

POL 438/2321

## Living in the Illicit Global Economy

University of Toronto  
Political Science

R 1-3pm EST  
Office hours: R 4-5pm SS3052  
Or by appointment



A woman with a child harvesting opium sap from a poppy field in Mexico. Photo credit: Rodrigo Cruz for the NYT

INSTRUCTOR: Prof. María Méndez, [maria.mendez@utoronto.ca](mailto:maria.mendez@utoronto.ca)

### Course Overview

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For as long as the global economy has existed, it has had a clandestine “underside.” Today, illicit trade is estimated to represent as much as 20% of total economic activity in some countries. Yet for most of us, our knowledge of the global economy is limited to legally recognized profits and expenses. This course explores the illicit side of the global economy, particularly as it is experienced by those living in the social peripheries. Drawing on political, historical, and ethnographic accounts of illicit economies from across the globe we will examine how distinctions between legal/illegal and licit/illicit activities are drawn, as well as the forms of life and death that emerge at the interface of the state, legal economies, and illicit activities. Tacking back and forth between theoretical texts and empirical research, students will reflect on prevalent ethical judgements about illicit activities, and on how their everyday lives might be entangled with them.

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## Course Readings

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*Required Readings:* There will be three required books to buy for this course. These titles are available online and will also be on reserve at the library either in print or digital form. All other readings will be posted on the course website.

### Required texts:

- Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century*
- Jon Horne Carter, *Gothic Sovereignty: Street Gangs and Statecraft in Honduras*
- Phillipe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*

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## Grading and due dates

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- Attendance and participation: 10%
- Seminar presentation & discussion: 25% *questions due by 11:59pm EST, day before session*
- Weekly reflections: 15% *due by 11:59pm EST, day before session*
- Topic and annotated bibliography: 3% *due February 8, 11:59pm EST*
- Research proposal: 5% *due February 29, 11:59pm EST*
- Peer review feedback: 2% *due March 7, 11:59pm EST*
- Final paper: 40% *due April 4, 11:59pm EST*

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## Assessment

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*Note:* Expectations and guidelines on how to write the book review, research proposal, and research paper will be distributed a minimum of two weeks before they are due.

### Attendance & Participation: 10%

This is a discussion-based seminar, and your participation is essential for the success of the course. You are expected to arrive on time and stay until the end of class. In addition to attending each session and bringing your course readings, you should come prepared with thoughtful questions and comments about the assigned materials. Participation will not be evaluated based on how much you speak but on the quality of the insights you share and your fruitful engagement with the views of others. Active participation in class also means being a good listener and contributing to in-class group activities. I encourage you to attend office hours to discuss class material, particularly if you find it difficult to engage in class discussions. I do not expect you to agree with the readings or with what your instructor or other classmates think. I very much welcome lively discussion as long as we treat each other with respect.

### Seminar Presentation & Discussion: 25%

Once during the semester, you will sign up with 2-3 of your peers (depending on enrollment) to present on an issue related to that week's readings and will lead discussion for the first half of the session (1 hour). A sign-up sheet will be on Quercus for students to choose a week.

Each group has two primary tasks: 1) Collectively craft three polished discussion questions and post them on Quercus the day before the session by 11:59pm EST. Since these questions are meant to

facilitate sustained conversations and inspire critical reflections, think carefully about what you circulate. Here are some questions you want to avoid: simple yes-no; leading (conveys the expected answer); and slanted (prevents participation from students who might disagree with the implied assumptions).

Grading criteria: 1) Clarity: Are our questions clear, concise, and precisely formulated? 2) Complexity and depth: Do our questions demonstrate a high level of complexity and depth, encouraging critical thinking and in-depth exploration of the topic? 3) Relevance to the topic: Are our questions relevant to the session's theme, connecting with key concepts and encouraging meaningful discussions? 4) Openness: Do our questions allow for diverse perspectives and encourage open dialogue?

2) Your second task is to lead the first hour of our seminar session. Seminar leads are expected to facilitate in-depth engagement with the week's material. This can take many forms: elucidating main arguments and key concepts, connecting theoretical provocations with historical or contemporary political issues (or other readings from the course), intertwining the assigned readings with everyday experiences.

- Create a presentation that deepens the group's understanding of the material and sparks thoughtful discussion around the key arguments/ideas of readings. Avoid a segmented approach where each student summarizes one section. Instead, focus on presenting as a cohesive unit.
- Use active learning strategies, such as "think-pair-share"/ "role-playing" to ensure that all students, not just a few, participate.
- Explore creative avenues. You are welcome to incorporate elements like video clips, newspaper headlines, audio, and leverage online platforms both before and during the seminar (e.g., Quercus discussion boards, polls, breakout groups, games, etc.).
- Be mindful of using excessive jargon or technical language that might be unfamiliar to all students. Aim for clarity by using simple and concise language. Approach the task as if you were sharing insights with a general audience. Avoid reading directly from notes or slides.
- As part of the preparation process, you must schedule a group meeting to coordinate the structure and content of this group assignment.

Grading criteria: 1) Content: Do we demonstrate a thorough understanding of all assignment material for the week? Is our content well-researched, relevant, and organized logically? 2) Delivery: Do we engage our audience with a confident and dynamic delivery? Do we use clear language? 3) Discussion: Do we stimulate lively discussion through innovative strategies? 4) Overall Impression: Do we leave a lasting and positive impression? Is our presentation memorable and impactful?

### **Weekly reflections: 15%**

The day before our class and by 11:59pm ET, you will submit a weekly reflection (250-350 words, starting week 2 and ending week 12) that focuses on one of the week's readings. These reflections will help you prepare for our class discussion and assignments. Unless otherwise specified, the reflection will consist of two parts: 1) *A brief description of one key argument/ key idea/ key concept that you find thought-provoking from the reading* (1-2 sentences, this should not exceed 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the reflection) and a 2) *A reflection* (not a summary!) that connects this main idea or concept to your own thoughts about it, supporting it with observations or personal experiences.

Here are some open-ended questions that you can respond to in the reflection part: How does this key idea connect to my everyday life, to world events, or to other readings/films/and ideas covered in the course? What is provocative or lacking in the author's analysis and why is this significant? In what ways does the reading challenge prior conceptions I had or teach me something new? What remains unclear in the reading and why?

The reflections will not receive written feedback, but feel free to discuss them with me. Please do not quote author's exact words in the text but express key ideas in your own words. If you use outside references cite them whenever possible and use any citation format you are familiar with (references are excluded from the word count). There is no need to cite course materials.

Half of your weekly entries can also take any creative format that reflects the amount of work you would devote to writing a 250–350-word reflection: a poem, a song, a work of art, an audio response, a video, an interview. If you submit a non-textual assignment (such as artwork that is not self-explanatory; in other words, an assignment that does not lend itself to a straightforward interpretation or needs further explanation for it to make sense to the observer/reader) please include a short caption describing the work, including any outside references you draw on. You can do so as an attachment or under the assignment comments section.

**Research Paper\* (annotated bibliography 3% + research proposal 5% + peer review 2% + 40% final paper): 50%**

You will write a research paper on a topic of your choosing. Students registered in POL 438 will write a 5-page single-spaced paper (around 2,500 words) and students registered in POL 2321 will write an 8-page single-spaced paper (around 4,500 words). This paper length excludes bibliography. The research paper must advance an argument on some dimension of the illicit global economy in relation to course materials.

Prior to the final research paper, you will submit a 1-page single-spaced document that includes your chosen topic and a brief annotated bibliography of at least five academic sources (graded credit/no credit). Each annotation should summarize the source and explain its relevance to your chosen topic. You will also submit a 2-page single-spaced research proposal, which needs to be completed for you to get a passing grade and for which you will provide peer feedback.

*\*Paper format:* 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins.

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## Course policies

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### Personal Accessibility Needs

All students are welcome in the course and should provide reasonable prior notice to facilitate any needed disability accommodation. To arrange accommodations, contact the Accessibility Services staff: Phone: 416-978-8060; E-mail: [accessibility.services@utoronto.ca](mailto:accessibility.services@utoronto.ca).

### Communication policy

Official communication for this course will take place through Quercus. Please note that emails will not receive replies. Given the high volume of daily messages, I encourage you to ask questions during class or seek clarification before or after our classroom sessions for a faster reply. Regularly check Quercus for important course updates.

For course-related inquiries, follow these steps:

- First, check the syllabus or Quercus for answers, as many assignment details are outlined under specific instructions.
- Second, contact your course buddy (we will set up a buddy system so you can contact each other about coursework!)
- Third, email Prof. Méndez (skip step 2 if the question pertains to the lecture)

Messages received within 24 hours of an assignment deadline may not be answered in time. Questions that are answered in the course syllabus or on Quercus and queries about missed class content will not receive responses.

When messaging about the course, include the course number and a brief description of your query in the subject line. I will aim to respond within 4 business days, Monday-Friday (8:00 am-5:00 pm). Plan accordingly for urgent matters and maintain professional communication, using appropriate salutations. In general, address individuals with the title "Professor" followed by their last name. You can address me as Professor Méndez. My pronouns are she/her/hers

## **Assignments**

*Submission:* All assignments must be submitted on Quercus unless stated otherwise. It is your responsibility to keep a backup hard copy in case of loss. Students must ensure that their assignments are correctly uploaded. Assignments not appearing or unable to be opened will receive a grade of zero.

*Late penalty:* Assignments will receive a late penalty of 2%/day, including weekends, and will only be accepted within 7 days of when they were due. Moreover, feedback on late assignments is not guaranteed.

*Grade appeals:* If you believe that I have given you an unfair grade, you may request a re-evaluation. Students must 1) submit the original work and attach 2) a written explanation identifying in detail why they believe there is a substantive error in grading. Grading appeals must be submitted after 48 hours and within 72 hours of receiving the graded assignment (It is your responsibility to regularly check Quercus to find out when your grade has been posted). Please note that a re-evaluation doesn't guarantee a change in your grade; it can result in the same or lower grade. Continuing with the remark or the appeal means the student accepts this condition. Appeals that do not follow the procedure outlined above will not be considered.

*Final grades:* Final grades are considered final and will not be subject to negotiation or alteration after they have been submitted. Please refrain from contacting the instructor to request additional points or grade adjustments. The grading process is conducted thoroughly and fairly, adhering to the criteria outlined in the course syllabus.

## Missed Academic Obligations

*Extensions, make-ups, and incompletes:* These will not be granted unless you meet one of the University's identified exceptions. If you are absent for legitimate reasons report your absence through the online absence declaration form available on ACORN and contact me to arrange an accommodation. In your message, please include the reason for your request and a proposal for a new deadline. Extensions requests made 48 hours prior to the deadline will be granted automatically. Any other requests will be considered at my discretion.

Legitimate reasons for temporary absences include illness, injury, and other unplanned circumstances beyond a student's control (such as court subpoena, funeral, car accident). Reasons such as holidays, pre-purchased plane tickets, family plans, lack of test/assignment preparation, conflicting deadlines, late course registration, technology failure, and traffic- or weather-related incidents are not considered to be beyond a student's control. Please note that accommodations due to late registration into the course will not be approved.

*Absence due to illness:* If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, please write to me right away. Normally, I will ask you for documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN) or the University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. If you cannot submit a VOI due to limits on terms of use, you can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI (including dates, academic impact, practitioner's signature, phone and registration number). For more information on the VOI, please see <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca>. For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/absence>. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

## Fostering a Positive Learning Environment

Effective learning can only occur in a positive classroom environment; therefore, we have a shared responsibility in ensuring that everyone in the class feels welcome to contribute. As your course instructor, I am committed to fostering a learning community that recognizes your inherent worth and dignity. This means that I will not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or hate speech.

## Office Hours

This class will require you to digest and synthesize a broad range of materials, therefore I encourage you to attend course instructor office hours early and often or contact us to set up an appointment. Here are some reasons why you might attend office hours:

- You need clarification on a concept, aspect of class discussion, or reading.
- You want to discuss course materials or topics further.
- You want to chat about a topic related to course materials.
- You have a question, concern, or comment about the course.
- You need to ask a question about an assignment that is specific to you.

Please note that to ensure fairness and consistency in the treatment of students in this course, detailed feedback on drafts will not be provided before submission.

### **Academic integrity**

Plagiarism is a very serious academic offense punishable by the university. Examples of plagiarism include copying another's work without attribution, falsifying records, cheating on tests, and submitting your own previous work. For advice on how to avoid plagiarism see <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>). If you wish to opt out of the university's plagiarism detection tool, email your tutorial section TA no later than January 17, 2023.

*Use of generative AI:* The knowing use of generative artificial intelligence tools, including ChatGPT and other AI writing and coding assistants, for the completion of, or to support the completion of, an examination, term test, assignment, or any other form of academic assessment, is prohibited and will be considered a form of cheating. Representing as one's own an idea, or expression of an idea, that was AI-generated may be considered an academic offense in this course.

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## **Course schedule**

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*All materials that are not required books or hyperlinks will be made available through Quercus. I recommend engaging with these materials in the order in which they are listed. Please note that this schedule is subject to modification.*

### **Week 1**

**January 11— Introduction: What is this course about? —No readings**

### **Week 2**

**January 18—The Illicit Global Economy and its Misconceptions**

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "The global illicit economy: Trajectories of transnational organized crime," March 2021. <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-Global-Illicit-Economy-GITOC-Low.pdf>

Susan Strange, "Organised crime: the mafias"

Peter Andreas, "Illicit Globalization: Myths, Misconceptions, and Historical Lessons"

### **Week 3**

**January 25—Rule of Law**

Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”

Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime.”

**Week 4**

**February 1 — Illegalities**

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, “Generalized Punishment” and “Illegalities and Delinquency”

**Week 5**

**February 8 —Criminal governance**

Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection*, “Introduction” and “The Industry of Protection”

\*\*\*Annotated bibliography (3%) due February 8\*\*\*

**Week 6**

**February 15 — Shadow economies**

Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century*, Parts 1-3

**Week 7**

**February 22 — Reading week, no class**

**Week 8**

**February 29 — Shadow Economies**

Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century*, Parts 4-5

\*\*\*Research proposal (5%) due February 29\*\*\*



## **Week 9**

### **March 7 — Criminal Violence**

Jon Horne Carter, *Gothic Sovereignty: Street Gangs and Statecraft in Honduras*, Introduction and Chapters 1-8

\*\*\*Peer review feedback (5%) due March 7\*\*\*

## **Week 10**

### **March 14 — Criminal violence. Class on zoom with Prof. Carter as guest lecturer.**

Jon Horne Carter, *Gothic Sovereignty: Street Gangs and Statecraft in Honduras*, Chapters 9-18

## **Week 11**

### **March 21 — Cultures of the underworld**

Phillipe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Introduction and Chapters 1-4

## **Week 12**

### **March 28 — Cultures of the underworld**

Phillipe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Chapters 5-9

## **Week 13**

### **April 4 — No class. Instructor at conference.**

Final assignment due (40%).