

Mafia
/'mäfiə/

A mafia is a highly organized, hierarchical **secret society** dedicated to criminal activities like extortion, trafficking, and racketeering. Originating in Sicily, it implies a tightly knit group using violence for power. Informally, it refers to a cliquish, powerful group protecting its own interests, such as a "**music mafia**".

Key Definitions and Contexts

- **The Mafia (Italian/Sicilian):** The original secret criminal organization in Sicily, Italy, often referred to as Cosa Nostra.
- **American Mafia (La Cosa Nostra):** A similar, predominantly Italian-American criminal organization with hierarchical families (e.g., the Five Families in New York)
- **Generic Use:** Any similar, tightly knit criminal organization, such as the Japanese Yakuza, Chinese Triads, or Latin American drug cartels.
- **Informal Use:** A small, influential group controlling a specific field or enterprise (e.g., "the theater mafia").

Usage Examples

- "The government is taking steps to combat the local **mafia**."
- "The investigation revealed a, cocaine **mafia** operating in the region".
- "He is in bed with the local **mafia** lawyer".
- "A small, powerful **mafia** of artists controlled the gallery scene".

Synonyms

- Criminal Organization / Syndicate
- Clique / Coterie
- Secret Society
- Mob / Mobsters
- Ring / Syndicate / Cartel

Historical Context

The Mafia emerged in 19th-century Sicily as a "protection" racket in areas with weak law enforcement, particularly around lucrative industries like sulfur mining and citrus farming.