mafia, like similar organized crime groups based in Italy, has always adopted violence as a last resort, namely when preferred alternatives—such as non-violent displays of strength or threats—cannot achieve the same results. Yet the professionalized use of firearms and explosives remains a characteristic feature of mafia organizations. The use of violence and intimidation against competitors and opponents enables these groups to enhance their reputation and acquire privileged positions in the markets in which they operate, whether legal or illegal. Thus, mafia-type organizations have generally relied on the availability of weapons.

This chapter examines patterns, rules, changes, and variations in the use of armed violence by organized crime groups across Italy, focusing specifically on traditional mafia-type organizations. It also reviews available information on firearm acquisition, storage, and use by these groups. Key findings include:

- Organized crime groups tend to make 'economical' use of violence, and deliberate killings are typically the last resort. This principle varies by group, however, with some acting less restrainedly than others in the use of armed violence to solve disputes, overcome problems related to their businesses, and maintain territorial control.
- The Camorra group, historically rooted in Naples and surrounding areas, is responsible for almost half (48 per cent) of all mafia homicides documented in Italy over the period 1992–2010 (see Table 4.1). A greater availability of firearms in the region, a stronger presence of organized crime members, and recurrent conflicts among clans may partly explain the group's predominance in violence.
- Mafia homicides declined by some 43 per cent from 2007 to 2010 (see Table 4.1). Analysts suggest that organized crime groups have entered a submersion phase, moving further into legal markets in which the use of violence and firearms is increasingly counterproductive to business operations.
- Most mafia clans maintain their own arsenals of collectively held firearms, with selected members in charge of procuring, storing, maintaining, and distributing firearms in response to requests or circumstances.

- The level of sophistication and the variety of firearms among mafia clans have increased since the 1970s. Most mafiosi (mafia members) currently rely on machine guns, revolvers, pistols, and AK-pattern assault rifles, although they even use World War II-era firearms or modified toy guns.
- Mafia groups procure firearms through robberies from firearms shops; thefts from the military, police forces, and private citizens; and in exchange for drugs and other illicit commodities.
- Criminal groups in the former Yugoslavia, Albania, and other Eastern European countries are key sources of firearms for Italian organized crime groups.

In view of the fact that no systematic data is currently available on the use of firearms by organized crime groups in Italy, this chapter provides an initial attempt at a qualitative analysis of this under-researched and relatively hidden phenomenon. The first part presents an overview of the main actors comprising the multifaceted Italian organized crime scene and provides a summary of the structure, internal organization, and modes of operation of the four main traditional mafia-type organizations: the Cosa Nostra, the 'Ndrangheta, the Camorra, and the Sacra Corona Unita (United Holy Crown, or SCU). The second section analyses organized crime and armed violence with a special focus on mafia homicides in Italy over the past 20 years and the changes and variations in the use of armed violence across the country. The final section explores characteristics, patterns, and rules of firearms procurement, possession, storage, and use by these groups. Thematic text boxes examine the role played by Italian organized crime groups in the illegal firearms trade and the presence of adolescents specialized in the use of armed violence inside some mafia groups.

The organized crime scene is dominated by the Cosa Nostra, the 'Ndrangheta, the Camorra, and the Sacra Corona Unita.

THE ORGANIZED CRIME SCENE

In the Italian debate, the expression 'organized crime' is a broad concept covering different offences and actors. Based on Article 416 of Italy's penal code, criminal organizations composed of at least three members who repeatedly get involved in serious crimes usually fall into this category; however, Article 416bis defines a mafia-type criminal association as relying on the intimidating power of the bonds of association, the condition of subjugation, and *omertà* (the code of silence), as enforced by intimidation (Italy, 2007, arts. 416, 416-bis).¹ Thus 'mafia' refers to a specific type of organized criminal organization that has the capacity to exercise power through systematic intimidation or political influence.²

Three major mafia-type organizations whose origins date back to the second half of the 19th century dominate the Italian organized crime scene: the confederation of groups comprising the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta, and the Campanian Camorra (Lupo, 2009; Ciconte, 1992; Sales, 1993). Though originally rooted in regions of southern Italy, since the post-war period these organizations have expanded towards north-central areas—where they have acquired strong economic interests—and abroad, where they have the support of well-established settlements (Sciarrone, 2009; Varese, 2011). Beginning in the late 1970s, Apulia also witnessed the expansion of organized crime with the emergence of a so-called 'fourth mafia', the Sacra Corona Unita (Massari, 1998; see Map 4.1).

In addition to these four traditional mafia-type organizations,³ Italy has faced increasing activity from several foreign criminal groups since the mid-1990s. Whether ethnically homogeneous or mixed, these groups were originally at the margins of the Italian criminal underworld but have since become increasingly active in several illegal markets (DNA, 2011). Italy's geopolitical position in drugs and human trafficking was a major factor in the emergence of these groups,

Map 4.1 Mafia strongholds in Italy



with countries in Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia acting as the source for illegal goods and services intended for Western markets. Among the principal foreign criminal organizations operating in Italy, law enforcement agencies note Balkan, Chinese, and Nigerian syndicates, as well as Russian and North African organized crime groups. These are mostly involved in smuggling illegal immigrants, trafficking humans and drugs, prostitution, counterfeiting, and money laundering (DNA, 2011, pp. 151–60). Although the outcomes of investigations confirm growing cooperation between Italian mafia-type groups and foreign criminal organizations in the management of illegal markets such as drugs, the latter tend to operate within specific sectors of criminal activities and in areas where mafia control is less intense (p. 152).

Traditional mafia structures

The word ‘mafia’ has appeared continuously since the mid-19th century, be it in political debates, judicial investigations, journalistic commentary, fiction, or parliamentary enquiries. While the term was originally used in Italian to refer exclusively to the Sicilian group, its meaning has since expanded to connote organized crime and various criminal phenomena. Until the 1980s, the word ‘mafia’ also defined a way of life, a form of behaviour, and an expression of traditional society. This view was largely based on the ideological representation mafiosi provided of themselves as mediators, resolvers of disagreements, and protectors of the weak (Lupo, 2009, p. 12).

Statements made by *pentiti* (former mafiosi who cooperate with the judiciary) have helped to separate such ideological representations from the real situation. Most of them provide insight into the mafia's hierarchical structure, careful vetting of members, division of territory, and syndicate-wide coordination mechanisms. The statements also reveal that mafia groups tend to outlive their individual members (Lupo, 2009).

Academic debate on the mafia among Italian scholars has generated a wide array of definitions that focus mostly on structure, activities, and resources (Varese, 2010, pp. 1–33). This chapter defines 'mafia' as an organized crime group characterized by the capacity to take root in certain areas, exert social control over society, rely on economic and military resources, and secure a certain degree of social support (Sciarrone, 2009, pp. 44–45).⁴

In order to understand its complexity, the mafia may be seen, as Santino suggests, as 'a system of violence and illegality aimed at accumulating wealth and gaining power, which also uses a cultural code and enjoys a certain level of popular support' (Santino, 1995, p. 130). In this sense, the groups exhibit political, cultural, and social features in addition to criminal and economic aspects. According to this approach, the mafia cannot be separated from official, legal society and should be considered within its wider social context (Ruggiero, 1996).

The Cosa Nostra

The Cosa Nostra represents a sort of paradigm for other organized crime groups. 'Cosa Nostra' (Our Business) is the expression used by mafiosi to refer to the Sicilian mafia. Its structure was disclosed in 1984 in statements made by *pentito* Tommaso Buscetta and other former mafia members who decided to collaborate with law enforcement agencies (Stajano, 1992; Arlacchi, 1992; 1994).

This organization still represents a sort of paradigm for other organized crime groups. It is composed of various units, called *famiglie* or *cosche* (families), which usually take their name from the territory where they operate, be it a neighbourhood, as in the city of Palermo, or a village. Although Cosa Nostra *famiglie* operate in each Sicilian province—where they exercise a sort of totalitarian control—Palermo 'is and still remains the place where the criminal organization most greatly expresses its vitality at both the decisional and (mostly) operational levels' (DNA, 2011, p. 51).

A *famiglia* may contain a varying number of members, from ten to as many as 100; called *uomini d'onore* (men of honour) or *soldati* (soldiers), they are usually organized in *decine* (groups of ten) supervised by a *capodecina* (head of a group of ten). Each *famiglia* is run by a *capofamiglia* (family head) or representative—elected by the members of the family—a *consigliere* (adviser), and a *sottocapo* (deputy). Several families operating in the same area form a larger unit called a *mandamento*, whose own chief is appointed by the various *capifamiglia*. In the past, two governing bodies operating at the provincial and regional levels—the *Commissione provinciale* (provincial commission) and *Commissione regionale* (regional commission)—supervised the activities of the various families, though no evidence is currently available on their actual existence. Today a more restricted committee composed of few trusted *capomandamenti* (heads of mandamentos) seems to manage overall Cosa Nostra businesses (Ingroia, 2008, p. 164–65).

Law enforcement operations have had a strong impact on the Cosa Nostra since the mid-1990s, leading to the imprisonment of major bosses such as Totò Riina, Bernardo Provenzano, and Salvatore Lo Piccolo, and sparking the emergence of a new generation of *uomini d'onore*, who are significantly younger than the former leaders.

After the 'terror strategy' adopted during the early 1990s—with the killings of judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, and the 'massacre strategy' with bomb attacks in Florence, Milan, and Rome in 1993,⁵ through which the Cosa Nostra openly challenged the state—the organization went through a 'submersion phase', aimed at avoiding the attention of law enforcement. Since then, the Cosa Nostra has been enduring a 'transition phase' characterized by the selection of new leadership and the adoption of new organizational patterns and strategies (DNA, 2011, p. 52).

'Ndrangheta

The 'Ndrangheta (group of brave men) is the mafia-type association historically rooted in the area of Reggio Calabria, in the southern part of the province of Calabria.⁶ Over the past 20 years, this organization has steadily grown in prominence; today it is well established across the entire region, as well as in the north-central part of the country and abroad.

Its structure is divided into basic units called *'ndrine* (families), composed of one or more groups with deep local roots, whether in a neighbourhood or a village. Each *'ndrina* relies largely on blood ties between members. The biological family almost always overlaps with the criminal family and represents the cornerstone of the *'ndrina*'s internal structure. A group of several *'ndrine* comprises a *locale* (a federation of groups), which operates in broader areas as large as an entire province. Each *'ndrina* is led by a *capobastone*, the highest rank a 'Ndrangheta affiliate can achieve after having moved up through the internal hierarchy (Gratteri and Nicaso, 2009, pp. 65–66).

The most recent investigations suggest that 'Ndrangheta structure has undergone significant changes over the past few years. In Calabria, the group is mostly divided into three main regional components—the Tyrrhenian, the City, and the Ionian. The entire organization is overseen by a corporate body called the *Provincia* (Province) or *Crimine* (Crime), which deliberates and endorses most important decisions involving groups operating in Calabria, as well as those active in other regions and abroad (DNA, 2011, p. 99; CPIFCOMS, 2010b, pp. 11–12).

Camorra

The term Camorra refers to a wide array of criminal groups based in Naples and other cities in the Campania province, such as Caserta and Salerno. These groups are often highly fragmented and hardly comprise a homogenous syndicate



Men linked to the Camorra stand in a street in Scampia, Naples, February 2009. © Samuel Aranda/Corbis

(Sales, 2008, p. 100). The latest official reports indicate that the Camorra is currently characterized by ‘the extraordinary fluidity of changes inside the main criminal groups historically rooted in certain areas’, mostly due to the effects of law enforcement operations as well as conflicts between major clans (DNA, 2011, p. 78). As opposed to both the ‘Ndrangheta and the Cosa Nostra, the rather flexible structure of this organization does not currently rely on governing bodies or other coordinating mechanisms aimed at managing the activities of the various clans.

The Camorra cannot be reduced to a single, unified criminal configuration (DNA, 2011, p. 73); nevertheless, major differences can be identified among groups operating in the city of Naples, those active in the province, and others mostly based in the area of Caserta. More than half the criminal groups active in Campania are based in the city of Naples, where criminal density is very high and the balance of power between the various clans is especially fragile (Brancaccio, 2009, p. 78). Often relying on blood ties, these clans tend to operate as a sort of criminal elite, well established at the social, economic, and even political–institutional levels.⁷ In the areas surrounding Naples, clans are more tightly structured, tend to manage all illegal activities in their territory, and display a strong tendency towards reinvestment of their illegal profits in the legal market (Brancaccio, 2009, p. 78). The area in and around Caserta is managed by the so-called Casalesi clan, a cartel of clans that emerged in the late 1980s (Cantone, 2012, pp. 20–21). Although still dangerous, this cartel has been heavily affected by major law enforcement operations and the arrest of several bosses.

Sacra Corona Unita

More than half the criminal groups of the Camorra are based in Naples.

The SCU, an Apulian mafia-type organization based largely in the southern part of the region, was founded in the early 1980s and drew heavily on the model furnished by robustly structured organized crime syndicates such as the ‘Ndrangheta and the Camorra. The SCU’s internal organization reflects a hierarchical structure and strong symbolism based on old ‘Ndrangheta statutes and codes—such as tattoos and other visual identifiers of group affiliation.⁸ Particularly during the late 1980s and 1990s, this organization experienced internal conflicts among various clans, leading to heavy reliance on violence as a tool for solving disputes and imposing authority over the local underworld (Massari, 2009, pp. 246–47). Other characteristics of the ‘fourth mafia’ include a low level of internal cohesion and a strong utilitarian approach, which led several bosses to accord priority to economic gain over the consolidation of power.

Over the past ten years, the SCU has undergone a significant transformation, since the incarceration of most of its bosses made space for a new generation, composed largely of the sons and relatives of the original leaders. The new elite has maintained a low profile while consolidating business through large, diversified investments in the legal economy. Moreover, the proximity to the Balkans, particularly Albania and Montenegro, has encouraged renewed interest in drug trafficking activities, as well as involvement in more traditional crimes such as robbery and extortion (Massari, 2009, p. 247).

ARMED VIOLENCE: CHARACTERISTICS AND TRENDS

Functions and meanings of violence

An account from the second half of the 19th century describes the Sicilian mafia as ‘the violence industry’ because of its ability to extort protection money and guarantee monopolies, and mafiosi as ‘violence entrepreneurs’ in view of their ability to use force in a professionalized way (Franchetti, 1993; Gambetta, 1993; Dickie, 2007, pp. 52–53).

More than a century later, scholarly debates and findings still cast violence as the qualifying characteristic of mafia power. Violence is one of the main resources used by mafia families to maintain their market position and increase

the competitiveness of their businesses (Paoli, 2000, p. 212). Organized criminals use it not only to enforce contracts, but also to defy them; not just as a means of aggression, but also as a means of defence (Gambetta, 2009, p. 78).

Moreover, beyond the extensive use of violence, merely the credible *threat* of its use often grants criminal organizations a powerful monopoly over legal and illegal markets. A violent reputation—not necessarily linked to the actual use of violence—represents a sort of calling card that allows mafiosi to impose their own rules, solve disputes, and claim respect. Both the use and the threat of violence, however, can be drastically minimized if other options, such as corruption, are available, especially when organized criminals forge partnerships with official actors.

As already noted, the Italian penal code recognizes the use of intimidation as a distinctive feature of any mafia group. The effects of this tactic are particularly visible in the subjugation of local communities, especially in southern Italy, but also increasingly elsewhere.⁹ In these areas, criminal organizations often exercise strong social control and tend to poison many aspects of daily life through threats, blackmail, and intimidation as they attempt to impose strict control over all activities that fall into their area of interest. Although homicides, assaults, and injuries are the most visible manifestations of the ability of organized crime groups to perpetrate wide-scale violence, subtler strategies also exist; based on the systematic use of terror and threats, these organizations increase group cohesion and efficiency, secure a certain level of social support, and challenge the ability of the state to enforce law and order.

Box 4.1 Mafias in Italy: key events

- 1962** Anti-mafia Parliamentary Committee appointed.
- 1962–63** First mafia war in Sicily.
- 10 December 1969** The Viale Lazio massacre in Palermo and the rise of the Corleonesi clan.
- 1974** Corleonesi boss Luciano Liggio arrested in Milan.
- 1974–80** First 'Ndrangheta war in Calabria.
- 1978–83** Second mafia war in Sicily.
- 1980** Piersanti Mattarella, president of Sicilian Regional Assembly, and prosecutor Gaetano Costa killed in Palermo.
- 1982** Pio La Torre, secretary of the Communist Party in Sicily, and Gen. Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa killed in Palermo.
- 1979–83** Camorra war in Campania.
- 1983** Judge Bruno Caccia killed in Turin by 'Ndrangheta.
- 1984** Tommaso Buscetta turned state's witness.
- 1985–91** Second 'Ndrangheta war in Calabria.
- 1986** Palermo trial against 474 Cosa Nostra members.
- 1989–91** Taurianova *faida* (feud) in Calabria.
- 1991** Beginning of the San Luca *faida* in Calabria.
- 23 May 1992** Judge Giovanni Falcone killed in the Capaci massacre.
- 19 July 1992** Judge Paolo Borsellino killed in the Via D'Amelio massacre.
- 15 January 1993** Cosa Nostra boss Totò Riina arrested.
- 27 May 1993** Beginning of Cosa Nostra terror strategy with a car bomb in Florence.
- 27 July 1993** Car bomb in Milan; two bombings on the same night in Rome.
- 19 March 1994** Father Giuseppe Diana killed in Campania by the Camorra.
- 24 June 1995** Cosa Nostra boss Leoluca Bagarella arrested.
- Mid-1990s** Beginning of Cosa Nostra submersion phase.
- 2004–05** First Scampia *faida* in Naples.
- 16 October 2005** Francesco Fortugno, vice-president of the Regional Council of Calabria, killed.
- 11 April 2006** Cosa Nostra boss Bernardo Provenzano arrested and end of the submersion phase.
- 15 August 2007** Duisburg (Germany) massacre by the 'Ndrangheta.
- 18 September 2008** Castelvoturno massacre in Campania.
- 2010** Operation 'Crimine' against 300 'Ndrangheta members.
- 2012** Second Scampia *faida* begins in Naples.

In this regard, the analysis of the functions and meanings of mafia activity suggests that the organizations employ two types of violence. *Instrumental* violence is aimed at achieving concrete goals, such as a certain position in the marketplace or the elimination of obstacles, competitors, or dangers. Yet violence can also play a more *symbolic* role, such as when it is intended to enhance the reputation of the clans, deepening their sphere of respect and securing a certain level of impunity. These two functions are not always distinct and often overlap. In both cases, violence may be carried out inside the criminal organization—as in the case of inter-mafia conflicts or disciplinary action against group members—as well as outside, as in the so-called ‘terror strategy’ adopted by the Cosa Nostra during the early 1990s (see Box 4.1).¹⁰

This chapter focuses on the most tangible expressions of organized criminal violence, namely the violence committed with firearms. Despite the high profile of mafia and other Italian criminal organizations both inside and outside Italy, the use of firearms by these groups has not been studied closely. The findings presented in this chapter are based on a qualitative analysis of information collected through author interviews with anti-mafia prosecutors based at the Direzione Nazionale Antimafia (National Anti-mafia Directorate, or DNA) in Rome and local Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia (District Anti-mafia Directorate) offices in the provinces of Lecce and Reggio Calabria, law enforcement officers in Rome, and mafia experts; content analysis of judicial files and police reports concerning major anti-mafia operations provided by interviewees; an examination of DNA reports on organized crime in Italy issued from 2006 to 2011; a study of reports and hearings issued by the Anti-mafia Parliamentary Committee from 2002 until April 2012; and a review of news reports in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* from 2002 to June 2012. Since most of the official sources lack detailed information on the use of firearms by organized crime groups, primary sources, such as author interviews, comprise the most relevant empirical basis for this research.

The four traditional mafia-type organizations show heterogeneous patterns in the use of armed violence.

Organized crime and firearm-related offences

Organized crime groups often employ armed violence as a last resort, when less risky strategies are not viable. Prudence guides such use of firearms, with criminals generally evaluating related risks to avoid drawing the attention of law enforcement agencies and raising concern among the population. Depending on the situation, violence is used in different degrees, ranging from a simple threat, or act of intimidation, to the infliction of injuries or the commission of homicide. The four traditional mafia-type organizations show heterogeneous patterns in the use of violence, as some are more inclined to resort to weapons, while others are more cautious.

In attempting to understand the role of armed violence in the organized crime world, it is important to consider its effect on the local population. Indeed, demonstrative acts of violence may sometimes reinforce a group’s image of invincibility among local communities, thus weakening any opposition to the organization. Such acts include the use of firearms or explosives in the commission of crimes, including robberies, extortions, homicides, and kidnappings. That said, little data is currently available on the number of crimes committed with the use of weapons and on the types of weapon used.¹¹

Local Italian newspapers often report on acts of mafia violence and intimidation involving the use of firearms and explosives against shopkeepers, entrepreneurs, political administrators, and private citizens. Most of these incidents are related to protection rackets (Gambetta, 1993). Mafia groups usually generate a demand for security and protection by causing a high level of insecurity and uncertainty in the marketplace as well as society (Grasso and Varano, 2002). Extortion may also be presented as a form of taxation on local production activities and a way to assert political

power over a territory. Bullet holes in shop and car windows, explosions near commercial centres, and intimidating letters containing bullets are all common mafia methods of communication. These methods are also used outside of the southern areas where mafia groups are historically rooted. Recent judicial files concerning the 'Ndrangheta in Lombardy, for example, show evidence of more than 70 incidents of intimidation using firearms, ammunition, and explosives against the local business and trade sectors (*La Repubblica*, 2012).¹²

Law enforcement agencies have not released systematic, detailed information on the use of weapons in the commission of these types of crimes, making rigorous quantitative analysis impossible. Nevertheless, information collected for this chapter provides a qualitative overview of the major trends and dynamics concerning the use of firearms in homicides committed by organized crime groups.

Mafia homicides

Murder is the paradigmatic expression of mafia power. Mafiosi use it to eliminate opponents and competitors, as well as ordinary citizens who may be completely outside criminal enterprises and law enforcement operations. In areas where traditional mafia-type groups are deeply rooted, they tend to vie against the state for the monopoly over the use of force; in a similar vein, they are generally intolerant of other criminal gangs or individual criminals who carry out illegal activities in the areas where they operate. As a consequence, ordinary criminals may need to request authorization from the local mafia clan (Tribunale di Caltanissetta, 2005, pp. 236–37). As already noted, organized crime groups tend to make ‘economical’ use of violence, seeking to balance the risks of overt displays of armed violence with the need to maintain a violent reputation essential to securing respect from the local population and partnerships with official actors.

During periods of intense conflict, such as the mafia wars that occur cyclically inside

Table 4.1 Mafia homicides in Italy, by group, 1992–2010

Year	Cosa Nostra	'Ndrangheta	Camorra	SCU	Total
1992	152	53	126	9	340
1993	53	41	59	5	158
1994	83	34	60	4	181
1995	95	38	131	17	281
1996	90	45	138	11	284
1997	48	43	135	21	247
1998	51	28	131	34	244
1999	39	33	80	29	181
2000	17	45	86	26	174
2001	31	39	68	25	163
2002	18	30	54	23	125
2003	13	33	77	37	160
2004	17	45	122	19	203
2005	18	42	72	7	139
2006	14	23	77	8	122
2007	12	16	85	4	117
2008	12	22	59	9	102
2009	19	11	49	7	86
2010	10	24	18	15	67
Totals	792	645	1,627	310	3,374

Notes: This table combines data from two sources. The Ministero dell’Interno-Direzione Centrale Polizia Criminale (Ministry of Interior-Central Criminal Police Directorate) provides mafia homicide data for the period 1992–2006, broken down by individual organized crime group. Mafia homicide data for 2007–10 is drawn from reporting by the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (National Institute of Statistics, ISTAT), which disaggregates homicides by region (Apulia, Calabria, Campania, and Sicily, plus one ‘other’ category). According to ISTAT, mafia homicides in each region mostly correspond to the specific organized crime group dominant in them. In this table, therefore, the regional figures for 2007–10 are applied to each of the four major mafia groups. The table does not include an additional 12 mafia homicides that were recorded outside of the main areas of operation over the four-year period.

Sources: 1996–2006: MI-DCPC (2007); 2007–10: ISTAT (2008; 2009; 2010; 2012); author communication with ISTAT, December 2012

the organized crime world, the use of firearms is usually high, especially in the commission of homicides. During Sicily's 'second mafia war' alone, more than 1,000 people were killed (Dino, 2008, pp. 297–98). In the same period, from 1979 to 1983, the war between the two main groups comprising the Neapolitan Camorra—the Nuova Camorra Organizzata led by Raffaele Cutolo and the Nuova Famiglia—claimed around 900 lives (Brancaccio, 2009, p. 66). In Calabria a few years later, between 1985 and 1991, the 'Ndrangheta killed more than 700 people using mostly its own powerful, sophisticated weapons arsenal (Gratteri and Nicaso, 2009, p. 61). No precise information is available on the types of firearm used in the commission of these homicides.

During the 1990s, mafia homicides showed irregular trends. The highest peak was reached in 1992, with 340 homicides nationally. A general decline followed, with exceptions in 1995 (281 homicides), 1996 (284 homicides), and 1997 (247 homicides). In 1999, 181 mafia homicides were recorded (see Table 4.1).

From 2000 onwards, the overall number of mafia homicides began to decline.

From 2000 onwards, the overall number of mafia homicides began to decline, although there was a peak in 2004 with 203 mafia homicides; given the explosion of the first Scampia *faida* (feud)¹³ at that time, the Camorra accounted for more than half of those deaths. Declines accelerated from 2005, dropping almost 52 per cent by 2010. Of a total of 69 mafia-type homicides reported in 2010 throughout Italy, 24 occurred in Calabria, 18 in Campania, 15 in Apulia, and 10 in Sicily, meaning that only 2 homicides—or 3 per cent of the total—were registered outside of the areas under the control of the major mafia groups (ISTAT, 2012). Although the declining number of mafia homicides over the past decade may elicit cautious optimism, a qualitative analysis of data concerning the main organized crime groups operating in the country leads to more complex evaluations.

While the rate of mafia homicides reported by law enforcement in 2010 was 0.1 per 100,000 inhabitants at the national level and 0.3 in the Mezzogiorno—or southern—regions, it was 1.2 per 100,000 in Calabria, the highest among the four traditional mafia regions, with a peak of 3.3 in the city of Catanzaro (ISTAT, 2012).¹⁴ One prosecutor interviewed for this study stressed that, in Calabria, the widespread availability of weapons belonging to the 'Ndrangheta, together with a large percentage of mafiosi out of the total population, may have led to more frequent use of firearms, especially in the area of Reggio Calabria.¹⁵ As he put it: 'the more firearms are available, the more they are used'.¹⁶ While no detailed data is currently available on the actual number of firearms at their disposal, law enforcement officials generally share the view that mafiosi have no shortage of weapons. Traditional cultural codes related to revenge and *faida* may also have contributed to the region's high incidence of violent crime (see Box 4.2).

In addition to being prevalent, mafia homicides in Calabria are often marked by excessive cruelty. One of the most dramatic episodes—perhaps the most brutal in contemporary mafia history—occurred in May 1991, when, during the so-called Taurianova *faida*, which involved several 'Ndrangheta clans, a man was killed and decapitated. His head was subsequently used as a target in a shooting contest improvised by his killers in the middle of the city's main square, in front of almost 20 people who witnessed the macabre scene (Sergi, 1992, p. 20).

The case of the Camorra demonstrates the sometimes very close relationship between violence and cruelty among Italian organized crime groups. The so-called Scampia *faida* in the Naples area in 2004–05 was characterized by an unprecedented level of ferocity—which may be explained on the basis of the perceived need to strengthen, in those exceptional circumstances, the reputation of the clans involved and to impose a climate of terror. The period witnessed many acts of indirect revenge against relatives or people who happened to be close to a clan associate on the run.¹⁷

One of the cruellest homicides during this *faida* occurred in November 2004, when a 22-year-old woman named Gelsomina Verde was kidnapped, tortured, and shot in the back of the head; her body was subsequently burned inside

Box 4.2 The Duisburg massacre

On the night between 14 and 15 August 2007, in the city of Duisburg, Germany, six young Calabrian men were killed by 54 shots fired by two 9 mm pistols a few metres away from an Italian restaurant that belonged to one of the men. The victims were between 17 and 39 years old and all had been somehow connected to a 'Ndrangheta clan based in the remote Calabrian village of San Luca, in the inland area of Aspromonte. For more than 15 years, that clan had been engaged in a brutal conflict with another clan that had originally been based in the same village (Bolzoni, 2008; Colaprico, 2007). As the Anti-mafia Parliamentary Committee states in its report, San Luca could be considered:

a strategic place in the past and current history of the 'Ndrangheta, a crucial area for the control of drug trafficking [...] and the location of a long and bloody *faida* between two family groups belonging to Calabrian mafia aristocracy (CPIFCOMS, 2008, pp. 11-12).

The two clans counted around 100 members each, out of a total population of around 4,000 inhabitants (Baldessero, 2007).

The *faida* arose from an apparently trivial matter. In 1991 in San Luca, during Carnival, a group of boys close to one of the families threw rotten eggs at the windows of a bar owned by a member of the other clan, making fun of the owner's protests and curses. A few days later, in the same village, two young members of the egg-throwing boys' family were killed and two injured. This event marked the beginning of a conflict that saw several deaths and reached its peak at Christmas 2006, when the wife of a boss involved in the *faida* was killed as well (CPIFCOMS, 2008, pp. 11-12).

Although all these events took place in Calabria, the Duisburg massacre occurred because one of the boys shot there was thought to be the custodian of the firearms used to kill the woman a year before; he had been marked for death for this reason. As the parliamentary report states, this 'tribal *faida* mixed with ruthless mafia modernity' sent shockwaves through both Italian and German public opinion (CPIFCOMS, 2008, p. 10). This was the first, and so far probably the only, visible manifestation of bloody violence expressly planned and carried out by a commando belonging to a mafia-type organization sent for that purpose outside the national territory. This massacre exposed the power of a criminality that had originated in the most remote areas of Calabria but was now spreading worldwide 'through the obscure underworld of globalization' (p. 11).



A police inspector holds up a photo of a weapon linked to the Duisburg massacre during a press conference, Duisburg, Germany, March 2009. © Frank Augstein/AP Photo

Box 4.3 Myths and stereotypes: the mafia code of honour

Traditional mafia-type organizations have often used subtle communication strategies to enhance their mystique (Dino, 2002). The expression *uomini d'onore* (men of honour) used by mafiosi to define members of the group is quite revealing of their long-standing self-perception as men committed to the pursuit of morality and justice. Tommaso Buscetta, one of the first Sicilian turncoat informants, remembered how in the past the Cosa Nostra 'was born to protect weak people from the abuse of the powerful and affirm values such as friendship, family [. . .], solidarity, *omertà* (the code of silence), in a word, the sense of honour' (Arlacchi, 1994, p. 11). All these values were deeply rooted in the traditional Sicilian sub-cultural system, in which the value of a man was mainly assessed through his ability to defend personal and family honour and avenge offences.

Within the mafia world, these values inform the strategy of the group and the individual alike. Thus, the mafia often represents itself as a sort of brotherhood committed to fighting injustice and protecting the poor. The belief that mafiosi operate according to a code of honour still shapes the widespread popular image of the mafia; in turn, mafiosi exploit that notion to legitimize their use of violence and the management of political functions in local communities (Paoli, 2000, p. 123).

According to this code of honour, mafiosi are not to engage in any disreputable illegal activities—such as prostitution or, at least until the early 1970s, the distribution of drugs¹⁸—and should protect women and children from violent acts. The latter is one of the most glaring myths the mafia has tried to disseminate, as mafia clans have killed more than 150 women since the end of the 19th century (Associazione daSud, 2012). Women have been killed in the context of indirect revenge or because they were trapped inside perverse family relationships; others were targeted because of their political activism and some lost their lives as innocent bystanders in shootouts. Many others were victims of so-called 'honour homicides' because they had dared to challenge mafia rules, such as by denouncing a mafioso, convincing a relative or husband to collaborate with law enforcement agencies, or choosing a partner who did not share the same mafia background.

Recently released information on suicides committed by women who had collaborated with prosecutors in Calabria in 2011 raised several disturbing questions. In at least two cases these women had decided—or were forced—to kill themselves by drinking hydrochloric acid, which is not only extremely painful, but also peculiar from a symbolic perspective. Celeste Costantino of the anti-mafia organization daSud stresses the ambivalent feelings that may have induced these women—who were profoundly influenced by their socialization to mafia disvalues—to take such a dramatic decision:

from the mouth some revelations came out, and through the same mouth one washes away the temptation to continue this, the desperation of having tried to do this, and the dishonour of having already done this (Associazione daSud, 2012, p. 5).

her car. A few months before the murder, she had dated a man who had been 'sentenced to death' by the clan and had thus gone into hiding (Saviano, 2006, pp. 94–97). The mafiosi had aimed to find out his whereabouts from the young woman. That homicide was clearly an extreme and symbolic act of violence. As Roberto Saviano notes in his book on the Camorra, which delves into accounts of this *faida*, 'people may become maps on which messages are inscribed' (Saviano, 2006, p. 97; see Box 4.3).

Among the traditional mafia-type organizations, the Camorra stands out for resorting to violence, seemingly indifferent to the general rule of parsimony observed by the Cosa Nostra and the 'Ndrangheta and to the possible effects of the uneconomical use of violence.¹⁹ One Camorra defector, for example, stated that his boss was so 'bloodthirsty' that he did not consider the consequences of his violent acts. While driving a car in a residential district of Naples, the boss had told him that he felt disappointed because there were no police cars he could shoot at to provide 'another signal' (*La Repubblica*, 2011). The Camorra committed an estimated 3,500 homicides between 1980 and 2008 (Brancaccio, 2009, p. 72).

Mafia groups also fall back on homicides to address internal conflicts and non-compliance with the rules of the organization, such as when members abuse drugs or flirt with the wives of imprisoned clan members.²⁰ No data is available on mafia homicides related to internal disputes.

Similar characteristics in the use of violence have been recorded in the Apulian SCU. Since its beginnings at the end of the 1980s, this criminal group has frequently employed

armed violence to exert hegemony over the local underworld. The area of Salento—the southern part of the region where the SCU maintains its base—witnessed 118 mafia homicides in 1989 and 145 the following year. Violence and terror became common tools for achieving power and securing a reputation (Dino, 2008, p. 293).

From the late 1990s until 2005, the SCU was almost decapitated by tough law enforcement operations in the areas of Lecce and Brindisi, several court trials, and the incarceration of most of the bosses. This period also saw an increase in an Albanian criminal presence in the region and, along with it, trafficking activities mostly related to the drug trade (Massari, 2008, p. 503). Fear of attracting further attention from police convinced leading SCU clans to adopt a much lower profile.

One of the most recent important SCU homicides occurred in 2003, in the area of Lecce, when a boss was killed in a bar, in front of many witnesses, with the express aim of sending a clear message to his affiliates to squash their attempts at establishing control over a number of illegal activities in the area.²¹ The SCU is currently implementing a more subtle strategy, aware that:

any mafia that can manage to ensure order in the areas where it operates, without using conspicuous forms of violence, ends up being more easily tolerated and in turn seen as a subject that may offer alternative services to the state (DNA, 2011, p. 149).



Cosa Nostra boss Bernardo Provenzano enters a police building in Palermo escorted by hooded police officers, April 2006. © Luca Bruno/AP Photo

In this regard, the Apulian criminal organization more closely resembles the Sicilian model, which is currently characterized by stricter internal secrecy due in part to the adoption of new rules, such as only allowing membership to individuals from the same village (DNA, 2011, p. 149).

With respect to the Cosa Nostra, one prosecutor stated that the general strategy is to employ homicide as a tool for solving a problem without creating additional problems.²² Nino Giuffrè, a defector from the Sicilian mafia, corroborated this point by referring to what his boss Bernardo Provenzano once told him: 'It should be evaluated whether somebody causes more harm dead or alive.'²³

Overall, the Cosa Nostra prefers a gradual increase in the use of violence. The first step is usually a threat, at times indirect rather than explicit; if that threat is not heeded, it may be followed by the actual use of violent methods.²⁴ After a relatively calm phase in Sicily, the Cosa Nostra appears to have reintegrated the use of homicide as a tool for solving internal problems.²⁵ The five murders that took place in the Palermo area in 2011 confirm that the Sicilian organization still employs homicide as a governing tool; that approach may set the tone for future strategies as the organization emerges from a transition phase that began with the arrest of Bernardo Provenzano in April 2006 (DNA, 2011, p. 52).

There is a specific reason why homicide statistics may be undercounts, especially in Sicily. The preferred mafia killing method is referred to as *lupara bianca*, which calls for the elimination of all physical evidence of the victim.

**Each organized
crime family usually
relies on its own
firearm arsenal.**

The victim is usually strangled or suffocated and the body dissolved in acid. Although this practice is still in evidence in Sicily—where four cases were recorded in 2011—and in Calabria, it is mostly used during relatively calm phases, during which homicides can be planned far in advance.²⁶ One prosecutor remarked that, whenever possible, the Cosa Nostra prefers to use hands and acid rather than firearms.²⁷

CHARACTERISTICS OF GUN USE BY ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS

Acquisition of and access to weapons

Italian law requires licensed firearms dealers to verify the eligibility of purchasers and maintain records of gun purchases, which must be forwarded to the police on a monthly basis (Italy, 2010). Ineligible buyers, such as members of criminal groups, tend to obtain guns from the legitimate market through 'straw purchasers'—relatives, friends, or ordinary citizens with a gun licence who buy firearms on their behalf and then usually report them stolen. Serial numbers on these firearms are usually obliterated. As a straw purchaser is not likely to be able to acquire more than one gun in this way, mafiosi seem to rely on more structured sources of supply to maintain their arsenals.

Mafiosi have also made use of explosives, as when the Cosa Nostra employed TNT during the terror strategy between 1992 and 1993. Investigators recently accused a fisherman from the Palermo area of providing explosives recovered from sunken mines, torpedoes, unexploded ordnance, and aerial bombs left over from World War II (Selvatici, 2012).

Each organized crime family usually relies on its own firearm arsenal, which represents the collective property of the group. Results from several investigations show that each criminal group, particularly in the Cosa Nostra, has members who, because of their expertise and contacts, are in charge of procuring firearms, which are stored and distributed to other members based on the circumstances or specific requests (Tribunale per i Minorenni di Caltanissetta, 2003, p. 27). In some cases, these arsenals consist of very old firearms that are stored, regularly oiled,

and maintained by members expressly devoted to these tasks. In others, they expand continuously as the group uses family funds to buy new or second-hand ‘pieces’, depending on their availability.²⁸

There are some exceptions to these arrangements. The Brancaccio family, the Palermo-based group charged with most of the killings in the area during the 1990s, relied on firearms stored and provided by another Cosa Nostra family, which managed one of the largest arsenals ever discovered in Sicily, the Misilmeri arsenal (Corte di Assise di Palermo, 2001, pp. 12–21). In 1992, Leonardo Messina, one of the first Cosa Nostra turncoat informants, also explained that the Campofranco family based near Caltanissetta was the main firearms supplier for other groups operating in that area (Tribunale di Caltanissetta, 2012, p. 183). As another defector puts it: ‘providing firearms [to other groups] is considered a sort of customer service’ (Tribunale di Caltanissetta, 2004, p. 125).

Such family-wide ownership may have developed in an effort to withstand any scarcity of firearms at the local level as well as to meet internal demand for specific types of weapons. This approach may also facilitate safe storage, away from the area where both the mafia group and law enforcement units usually operate. In these cases, members usually return firearms to the family in charge of storing them after their use (Corte di Assise di Caltanissetta, 2000, p. 191).

If a group decides to commit a homicide outside its own territory, it must abide by certain guidelines. Cosa Nostra rules, which some other organized crime groups also follow, require that the group request authorization from the local family and use firearms borrowed from that family (Tribunale di Caltanissetta, 2004, p. 125). Similarly, when professional killers are hired, their employers must provide the firearms needed for the crime.

Although firearms are usually considered group property, research suggests that individual members may also own personal guns. Firearms are sometimes given as a gift to affiliates as a sign of friendship or trust or just to mark special occasions. One Camorra turncoat, employed as a hit man by the Gionta clan,²⁹ described how the clan boss gave him a pistol as a gift immediately after his formal affiliation. Afterwards, he was invited to choose any guns he liked from a big bag; he recounted selecting ‘the flashiest guns’ (Tribunale di Torre Annunziata, 2009, p. 69).

Camorra clans display a high level of firearms exchange among members. Guns often circulate from one clan to another after being adequately modified to avoid traceability. Thus there is a large availability of old firearms for use in the management of various crimes.³⁰

Another important factor in the use of firearms is a mafioso’s ability to shoot. The ‘Ndrangheta has always considered marksmanship an important skill and a testing ground for new members.³¹ One of the cruellest killers in the Corleonesi family, called ‘Scarpuzzedda’, was a Cosa Nostra legend because of his excellent firearm skills. As one prosecutor put it, from Bernardo Provenzano on down, ‘the ability to shoot is among the top qualities of a man of honour’.³²

Arsenal sizes and distribution

Assessing the size and quality of current organized crime arsenals is not an easy task; indeed, available information is highly fragmented because there is no systematic collection of data. Most of the details have come to light as a result of law enforcement seizures, which often take place in response to information provided by mafia turncoats. Indeed, police tend to test the reliability of *pentiti* by asking them to locate hidden arsenals. Given the strict territorial organization of major mafia groups, each one usually relies on its own arsenal. Thus, information provided to the police will help to dismantle just that single arsenal. A turncoat is highly unlikely to have any details on other arsenals, given that each family jealously guards such information. That said, several arsenals were found as a result of ad hoc investigations in the area of Caltanissetta, Sicily, in 2011–12.³³

The ability to shoot is among the top qualities of a man of honour.

Since the number of arsenals discovered in a certain area is not necessarily an indicator of the availability of firearms to a certain group, data derived from seizures cannot simply be generalized to produce broader findings. Nevertheless, interviews suggest that, in the case of both the Camorra and the 'Ndrangheta, the areas where these criminal organizations traditionally operate—Campania and Calabria—are 'flooded' with large numbers of weapons.³⁴

In contrast, Cosa Nostra arsenals in Sicily seem to be mainly composed of 'old' firearms that have been in storage for many years. Given the sophisticated technology of pistols and assault rifles produced up to 50 years ago, some organized crime groups may not perceive a need to update their stock regularly in order to remain competitive (UNODC, 2010, p. 129). Nevertheless, the Sicilian mafia is currently 'starved' for weapons and trying to buy whatever the illicit market may offer.³⁵

As mentioned earlier, a mafia family that owns its own arsenal usually stores its own firearms. An important exception emerged in 2001 with the seizure of one of the largest Cosa Nostra arsenals. Some of the weapons in the so-called Balistreri arsenal, run by a group associated with the Misilmeri mafia family, belonged to another group—the Brancaccio family, based in Palermo—for whom the local clan acted as trusted manager (Corte di Assise di Palermo, 2001, pp. 163, 180–81).³⁶

In both Sicily and Calabria, most arsenals are discovered in rural areas, close to old houses, inside farm stalls, behind double walls, in bunkers, or in underground caches or wooden boxes.³⁷ The firearms may be individually wrapped in cellophane to avoid the effects of humidity, or they may be placed in sacks and then wrapped in large plastic bags. Another creative form of storing firearms was recently discovered in Naples, where seven pistols and ammunition had been hidden behind the altar in a church whose entrance was monitored through a video surveillance system (Quotidiano.Net, 2012).

Generally, two people are in charge of arsenals, a guardian and a trustee; if one of them is arrested, the other one can immediately move the weapons elsewhere.³⁸ Results from several investigations show that these custodians occasionally dig up, check, and clean the weapons (Corte di Assise di Palermo, 2001, p. 181). In Calabria, especially along the Tyrrhenian coast, authorities have discovered



Weapons confiscated by police from members of the Camorra, Scampia, Naples, December 2004. © Silvia Morara/Corbis

several arsenals guarded mostly by farmers.³⁹ As stated by a prosecutor interviewed, the Camorra usually appoints people with no links to the criminal group as firearm keepers. The group tends to select individuals with no criminal record or known offences, so that they do not attract attention. In exchange, the guardians receive a monthly payment from the organization.⁴⁰

Weapon types and procurement patterns

The image of a mafioso with a *lupara*—a homemade sawn-off shotgun—has become a ubiquitous symbol of Italian organized crime in the public imagination. Traditionally used in wolf hunting—the word ‘lupara’ means ‘for a wolf’—this weapon has a shortened barrel, allowing easier concealment, and the lack of a choke allows for a wider spread of shot when the weapon is fired. Especially in the past, mafiosi preferred to use this unsophisticated hunting weapon as it was not likely to attract police attention and because its ammunition, once fired, could not be easily identified. Its use was particularly widespread in the Sicilian countryside, such as the areas surrounding the cities of Agrigento, Caltanissetta, and Trapani.⁴¹ Nevertheless, during the past few decades, the use of the *lupara* has continually

declined, especially in Sicily and Calabria, where it was most popular in the past.⁴²

Since the 1970s and early 1980s, the level of sophistication in mafia weaponry has increased, as has the variety of firearms available in mafia arsenals. Thanks to greater financial resources, the Cosa Nostra, for example, started using short-barrel guns, such as .38-calibre and .357 Magnum handguns. Assault rifles, such as AK-pattern rifles, and rocket and grenade launchers have been introduced in more difficult assaults (Sagramoso, 2001, p. 22). One prosecutor argued that the Cosa Nostra first began to avail itself of AK-pattern assault rifles in the early 1980s, testing them against bullet-proof jewellery store windows to gauge their power; the group later used the weapons in homicides, such as the ‘Palermo ring road massacre’, which claimed five lives in June 1982, and the homicide of Gen. Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa, his wife, and a police agent a few months later.⁴³

During the mid-1990s, the increased availability of cheap, yet powerful, weapons that mostly originated in Belgium and the



Balkans—including AK-pattern rifles, machine guns, pistols, hand grenades, and anti-tank rocket launchers—created a growing demand among Italian criminal organizations for new kinds of equipment. During this period, the bosses of the Cosa Nostra's dominant Corleonese family and other clans based in Catania significantly increased their arsenals (Sagramoso, 2001, pp. 22–23).

Some of the newly acquired firearms were found by Italian police in 1996, when, in just a few months, large numbers of weapons were discovered in San Giuseppe Jato, a village 40 km from Palermo, and Mala Tacca, a rural area near the highway between Palermo and the local airport (Lodato, 1996, p. 8). At that time, the San Giuseppe Jato arsenal was the largest that had ever been discovered by law enforcement in Italy. Police seized two underground bunkers that contained, among other weapons, 10 missiles, 10 bazookas, 50 AK-pattern rifles, 35 pistols, 7 sub-machine guns, 10 anti-tank bombs, 400 kg of explosives, and some bulletproof jackets; most of these weapons originated in Eastern Europe, the former Yugoslavia, Iran, and Afghanistan (Viviano, 1996, p. 20).

These seizures occurred during the relatively calm period following the 1992–93 'killing season', when the Cosa Nostra decided to adopt a lower profile. The fact that the seized weapons were mostly new and in perfect working order suggests that the Sicilian syndicate had maintained its 'military' potential despite its attempt to avoid escalations of violence. As demonstrated through a recent flurry of homicides, this behaviour has remained intact, indicating that violence continues to be a viable option for these groups, as long as its use is planned according to the circumstances and in line with specific rules.

Criminal organizations face hardly any problems in securing their own weapons sources.

Some organized crime groups have access to large stockpiles of sophisticated weaponry, including military firearms and—as several *pentiti* have argued with reference to the Sicilian Cosa Nostra—even bazookas. They generally prefer to use 7.65 mm machine guns and revolvers,⁴⁴ as well as 9 × 21 mm pistols—the model used by Italian police. AK-pattern assault rifles are also widely used, since they seldom misfire, cost less than their market equivalent (the M16), and are best known by members.⁴⁵ Yet, on the whole, the choice of weapon is driven by pragmatism and weapons are usually destroyed after the commission of a crime.⁴⁶ Still, some mafiosi may select specific types of firearm for comfort and reliability. During shortages, they may even use surviving wartime firearms or modified toy guns.

To date, law enforcement has not been able to shed much light on mafia firearm procurement practices. It is not clear whether each organization relies on one single supply source or many. In the past, the Camorra was considered the most successful in opening and securing reliable procurement channels, thanks to strong links with Eastern European criminal organizations.⁴⁷ Although no steady supply channels have emerged so far, most *pentiti* confirm that criminal organizations face hardly any problems in securing their own weapons sources.⁴⁸

In terms of firearm procurement, four main patterns can be identified:

- robberies from firearm shops;
- theft of firearms from military or police forces;
- theft of firearms from private citizens; and
- exchange of illegal goods (such as drugs) for firearms.⁴⁹

As with terrorist groups during the 1970s, thefts from firearm shops have always been one of the most popular mafia procurement patterns. However, some firearm shopkeepers have colluded with certain mafia clans. One interviewee remarked that in Sicily there have always been 'Cosa Nostra armouries' that provided firearms to both hunters and mafiosi.⁵⁰ In addition, the use of firearms stolen from police officers allowed some Camorra groups in particular

to expand and diversify their arsenals, as evidenced during the 1990s, when large numbers of firearms stolen from Naples police headquarters ended up in the hands of the Casalesi clans.⁵¹

In some cases, such procurement was facilitated by individuals who were nominally on the right side of the law. In fact, a major international firearms trafficking operation discovered in 2006 was actually run by a carabinieri marshal who had supplied new arms—especially AK-pattern rifles—to several Casalesi clans (Tribunale di Napoli, 2010, p. 44). In addition, almost 70 per cent of the ‘thefts’ of legally owned civilian-held firearms in Campania had been faked; the guns were not stolen but voluntarily given to mafiosi. This type of procurement represents an important channel used by organized crime to secure ‘clean’ weapons for homicides and other crimes.⁵²

Mafiosi also procure weapons through drug-trafficking and other channels used by networks and suppliers based in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In this context, arms are often paid for with drugs—especially cocaine, whose trafficking and wholesale distribution in Europe are largely supervised by the Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta—or cash, given the enormous cash flows provided by drug trafficking.⁵³ Criminal gangs operating in Rome—some of which were involved in homicides that have sparked widespread social outrage—use the same procurement approach. They invest part of the large flow of drug money in the purchase of firearms. For members of these gangs, the availability and use of large numbers of weapons secures them high criminal status in the greater underworld system.⁵⁴

Gun trafficking

Almost 30 years ago, in a speech on firearms at a conference in Brescia,⁵⁵ the Sicilian judge Giovanni Falcone warned his audience about the crucial role of the illegal firearms trade in facilitating connections between apparently distinct sectors of criminal activity—such as drug trafficking. He also called attention to emerging partnerships between criminal organizations and legitimate partners operating in different countries (Falcone, 1984). He referred to a number of investigations that had provided some evidence on how Italian organized crime groups exchanged firearms for other illicit commodities—at that time mostly heroin from the Middle East—emphasizing the significant international financial flows created by these activities. He also mentioned the strong, though neglected, links between mafiosi and white-collar criminals, who are mostly specialized in money-laundering activities, in terms of both firearms and drugs, calling them the most worrying trend and a true danger for democratic institutions. Years later, criminologist Vincenzo Ruggiero described these links as the ‘dirty economy’, an area characterized by ‘the exchange of services and mutual entrepreneurial promotion between conventional organized crime and official actors’ (Ruggiero, 1997, p. 35).⁵⁶

Since then, in Italy, no comprehensive investigation of the illegal firearms trade has successfully shed light in a systematic way on the characteristics of this market, its actors, routes, or trafficking methods, even though large numbers of weapons have been readily available to major mafia groups since the late 1970s (Sagramoso, 2001, p. 22).⁵⁷

Based on information released in official reports and the few available studies, as well as data provided by interviewees, Italian criminal organizations appear to be active as traffickers, buyers, and intermediaries in the international illegal firearms trade. Since the end of the conflicts of the 1990s, large illegal stockpiles have remained beyond the control of authorities, leaving the Western Balkans, as well as the Russian Federation and Eastern European countries, as key sources of firearms trafficked into the European Union (Europol, 2011, p. 38). The geographical proximity of Italy to the former Yugoslavia and Albania has allowed domestic criminal groups to buy weapons at relatively low prices (Sagramoso, 2001, p. 21). Of the networks based in Italy, Europol finds that the ‘Ndrangheta and the Albanian criminal groups are most involved in the illegal arms trade (Europol, 2011, p. 38).⁵⁸

Western Balkans, the Russian Federation, and Eastern Europe are key sources of firearms trafficked into the EU.

During the Balkan conflicts of the mid-1990s in particular, the Apulian SCU also established close links with new partners operating on the other side of the Adriatic Sea (Jamieson and Silj, 1998, p. 22; DNA, 2008, p. 803).⁵⁹ According to the Anti-mafia Investigative Directorate, the number of seizures of ammunition and explosives in Apulia in 1998 was 50 per cent above the national average (Sagramoso, 2001, p. 25). Today, most weapons available to the SCU still come from Albania and the former Yugoslavia; these include Tokarev pistols, AK-pattern rifles, and Chinese grenades trafficked through Albania.⁶⁰

During the 1990s, mafiosi smuggling routes that had traditionally been used for cigarettes and drugs were easily converted to channel the growing flow of illegal immigrants from Albania. In a report released in 2003, the Anti-mafia Parliamentary Committee stresses that, during the 1990s, firearms and ammunition, along with immigrants, also travelled in small, fast boats along the same routes. The strong partnership established between mafia groups and foreign criminal organizations facilitated a specific type of service exchange; Italian organizations requested drugs and firearms in order to allow Balkan organized crime groups to manage the business of irregular immigration by sea along the Italian coast (CPIFCOMS, 2003, p. 304). In this way, the Committee concludes, Italy became the main hub in the international illicit firearms trade managed by Albanian and Montenegrin criminals along routes previously used by Apulian tobacco smugglers (p. 275).

From the Balkans, smuggled weapons still cross the Adriatic by boat or travel by land through northern Italy. They are often concealed in legitimate loads, carried in trucks or jeeps, or transported in small quantities in private cars, often temporarily hidden in sheds near highways before they reach their final destination (Sagramoso, 2001, p. 23; Europol, 2011, p. 38). Although no systematic information is currently available on illicit arms flows from the Balkans to or through Italy, the country is considered a major transit point for smuggled weapons headed to northern and eastern Europe (Sagramoso, 2001, p. 21).

Each mafia clan
relies on its own
fire group.

Gruppi di fuoco (fire groups)

Italian organized crime groups assign the use of violence inside and outside the group to members expressly chosen for that purpose. As suggested by their Italian designation, *gruppi di fuoco* (fire groups), these individuals form units in charge of carrying out a wide array of violent acts, ranging from physical assaults to killings, although homicides are by far the most frequent.

Each clan typically relies on its own fire group. In cases such as the Secondigliano Alliance, based in the area of Naples and composed of a federation of several Camorra groups, each clan may provide its own killers for the Alliance's fire group.⁶¹ In other cases, professional hit men are lent out to other clans for assignments. This strategy helps ensure a higher level of anonymity and wider freedom of movement; moreover, it reduces the chances that law enforcement agencies will be able to identify the authors of crime (Tribunale di Torre Annunziata, 2009, p. 159).

Although marksmanship is among the most appreciated skills in *gruppi di fuoco*, larger fire groups tend to comprise members who perform various tasks besides shooting. Especially in the case of the Cosa Nostra, investigations have shown that these members provide services such as stealing motorbikes for use in attacks, riding them during attacks, and destroying (usually burning) them immediately after a homicide in order to erase all possible traces left by the killers. These groups may also contain as many as six or seven people who—as asserted during an interview—operate as ‘commandos’, sometimes without even knowing the target they are meant to hit.⁶² Membership in a fire group can also serve to test one's personal ability or to create a strong bond among clan members.⁶³

Key homicides by fire groups, such as the one in 2007 in Palermo, tend to be precisely planned. Selected members follow the victims to be able to predict their movements and patterns, such as when they leave work or when they usually go to their favourite bar, and others prepare the overall strategy and provide support during and immediately after the act.⁶⁴

Particularly in the past, the Camorra's more structured clans tended to adopt strict selection criteria regarding the composition of fire groups. As has been reported about the Cosa Nostra, membership in a fire group has often allowed mafiosi to advance in the group's internal hierarchy; indeed, it functions as one of the main channels of upward mobility inside criminal organizations. Both Antonio Iovine and Michele Zagaria—two powerful bosses in

Box 4.4 Becoming a mafia soldier: the case of minors

In the bestseller *Gomorra*, Roberto Saviano tells of his encounter—probably fictitious but quite plausible—with Pikachu, a 14-year-old boy from Secondigliano, a socially deprived area in the northern part of Naples and one of the main battlefields in the so-called Scampia *faida* that exploded among Camorra clans in 2004. Pikachu—a nickname taken from a Japanese cartoon—guides Saviano through the streets of Secondigliano, where they meet Tonino Kit Kat, a boy who is already affiliated with the so-called *System* (the name given by Camorra members to their criminal organization).

Although reluctant to answer his questions, Tonino shows the novelist the big bruises on his chest. Those large, livid spots on his adolescent body were the signs left by gunshots to his flak jacket during his training in the use of firearms. As Saviano puts it:

in order to train them not to fear firearms, [Camorra members] ask them to wear flak jackets and then they shoot at them [. . .]. Kit Kat had been trained, with others, to receive shots, a training for death, indeed, *almost* death (Saviano, 2006, pp. 118-19).

The Italian Interior Ministry reports that from 1990 to 2002, 147 minors were charged with membership in a mafia-type organization in Apulia and Campania while an additional 167 were charged in Sicily and Calabria (Ministero della Giustizia, 2004, pp. 19-20). The most represented age group was that of 16-17-year-olds; more than 79 per cent of minors in Apulia and Campania had a previous criminal record and around 40 per cent had family members already charged with the same crime (pp. 24-26).

Children who have relatives involved in mafia businesses risk greater exposure to violence and may be more likely to participate in criminal activities than their peers. While social deprivation may lead some youths to join mafia groups, others pursue membership to gain a sense of belonging to what they perceive as a mysterious and powerful world. The mythical self-representation the mafia tends to disseminate captivates these boys.⁶⁵ One Sicilian 'baby hit man' explained why there were so many adolescent members in his clan: 'No problem at all, because . . . I don't know, probably because Sicily is like that, but there is this prestige thing' (Tribunale per i minorenni di Caltanissetta, 2003, p. 26).

Mafia-type organizations usually choose their members based on their abilities and capacities, rather than simple blood ties, which are important but not crucial. Minors may be particularly sought-after since they attract less attention and can be used as killers without alarming the victim. As one former member of the Sicilian Stidda group told the judge who interviewed him, 'a mafioso does not care about a 13- or 14-year-old boy. He does not expect him to put a gun to his head and fire as soon as his back is turned' (Tribunale per i minorenni di Caltanissetta, 2003, p. 26).⁶⁶ The same goes for law enforcement agencies, since minors rarely attract their attention. Furthermore, adolescents are 'cheap merchandise'; they are paid less than adults, work long hours, are always available on the streets, and can be easily replaced (Dino, 2012, p. 160; Saviano, 2006, p. 119).

The Camorra has always used adolescents for different tasks, not necessarily as killers, but often as sentries at entrances to areas of the city where retail drug markets flourish or as lookouts during the commission of robberies and other crimes.⁶⁷ Currently, the so-called Secondigliano System relies largely on the availability of adolescents; as formal mafia members, these youths have been entrusted with important roles, including in fire groups that are responsible for recent homicides (Cantone, 2012, p. 41). In the past, these boys would have had to go through a sort of apprenticeship, which would gradually have allowed them to ascend the mafia social ladder. Nowadays, they can play leading roles by the time they turn 20. This trend is also in evidence in more structured, traditional mafia-type organizations, such as the Cosa Nostra, where one of Palermo's emerging bosses is thought to be in his twenties.⁶⁸

the Casalesi cartel arrested between 2010 and 2011—began their careers as hit men in a fire group (Cantone, 2012, p. 28). In the case of the Camorra, members used to be able to advance gradually thanks to individual abilities and merits, yet nowadays criminal careers appear to be shorter than in the past. This shift could be related to the high level of violence affecting the Campanian criminal organization since the late 1990s and the related fragmentation and conflicts within the group (see Box 4.4).

The approach adopted by Camorra fire groups during some of the cruellest massacres in the past decade is similar to heavy combat strategy. During the 30-second raid in Castelvoturno in September 2008, when six African immigrants were killed, the use of firearms was so utterly disproportionate—considering that none of the victims were able to defend themselves—that at least 125 bullets were found on the ground, fired from two AK-pattern assault rifles, one 9 mm sub-machine gun, and four semi-automatic pistols (della Valle, 2009). According to investigators, this strategy—which led prosecutors to charge the group with the aggravating circumstance of terrorism—may also be linked to widespread cocaine use among Camorra members. Such drug abuse has also led to a marked decline in the professionalism of fire groups, leaving the Camorra reliant on at most three or four reliable killers in all of Campania.⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

In a first step towards bridging the information gap on the use of firearms by organized crime groups in Italy, this chapter presents original research and analyses relevant information available from official, academic, and media sources. It finds that, to maintain their power and strategic resources, mafia-type organizations under review prioritize the availability of large arsenals and sophisticated weaponry as well as the ability to rely on members who are specialized in the use of firearms—such as the fire groups.

Since 2007, most criminal organizations—especially the Cosa Nostra and the SCU—appear to have entered a submersion phase, confirmed by a 43 per cent decrease in the number of homicides through 2010 (see Table 4.1). This submersion is most probably strategic, aimed at avoiding law enforcement attention as the groups consolidate their hold on legal markets. They have similarly tended to minimize the use of firearms in recent years. But emerging trends, such as the case of the latest Camorra *faida* or the return of mafia homicides in Palermo, indicate that the use of armed violence remains an available option.

While important strides have been made in understanding patterns of firearm acquisition, possession, and storage, as well as mafia groups' deployment of firearm violence, quantitative data remains weak and further research on firearm-related crimes in Italy is clearly needed. As of this writing, researchers had not yet been granted access to a considerable pool of existing official data, including on firearms seizures and the type of crimes committed with firearms by mafia clans. Once this important information becomes public, it will help present a much more focused picture of the actual dimensions and characteristics of mafia-related violence—and of ways to contain and reduce it. ■

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DDA	Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia (District Anti-mafia Directorate)
DNA	Direzione Nazionale Antimafia (National Anti-mafia Directorate)
ISTAT	Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (National Institute of Statistics)
SCU	Sacra Corona Unita

ENDNOTES

- 1 Issued in 1982, Law No. 646, also known as the Rognoni–La Torre Law, introduced Article 416bis into the Italian penal code, criminalizing membership in mafia-type associations. It also informed the definition of the term ‘organized crime group’ adopted in the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Italy, 1982; UNODC, 2004).
- 2 Although the terms ‘mafia’ and ‘organized crime’ are often used as synonyms, they are analytically distinct; in the Italian context, they are usually employed to distinguish between traditional, mostly autochthonous criminal groups that are often characterized by a hierarchical structure—referred to as mafia-type associations—and more recent, loosely organized, and sometimes exogenous criminal organizations—which are generally defined as organized crime groups.
- 3 The expression ‘traditional mafia-type organizations’ was coined in 1994 by the Anti-mafia Parliamentary Committee in reference to the Cosa Nostra, the ‘Ndrangheta, the Camorra, and the Sacra Corona Unita (CPIFCOMS, 1994, p. 9).
- 4 Most foreign criminal organizations active in Italy would fall outside this definition because of the lack of social control outside the boundaries of their ethnic communities or the inability to take root locally.
- 5 Although most Cosa Nostra affiliates involved in these crimes were sentenced—and the criminal responsibility of these massacres clearly identified—there is still a vacuum in the so-called ‘hidden agents’ of these acts; that is, the secret architects behind that strategy. As several investigations have already shown, in the early 1990s the Cosa Nostra was actively looking to establish close partnerships with politicians and members of various agencies who could have provided benefits if that ‘massacre strategy’ stopped. This sensitive yet crucial topic—referred to as the *trattativa* (negotiation) between the mafia and the state—was the object of great debate in Italy in 2012.
- 6 The word ‘Ndrangheta resembles the Greek term *andragatia*, which refers to virile virtues, courage, and rectitude (CPIFCOMS, 2008, p. 15).
- 7 According to the chief prosecutor of the Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia (Anti-mafia District Directorate, or DDA) of Naples, in 2009 almost 30 per cent of Neapolitan politicians and local representatives were in collusion with the Camorra (Barbagallo, 2010, pp. 239–40).
- 8 Furthermore, the promotion of members to various ranks within the internal hierarchy usually takes place through rituals based on traditional codes and statutes from old secret criminal associations rooted in southern Italy (Massari, 1998).
- 9 As clearly stated in several reports issued by the Anti-mafia Parliamentary Committee since the mid-1990s, and as recently confirmed by major investigations—such as those code-named ‘Infinito’ and ‘Crimine’, which concluded in 2010 and 2011, respectively, shedding light on ‘Ndrangheta activity in Lombardy—traditional mafia-type organizations have also successfully managed to impose their control in various north-central Italian regions (Sciarrone, 2009; Varese, 2011; CPIFCOMS, 2010b).
- 10 As Alessandra Dino notes, ‘the massacre strategy of the early 1990s [...] was planned by counting on the echo effect that the media would produce and on the impact that this wave of homicides and attacks would have on the population’ (Dino, 2002, p. 163).
- 11 Neither the Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (Anti-mafia Investigative Directorate) nor the Direzione Centrale della Polizia Criminale (Central Directory of the Criminal Police)—institutional agencies in charge of analysing mafia crime trends—currently collects systematic data on the use of firearms by organized crime groups. Author phone interview with an officer of the Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Rome, 11 September 2012.
- 12 These files are part of the ‘Infinito’ investigation, carried out between 2006 and 2010 by the DDA of Milan in cooperation with the DDA of Reggio Calabria (Tribunale Ordinario di Milano, 2010, p. 61).
- 13 The word *faida* usually refers to conflicts that affect two mafia clans operating within a limited area. These conflicts tend to revolve around issues of honour and personal revenge. They typically fluctuate in intensity, often going through latent phases only to suddenly explode again (Brancaccio, 2009, pp. 74–75).
- 14 That same year, the mafia homicide rate was 0.3 in Campania, 0.4 in Apulia, and 0.2 in Sicily (ISTAT, 2012).
- 15 The ‘Ndrangheta currently relies on an estimated 10,000–15,000 affiliates and includes approximately 170 member clans. Yet, as stated by the former chief prosecutor for the DDA in Reggio Calabria, these figures may be significant underestimates. He added that, in a small village such as Rosarno, one of the ‘Ndrangheta strongholds in Calabria, the number of affiliates is around 250, out of a total population of 15,000 inhabitants. If relatives, friends, and acquaintances are factored in, that number can swell to 1,500–2,000 related adults. Not even in Palermo does the Cosa Nostra rely on such a large proportion of affiliates (CPIFCOMS, 2010b, p. 5).
- 16 Author interview with an adjunct prosecutor, DDA, Reggio Calabria, 24 August 2012.
- 17 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 9 July 2012. Roberto Saviano describes this *faida* as the cruellest in southern Italy in the past ten years (Saviano, 2006, p. 91). According to the latest DNA report, in December 2011 this *faida* had not yet concluded (DNA, 2011, p. 80).
- 18 As one member of the Cosa Nostra from the Agrigento area in Sicily replied to questions posed by the judge interrogating him: ‘I consider myself not guilty of the crime of both membership in a criminal association and a mafia-type association, since I have never committed a crime, nor have I joined others for this purpose. But I should say that I was born and will die mafioso, if mafia means, as I understand it, doing good to others, providing for those in need, finding a job for the unemployed [...]. I think that those who hurt others and, in particular, those in the drug trafficking business are not mafiosi, but just ordinary delinquents. They are damaging the younger generations. When I come into contact

with somebody who traffics drugs, I move away from him because I feel disgusted' (Paoli, 2000, p. 126). This member was actually far from being this altruistic; yet the powerful role of traditional cultural codes in backing his identity as a mafioso and legitimizing his power must be recognized (p. 126).

- 19 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 9 July 2012.
- 20 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 9 July 2012.
- 21 Author interview with the chief prosecutor, DDA, Lecce, 5 July 2012.
- 22 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 23 Author interview with an adjunct prosecutor, DDA, Reggio Calabria, 24 August 2012.
- 24 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 25 The last major homicide that affected internal Cosa Nostra power strategies occurred in June 2007 (DNA, 2011, p. 52).
- 26 The perpetrators of such murders can display inconceivable callousness. One former Cosa Nostra member confessed that, after having strangled a thief and placed his body in acid, he and his companion became hungry and decided to eat some sandwiches. Referring to his companion, Gaspare Spatuzza, he explained: 'He ate the sandwich with one hand, while he stirred the tibia and thighbones of the man he was dissolving in acid with the other' (Bolzoni, 2009).
- 27 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 28 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 29 This clan traditionally operates in the area of Torre Annunziata on the Gulf of Naples.
- 30 Author interview with a judge, Ufficio del Massimario della Suprema Corte di Cassazione, Naples, 27 June 2012.
- 31 Author interview with the chief of the Police Department's Flying Squad, Rome, 10 July 2012.
- 32 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 33 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 34 Author interviews with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 9 July 2012, and an adjunct prosecutor, DDA, Reggio Calabria, 24 August 2012.
- 35 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 36 The fire group (a group expressly formed for implementing violent acts) belonging to the Brancaccio family played a crucial role in the 1992 massacres, which led to the death of judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, and others (CPIFCOMS, 2012, p. 7). The arsenal contained explosives that were very similar to the ones used in the 1992 massacres, as well as rocket and missile launchers (Corte di Assise di Palermo, 2001, p. 13). Author interview with an adjunct prosecutor, DDA, Reggio Calabria, 24 August 2012.
- 37 Author interview with the chief of the Police Department's Flying Squad, Rome, 10 July 2012.
- 38 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 39 Author interview with an adjunct prosecutor, DDA, Reggio Calabria, 24 August 2012.
- 40 Author interview with a judge, Ufficio del Massimario della Suprema Corte di Cassazione, Naples, 27 June 2012.
- 41 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 42 In March 2012 a homicide with a lupara in the area of Reggio Calabria was filmed by an anonymous video-maker who sent a flash drive containing the video to the Carabinieri (*Il Quotidiano della Calabria*, 2012).
- 43 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 44 Author interviews with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012; with the chief of Police Department's Flying Squad, Rome, 10 July 2012; and a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 9 July 2012.
- 45 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 46 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 47 Author interview with a judge, Ufficio del Massimario della Suprema Corte di Cassazione, Naples, 27 June 2012.
- 48 Author interview with a judge, Ufficio del Massimario della Suprema Corte di Cassazione, Naples, 27 June 2012.
- 49 Author interview with a judge, Ufficio del Massimario della Suprema Corte di Cassazione, Naples, 27 June 2012.
- 50 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 51 Author interview with a judge, Ufficio del Massimario della Suprema Corte di Cassazione, Naples, 27 June 2012.
- 52 Author interview with a judge, Ufficio del Massimario della Suprema Corte di Cassazione, Naples, 27 June 2012. Such procurement also happens elsewhere. In Rome, for example, some of the firearms used for the commission of several homicides in 2011 and 2012, though mostly related to conflicts between criminal gangs, had been stolen from the apartments of private citizens. Author interview with the chief of Police Department's Flying Squad, Rome, 10 July 2012.
- 53 Author interview with a judge, Ufficio del Massimario della Suprema Corte di Cassazione, Naples, 27 June 2012.
- 54 Author interview with the chief of Police Department's Flying Squad, Rome, 10 July 2012.
- 55 The area of Brescia, in the northern part of the country, is currently home to almost 150 firms that are involved in firearm manufacturing, such as Beretta. These account for almost 90 per cent of national production (Eurispes, 2008a, p. 49).

- 56 International arms traffickers often rely on corrupt officials and professionals, including for fraudulent paperwork and transportation services (UNODC, 2010, p. 144).
- 57 Most of the prosecutors interviewed for this study stressed this point. It should also be mentioned that during the early 1980s Judge Carlo Palermo attempted to carry out a major investigation on drugs and arms trafficking between Turkey and Italy, via Austria and Yugoslavia; most of those accused were acquitted (Palermo, 1988; Cecchetti, 1988).
- 58 According to the research institute Eurispes, profits made by the 'Ndrangheta from illegal arms trafficking in 2007 amounted to EUR 2,938 million (USD 3,900 million). Although this data is quoted in several reports, no information is available on the methodology or sources used to produce this figure (Eurispes, 2008b, p. 3). The crucial role played by the 'Ndrangheta in supplying sophisticated weapons to other organized crime groups has been confirmed by Cosa Nostra turncoat Gaspare Spatuzza, who provided information on a stockpile of weapons, including a surface-to-air missile, bought by his clan in order to kill anti-mafia judge Giancarlo Caselli, who, for security reasons, was often transported by helicopter while he was chief prosecutor for the DDA in Palermo (Viviano and Ziniti, 2009).
- 59 A note that was drafted by a boss of the SCU in March 1991, given to his wife during a colloquium in prison, and seized by the police contained a shopping list with precise indications on the weapons sought by the organization. These included three FAMAS assault rifles, two M16 grenade launchers, three AK-47s, three Ingram MAC-10 machine pistols, Beretta and Wildey semi-automatic pistols, and one ATIS shotgun, among others. Document provided to the author by the chief prosecutor of the DDA, Lecce, 5 July 2012.
- 60 Author interview with the chief prosecutor, DDA, Lecce, 5 July 2012.
- 61 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 9 July 2012.
- 62 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 63 Author interview with the chief of Police Department's Flying Squad, Rome, 10 July 2012.
- 64 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 65 This ambivalent mix of truth and mystery allows mafias to secure consensus from certain sectors of the population and to structure their power (Siebert, 2010). It allows them to mask and dissimulate the actual criminal nature of their organizations, with the result that some people perceive the mafia as a sort of benefactor. Demonstrations of indebtedness and allegiance to the mafia include public tributes, such as when the Sicilian football team dedicated victories to mafia bosses, or when the picture of a recently imprisoned boss was displayed close to the symbol of the patronal festival in a village near Naples (similar cases were recorded in Calabria), or when elaborate fireworks criss-cross the Neapolitan sky to celebrate the release of Camorra or SCU bosses.
- 66 *Stidda* ('star' or 'constellation' in Sicilian) is the name of a mafia-type organization that emerged in the early 1980s in the southern part of Sicily. In the late 1980s, the city of Gela became a recruitment centre for adolescents who would be employed as killers or in extortion rackets (Massari, 2004).
- 67 Author interview with a judge, Ufficio del Massimario della Suprema Corte di Cassazione, Naples, 27 June 2012.
- 68 Author interview with a deputy national anti-mafia prosecutor, Rome, 28 June 2012.
- 69 Author interview with a judge, Ufficio del Massimario della Suprema Corte di Cassazione, Naples, 27 June 2012.

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