



Transnational Drug Crime: A Case Study of the United Arab Emirates' Response to Emerging Threats

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of transnational crime (particularly drug-related crimes) on security governance in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in light of the rapid transformations in patterns of organized crime worldwide and the complex security, legislative, and societal challenges they impose. The study is grounded in the core premise that drugs are no longer merely a public health or conventional criminal issue; rather, they have evolved into a multidimensional threat affecting societal, economic, and political security, closely linked to transnational criminal networks that exploit technological advancement, legal loopholes, and the ease of movement of capital and individuals. The research adopts a descriptive–analytical approach to analyze relevant literature, prior studies, international conventions, and United Nations reports—most notably those issued by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)—in addition to examining the UAE’s experience in combating drug crimes from a security governance perspective. The findings indicate that transnational drug-related crime is characterized by complex organizational and technological dimensions, rendering traditional security responses insufficient unless supported by an integrated security governance framework based on clear policies, institutional role integration, and high-quality planning and response mechanisms. The results further show that the UAE has adopted a comprehensive and balanced approach that combines strict security deterrence, broad community-based prevention, rehabilitation and treatment programs, advanced use of digital technologies, and strengthened regional and international cooperation. The study also confirms that the success of countering drug crimes should not be measured solely by the volume of seizures or the number of cases, but rather by the state’s ability to build a well-governed security system grounded in anticipation, coordination, transparency, and respect for the rule of law.

Keywords: Drugs, Transnational Crime, Security Governance, Community Security, Drug Prevention.

Introduction

Humans have used drugs for thousands of years, initially resorting to certain herbs and plants for healing purposes or during ritualistic ceremonies. Over time, and with advances in the medical sciences, scientists began extracting active substances from these plants and using them in surgical operations and treatments (Chaachouay & Zidane, 2024). However, this beneficial use did not persist in its original form. With increasing complexities of life and the mounting psychological and social pressures (especially in urban environments), some individuals began misusing drugs as a means of escape from their problems, resulting in the widespread phenomenon of addiction (Abdallah et al., 2023). Furthermore, chemical developments contributed to the creation of synthetic drugs with more potent and harmful effects (Banday et al., 2024). A drug is defined as “Any natural or synthetic substance listed in Schedules I and II of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs.” (UN Convention, 1988).

Over time, drugs shifted from being therapeutic agents to becoming a serious health and social issue threatening individuals and communities alike. This transformation now requires comprehensive interventions that include awareness campaigns, prevention efforts, treatment programs, and stringent legal measures to curb their escalating harms (Omiyefa, 2025). Drug trafficking and abuse have become global issues, affecting societies worldwide. In today’s interconnected world, all nations have experienced various forms of drug threats. The rapid development of transportation, communications, and information technology has facilitated the spread of drugs globally (Ovsianiuk & Ustymenko, 2024). This includes illegal activities conducted through the internet, where organized criminal groups have exploited these technologies (especially financial systems) to adopt scientific approaches in planning and executing their illicit operations, particularly in drug trafficking (Snaphaan & Van Ruitenburch, 2024; Manzi & Calderoni, 2024).

The drug phenomenon has become a terrifying threat, raising alarm within the international community and hindering the progress and security of humanity. Addiction has reached epidemic levels in many countries, regardless of their political, social, or economic systems, with record-breaking quantities of drugs being seized (Chidume & Mugambiwa, 2026). The issue is not confined to specific nations; rather, humanity at large suffers from

the spread of drug use and dependency, resulting in public health degradation, societal disintegration, rising crime, violence, and corruption. It also diverts vital human and financial resources from economic and social development to efforts focused on combating drugs (Manurung, 2024).

Recently, the drug problem has intensified both internationally and locally. It has penetrated countries through international syndicates supported by well-organized networks, classifying it among organized crimes (Ali et al., 2024). These networks are equipped with massive financial resources and advanced technologies that have enabled them to flood international markets with countless types of narcotics and psychoactive substances, causing devastating effects, particularly on the youth (Manurung, 2024). Indeed, drug abuse has become one of the most dangerous forms of human destruction. These criminal networks have begun to resemble multinational corporations, operating across vast regions and maintaining strong connections with other criminal organizations (Jakupi, 2024). Drug revenues are used to fund civil wars, sectarian conflicts, and even to infiltrate law enforcement and bribe officials (Diviák, 2024). Such actions compromise the seriousness of national laws and international treaties concerning drug control, hinder economic and social development programs, and threaten political stability and environmental security in many parts of the world (Kashif et al., 2025; Fawwaz, 2023).

In light of the growing challenges facing modern societies, drugs and their widespread availability pose one of the most dangerous threats to the stability of states, individual health, and societal safety. This complex phenomenon requires multidimensional interventions, including both security-oriented and preventive strategies (Luo et al., 2025; Khodsiani et al., 2024). The significance of the current study lies in examining the impact of security measures in combating drugs, as such interventions play a pivotal role in reducing drug proliferation and dismantling smuggling networks. Moreover, preventive awareness strategies are a core element in reducing the risks of drug abuse by raising public consciousness about its dangers and encouraging healthier behavioral practices (Onyenwe et al., 2024; Day et al., 2025).

Table 1 World Drug Report 2024 (UNODC)

Indicator	Statistic / Figure	Explanation
Global number of drug users in 2022	292 million people	An increase of 20% over the past decade
Cannabis users	228 million people	Representing the vast majority of users
Opioid users	60 million people	Includes fentanyl and nitazenes
Amphetamine users	30 million people	Use of powerful stimulant substances
Cocaine users	23 million people	Usage continues to rise globally
MDMA (Ecstasy) users	20 million people	Commonly used in party contexts
Cocaine production (2022)	2,757 tonnes	Highest recorded amount; 20% increase over 2021
Impact of nitazenes	↑ Overdose deaths	More lethal than fentanyl
Mental health effects of cannabis	↑ Suicide attempts	Especially in Canada and the U.S. after legalization

The data presented in Table 1 paints a troubling picture of the growing prevalence of drug use worldwide. In 2022, approximately 292 million people were reported to have used drugs—a 20% increase over the past decade—highlighting the escalating nature of the issue despite ongoing international efforts. Cannabis (marijuana) remains the most widely consumed substance, with 228 million users, raising questions about regulatory policies, particularly in light of rising suicide attempts associated with its psychological effects, notably in Canada and the United States, where cannabis has been legalized. Opioids are used by 60 million people, and the emergence of more dangerous synthetic opioids, such as nitazenes, has exacerbated overdose deaths—surpassing the lethality of even fentanyl. Cocaine use also shows a significant upward trend, with 23 million users reported. Its production reached a record 2,757 tonnes in 2022, marking a 20% increase over the previous year and highlighting the strength and adaptability of global trafficking networks.

Amphetamines remain widely used, with 30 million users, particularly among younger populations and in entertainment settings. The continued usage of MDMA (Ecstasy) by 20 million people reflects this same recreational trend. These patterns collectively underscore the complexity and scale of the global drug problem and the need for diversified, adaptive strategies in policy, health, and enforcement (Unlu et al., 2025). The United Arab Emirates' official statistics for 2024 reveal critical insights into the security-related challenges posed by drug crimes, while also highlighting notable progress in detection and response capabilities (UAE Ministry of Interior, 2026). These efforts are part of a robust and evolving national strategy aimed at mitigating the risks and impact of narcotics (Al-Obaidly, 2025). Security authorities in the UAE have expanded their operational capacity in identifying and apprehending individuals involved in drug-related crimes. This institutional effectiveness reflects the success of strategic security policies in tracking and dismantling criminal networks (Haidar, 2025). Moreover, the data indicate diversity in offender profiles, reinforcing the need for international cooperation and enhanced border control, especially given the transnational nature of drug-related crimes (Ovsianiuk & Ustyomenko, 2024).

Positively, there has been a decline in domestic drug involvement, which can be attributed to effective national prevention programs, awareness campaigns, and proactive policies targeting youth protection (UAE Ministry of Interior, 2026). These outcomes point to the crucial role of the newly established National Anti-Narcotics Authority

(Decree Law No. 2 of 2025), which has centralized efforts in criminal tracking and interdiction through integrated governance, advanced technology, and international partnerships (Al-Obaidly, 2025). In terms of health impacts, the UAE has maintained relatively low rates of drug-related mortality compared to other nations, demonstrating the effectiveness of its comprehensive approach that includes strict enforcement, health preparedness, and rehabilitation programs (Hourani, 2026). This is the product of a holistic policy that balances law enforcement, public health, and community awareness, ultimately protecting lives and promoting societal stability. Furthermore, there has been a notable rise in the use of digital platforms and social media as drug distribution channels. The decentralized and anonymous nature of cyberspace poses new challenges. However, Emirati authorities have responded with high efficiency, employing continuous monitoring, content blocking, and digital disruption measures, showcasing the country's growing cybercrime capabilities (Tubaishat, A., & AlAleeli, 2024; Alnuaimi, & Dahlan, 2025).

On the international front, the UAE has emerged as an active global partner in combating transnational organized crime. The country has contributed intelligence and supported international seizures, reflecting the sophistication of its intelligence infrastructure and its shift from being a reactive player to a proactive security exporter (Khan et al., 2024). These achievements are not isolated successes, but rather part of a broader model of security governance grounded in strategic foresight, institutional integration, technological innovation, and global collaboration (Al-Obaidly, 2025). The UAE has demonstrated the ability to convert intelligence into operational impact, reinforcing both national safety and global security (Yates, 2022). The trends highlighted in Table 1, alongside the UAE's national indicators, underscore the necessity of multilevel responses to the global drug crisis. They emphasize the effectiveness of the UAE's strategic governance model, combining deterrence, prevention, rehabilitation, and international cooperation. These data points form a vital analytical base for the current study, especially in examining the relationship between transnational crime characteristics, state response, and the efficacy of security governance in confronting complex drug-related threats (Al-Obaidly, 2025).

Literature review

Transnational crime is considered one of the most serious security challenges facing modern states. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) defines transnational crime as “a criminal activity carried out or supported across international borders by organized groups, often involving drug trafficking, money laundering, human trafficking, and arms smuggling, taking advantage of legal and technical loopholes between countries” (Citaristi, 2022). Transnational crime complex nature and ability to operate beyond the geographic and sovereign boundaries of a single nation, making its combat a collective international responsibility (Sundram, 2024). These crimes are characterized by their mobility, exploitation of legal loopholes, and constant evolution in their methods, especially with the massive advances in digital and technological tools (Oriolo, 2023). The threat escalates when these crimes are coupled with organizational structures, advanced technological means, and complex criminal dimensions, leading to grave security, social, and economic consequences (Sundram, 2024). This phenomenon can be analyzed through four main dimensions:

Organizational and Network Dimension: This dimension reflects how transnational crime depends on complex organizational structures that operate beyond national borders, relying on criminal networks that span continents. These networks often consist of organized criminal entities functioning in hierarchical or decentralized forms, allowing role distribution and easier evasion of security monitoring (Pires, 2025). Such organizations excel in coordinating among multiple criminal actors and facilitating the illegal movement of goods across borders, including drug trafficking, arms trade, human trafficking, and money laundering (Kolhe & Bhat, 2024). They also exploit legal differences between states and weaknesses in international security cooperation to expand their reach and serve their illicit goals without much obstruction (Lazarus, 2025). Notably, transnational criminal organizations tend to be structurally flexible, allowing them to quickly adapt to security, political, or even economic changes (Pires, 2025). This makes combating them extremely difficult without effective international coordination and integrated national strategies.

Technological advancements are among the most significant factors that have facilitated the spread of transnational crime. Modern criminal organizations use advanced technologies to carry out their operations, including the dark web, encryption technologies, cryptocurrencies, social media, encrypted communications, and artificial intelligence (Parmenbayovna & Ilyashkanovich, 2023). Crime is no longer limited to traditional forms—it has evolved into transnational cybercrime conducted through computers and mobile devices without the need for physical presence at the crime scene (Khashashneh et al., 2023). This shift has complicated investigation and tracking processes, creating legal loopholes at the international level, especially due to disparities in cybersecurity laws among countries. Moreover, these criminal groups exploit the digital infrastructure of less-protected states and use servers and virtual communications as safe environments to carry out their operations, making it more difficult to identify perpetrators and uncover their true identities (Cook-Kwenda, 2024).

Criminal Complexity Dimension concerns the intricate criminal tactics used by transnational offenders. These crimes often require long-term planning, complex logistical organization, and coordination between multiple actors spread across different countries (Osmani, 2020). Examples include multi-route arms trafficking, money laundering through shell financial institutions, complex digital fraud involving social engineering, and human trafficking through intertwined networks of intermediaries, transportation, housing, and document forgery (Tas, 2023).

Security and Societal Impact Dimension refers to the deep consequences transnational crimes leave on national security, societal peace, the economy, and the social fabric (Kolhe & Bhat, 2024). From a security perspective, these crimes threaten state sovereignty, undermine the ability to enforce law across national territory, and drain security resources in countering threats that transcend traditional borders. Socially, the spread of such crimes leads to increased corruption, erosion of trust between citizens and the state, and rising rates of domestic crime due to external criminal influences. Some of these crimes, such as human trafficking and illegal migrant smuggling, cause humanitarian crises, demographic and cultural disturbances, and internal instability (Fenizia, A., & Saggio, 2024). Economically, transnational financial crimes result in public fund losses, capital flight, and distorted investment environments, negatively affecting the state's development (Ghose et al., 2025).

Unique Features of Transnational Organized Crime

Secrecy is a core foundation of organized criminal groups. These groups operate under strict confidentiality to conceal their plans and members from law enforcement, ensuring the successful execution of their operations (Roks, 2024). This secrecy extends beyond just protecting plans; it covers shielding the members themselves from prosecution. Leaders enforce a strict code of silence among members, with breaches punished harshly, sometimes even with death. This "law of silence" strengthens internal cohesion and creates an internal security shield via encrypted communications, making it hard for justice systems to gather evidence or dismantle these networks (Block, 2024). Geographic borders no longer restrict the movement of these groups. Advancements in communication and transportation allow them to operate in multiple countries simultaneously.

The primary goal of organized crime groups is to maximize financial gain, regardless of ethical, social, or economic consequences. These groups pursue rapid wealth accumulation through illegal activities like drug trafficking, money laundering, and human trafficking (Aziani et al., 2023). Simultaneously, they attempt to infiltrate legitimate economies by investing criminal proceeds in lawful businesses such as hotels, restaurants, entertainment, and even labor unions or logistics sectors (Fenizia, A., & Saggio, 2024). This blending of legal and illegal activities enhances their ability to disguise operations and influence local economies, especially in developing countries (George-Marius, 2024). Moreover, such groups possess a high ability to build influence networks within state and societal institutions. They recruit powerful individuals in political, legal, or economic fields through bribery, threats, or coercion (Fenizia & Saggio, 2024). This infiltration enables them to influence decisions, ease their operations, and shield themselves from legal action, making them more resilient and capable of expansion (Block, 2024).

Security Governance

In general, governance refers to a set of procedures and processes through which organizations are directed and controlled (Batool et al., 2025). The overall governance framework involves the definition and distribution of rights and responsibilities among various stakeholders within the organization, such as the board of directors, managers, shareholders, and other relevant parties (Papagiannidis et al., 2025). Additionally, governance sets the principles and procedures for institutional decision-making (Kjaer, 2023). Governance in institutions operates across various domains and actors, utilizing specific tools. With the increasing complexity of security threats posed by transnational crimes, the concept of security governance has emerged as a critical tool to enhance the efficiency of security systems and improve their capacity for anticipation and effective response (Obendiek & Seidl, 2023). In this context, governance refers to the provision of an institutional, participatory, transparent, and efficient framework that supports rational security decision-making, coordination among relevant agencies, and a balance between security imperatives and individual rights (Blattman et al., 2025). The UAE experience demonstrates significant progress in this domain, as the country ranks highly on global indicators of public trust in police forces and security performance (Halford, 2024). This reflects its success in applying the principles of security governance at both the policy-making and implementation levels, as well as in community engagement.

Methodology

The primary data used for the content analysis were the UAE documents about transnational crime (particularly drug-related crimes) on security governance in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) reports. They reflected the aspirations, objectives, rationale, and direction that the UAE had developed in the combat against TC, and are important to identify historical records that were phenomenal and significant to today's progress. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports on transnational crime operations conducted in collaboration with other countries, which were another set of primary data utilized. These are the key, especially in the analysis section, as they provide background information on the successful operations conducted so far and highlight the role

of various actors involved. This allowed for the examination of the UAE's efforts against transnational crime. Other supporting data consist of research articles on the UAE's institutional design or norms and the idea of securitization, including definitions of transnational crime. They provided an understanding of how the UAE's current institutional design may impede or hinder efforts against transnational crime. They also provided a counterbalance by showing instances where the UAE's norms are eroded or sidelined, prioritizing plans to combat transnational crime. It should be noted that information regarding transnational crime documented or reported by UNODC does not contain details of the transnational crime operations or the specific roles played by each actor involved. This is because these can be sensitive and confidential to the public since they will be crucial to arrest operations of perpetrators of transnational crime. As such, the main point in citing information from those reports remains to highlight challenges faced by authorities, actors involved, and actions required leading up to the execution of the operations. In this article, 'successful' operations of transnational crime will be understood as operations where authorities and relevant organizations can achieve the operation's objectives.

The method of analysis used in the present research was qualitative. The obtained literature was examined using content analysis to identify problems, gaps, milestones, and important initiatives that led to the establishment of transnational crime mechanisms and frameworks in the UAE, as well as theoretical frameworks linked to securitization and comprehensive security. The findings of the literature review were synthesized and interpreted to provide an understanding of the UAE's long history with transnational crime, gaps, current efforts, frameworks, and challenges that will impede the UAE's regional cooperation against transnational crime, as well as the implications for the country's commitment to addressing the issue. The case study highlights successful examples of the UAE in regional operations to combat transnational crime, including drug-related crimes. Transnational crimes are identical in that they are transboundary and often difficult to track, persecute, or prosecute due to cross-border complications such as different laws and regulations and sovereignty issues. However, drug-related crimes have slightly different aspects in that the latter was more developed in the latter half of the twentieth century due to technological advancement. With this, this case study provides a good balance between the more conventional type of transnational crime, as will be depicted by drug-related crimes, and the more globalized type of transnational crime, as will be shown by cybercrime. This case study signals the importance of inter-cooperation and support between the UAE and external partners to combat the respective crimes.

Case study of the United Arab Emirates

The Ministry of Interior of the United Arab Emirates places significant emphasis on combating the threat of narcotics in all their forms, recognizing the danger they pose to societal security and national cohesion. Accordingly, the ministry adopts a firm policy against drug users and traffickers, based on the principle of protecting individuals, families, and society from the spiral of addiction and crime (UAE Ministry of Interior, 2026). The specialized security agencies continuously develop operational mechanisms and intensify surveillance and intelligence efforts to thwart any attempts to flood the community with narcotics (Al-Obaidly, 2025).

In line with this security strategy, the National Supreme Committee for Drug Control was established in 2001, headed by H.H. Sheikh Sultan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, to serve as a unifying national platform for coordinating efforts among concerned entities (UAE Ministry of Interior, 2026). Within the Ministry of Interior, the Supreme Committee for Drug Control was formed, chaired by the Director General of Criminal Security, and comprised of directors of anti-narcotics departments across all emirates. This committee underwent a notable structural evolution, being restructured under Ministerial Decision No. 152 of 2009, aligning with the ministry's updated organizational framework (UAE Ministry of Interior, 2026). Administrative Decision No. 312 of 2012 later clarified the committee's responsibilities.

As part of the UAE's integrated efforts, Federal Decree-Law No. (2) of 2025 was issued (preceded by the 2023 foundational decree), establishing the National Anti-Narcotics Authority as an independent federal body reporting directly to the Cabinet. H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Hamad bin Hamdan Al Nahyan was appointed as its head, marking a paradigm shift in institutional efforts to counter the growing threat of drug crimes (Federal Decree-Law No. 2 of 2025). This authority replaced the former General Department of Drug Control under the Ministry of Interior, and is now tasked with drafting public policies, legislation, and national strategies to combat narcotics in coordination with both federal and local authorities. Its mandate covers drug trafficking, tracking smuggling networks, monitoring precursor chemicals, and regulating the circulation of psychotropic substances (Federal Decree-Law No. 2 of 2025). Beyond its security role, the authority leads national awareness campaigns and strengthens international cooperation with other countries and organizations for knowledge exchange and joint operations (Al-Obaidly, 2025). It also oversees the establishment of a comprehensive national database on drug-related crimes to enhance coordinated responses and data integration across all concerned agencies. The authority works with healthcare and social institutions to rehabilitate addicts and support their reintegration through holistic programs based on global best practices (UAE Ministry of Interior, 2026). It also commissions specialized research and studies on addiction, providing evidence-based recommendations to support policymakers and improve drug control policies (Al-Obaidly, 2025). These efforts show the UAE's commitment to a strategy that combines security, prevention, and public awareness to build a drug-free, safe, and healthy society.

Recognizing the multidimensional challenge posed by drug addiction, the UAE adopts a comprehensive preventive approach that balances security efforts with awareness campaigns, social programs, and specialized treatment institutions. The preventive model emphasizes youth-focused strategies such as health education, recreational, religious, and sporting activities that foster awareness and behavioral resilience (Al Najdawi & Nidal, 2026). For example, Psychiatric Hospital in Abu Dhabi, Al Amal Hospital in Dubai, and the Rehabilitation Center in Sharjah (which includes both a treatment clinic and a rehabilitation camp) provide professional therapeutic support, focusing on both psychological and social dimensions of recovery (Alrousan & Faqir, 2023). Moreover, the Ministry of Health designs and distributes health awareness materials, while the Ministry of Education integrates anti-addiction themes into curricula, organizes school activities, and hosts awareness events to develop sustained student knowledge (AlKhalidi et al., 2026). The Ministry of Interior's security media office leads public awareness through traditional and digital channels, focusing on exposing emerging drug trafficking methods (particularly online) through targeted communication strategies (Darwish, 2025). The UAE recognizes the pivotal role of media as a strategic partner in reducing drug demand, acknowledging the media's powerful influence in shaping public awareness and behaviors, particularly among youth and families (Alketbi & Al-Gharaibeh, 2023). The National Supreme Committee for Drug Prevention effectively utilizes various media platforms to broadcast preventive messages in creative and impactful ways. Such as, leveraging social media as a primary space for influence by sharing preventive content, engaging with audiences, and tracking digital trends linked to drug culture.

The UAE's anti-narcotics policy adheres to a balanced global approach that addresses both demand reduction and supply control, aligning with UN-established standards (Alketbi & Al-Gharaibeh, 2023). Prevention is viewed as equally vital as law enforcement and involves the coordinated efforts of social, educational, health, and legal sectors to build a sustainable national system for drug prevention.

The table highlights the scale of the awareness campaigns conducted by the United Arab Emirates between 2022 and the first half of 2025 (Federal Decree-Law No. 2 of 2025). The total number of beneficiaries reached 19,326,231, a figure that reflects the extensive societal outreach of these preventive programs and the state's strategic reliance on awareness as a central tool in combating drug abuse. The data indicates that Friday sermons accounted for the largest share of beneficiaries (4,396,000), underscoring the effectiveness of utilizing religious platforms to enhance ethical and behavioral awareness. These platforms play a vital role in preventing deviance and risky behaviors. The figures also reveal a diverse array of awareness channels, including cultural, educational, and national exhibitions such as the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair (619,724 beneficiaries) and school and university fairs. This diversity reflects inter-sectoral cooperation between religious, educational, and cultural institutions.

Additionally, the inclusion of governmental and security agencies, such as the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice, and various police departments—in these events reinforces the concept of institutional partnership in prevention and fosters trust between the public and the concerned authorities. Notably, the participation of 8,084 ministries and governmental entities illustrates a high level of national coordination, confirming the state's adoption of a comprehensive, cross-sectoral approach. From a broader analytical perspective, such expansive awareness efforts contribute to reducing drug demand, which indirectly impacts the drying up of illicit financial flows generated from drug trafficking. This enhances the UAE's broader strategy in combating money laundering within an integrated preventive framework.

Table 2 Number of Beneficiaries from Community Awareness Programs in the UAE)

#	Program / Event	Beneficiaries
1	Friday Sermons	4,396,000
2	Cinema Awareness Campaigns	361,561
3	School Students' Exhibition	57,619
4	National Day Exhibition	44,834
5	Abu Dhabi International Book Fair	619,724
6	Book Exhibition	3,600
7	Formula 1 Exhibition	8,000
8	Sharjah International Drug Prevention Exhibition	30,000
9	Ministry of Interior Clinics Exhibition	14,000
10	Ministry of Justice Exhibition	18,000
11	University Exhibitions	1,700
12	Police Exhibitions	1,500
13	"Without Borders" Exhibition	4,000
14	Safe and Cohesive Family Initiative	600
Total – Awareness Program Beneficiaries		12,970,378
Beneficiaries from 12 Public Forums		950
Number of Participating Ministries and Government Entities		8,084
Grand Total of Beneficiaries		19,326,231

Source: *National Anti-Narcotics Authority (UAE)*

Amid increasing societal challenges posed by narcotics and psychotropic substances, the UAE has adopted a comprehensive proactive approach through the national “Siraj” program, one of the most significant integrated preventive initiatives at the national level (UAE Ministry of Interior, 2026). The program aims to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors through multiple interconnected pillars that reflect a holistic educational and social philosophy. The strength of the Siraj program (includes Strong Family Unit, Psychological Well Being and Happiness, Positive Peer Groups – Recognizing, and Physical Health and Activity) lies not only in its multidimensional components but in their interconnected implementation (UAE Ministry of Interior, 2026). Strong families promote psychological well-being, encourage positive peer groups, and support engagement in physical activities, all of which contribute to a comprehensive protective environment. Siraj also bridges these core areas with educational, media, and awareness activities provided to families, schools, and communities as part of a unified strategy to enhance awareness and strengthen national preventive capacities (Federal Decree-Law No. 2 of 2025). Under the leadership of H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Hamad bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the National Anti-Narcotics Authority launched the “Security and Safety Guide 2025” as part of the UAE’s comprehensive national strategy to bolster community prevention and enhance security awareness among diverse groups, especially youth and students (UAE Ministry of Interior, 2026). Developed through multi-sector collaboration and guided by an ambitious national vision, the guide aims to eliminate sources of narcotics and protect society through modern preventive and awareness tools aligned with international standards and best practices.

Discussion

The theoretical and descriptive data analysis presented in this research demonstrates that the drug phenomenon is no longer an isolated health or criminal issue. Instead, it has evolved into a complex threat impacting societal, economic, and political security. It also plays a significant role in reshaping patterns of organized crime both nationally and internationally. The introduction clarified how drugs historically transitioned from limited therapeutic use to a global system of production and trafficking operated by well-resourced and technologically advanced networks. This transformation explains their widespread impact on individuals, families, and communities, as well as their connection to associated crimes such as violence, corruption, and money laundering (Ali et al., 2024).

The UNODC 2024 World Drug Report reinforces this rising threat, particularly through the surge in global drug use and the expansion of production, most notably in cocaine. These trends reflect the strength and adaptability of global supply networks and the sustainability of illicit flows. Analytically, these figures indicate not only a rise in consumption but also a transformation in the risk profile of certain drug types, especially synthetic opioids, which are among the deadliest (Citaristi, 2022). This necessitates continuous updates to security and health policies, beyond seasonal or traditional responses.

In the UAE context, the state employs a dual approach: enhancing law enforcement efficiency in detection and control, and reducing demand through prevention and awareness. This is evident in the diversity and scope of preventive programs and tools (religious sermons, exhibitions, family initiatives, sports activities, schools, and universities), marking a shift from a narrow “drug crime” lens to a broader societal security perspective that requires long-term institutional, knowledge-based, and communicative tools (Alketbi & Al-Gharaibeh, 2023). Collectively, these dimensions underscore that security governance is not an optional framework but a prerequisite for effective responses in a complex threat landscape. This research outlined security governance as a framework that balances operational effectiveness with transparency and rule of law.

Sections focusing on transnational organized crime highlight drugs as central to this criminal pattern, due to four interlinked dimensions. The network and organizational dimension shows how trafficking groups operate across borders with flexible structures, delegating roles that often evade traditional enforcement tactics (Diviák, 2024). The technological dimension reveals how trafficking has moved to encrypted digital spaces like the dark web, cryptocurrency platforms, and online marketplaces, necessitating equivalent technical and legislative readiness (Luo et al., 2025). The logistical and procedural complexity adds another layer, as trafficking operations now require advanced planning with multi-level financial and legal concealment (Fenizia & Saggio, 2024). The security and societal impact dimension underscores how drug trafficking fuels corruption, system infiltration, resource depletion, and community instability, while also feeding other crimes indirectly (Khodsiani et al., 2024).

These findings suggest that drug control success relies not just on enforcement but on intelligent security management—transforming data into decisions, decisions into action, and actions into measurable outcomes. The public outreach data further supports this, showing broad engagement through diverse channels (religious, educational, cultural, mass, and sports). This indicates that prevention in the UAE is not a secondary activity but a national policy integrated with security efforts. Programs such as SIRAJ, Mukafah service, and family initiatives, alongside targeting sensitive groups (students, families, workers, military personnel), reflect a community immunization logic. The more socially aware the public is, the less susceptible it becomes to addiction or promotion networks.

Thus, drug control efforts are not solely evaluated by seizure statistics or case numbers, but rather by the ability to build a governance-based security system that anticipates threats, coordinates institutions, adapts regulations,

enhances partnerships, expands prevention, and addresses digital criminal shifts. The integrated approach combining deterrence, prevention, technology, and institutional coordination is essential for sustainable societal security and long-term resilience.

Conclusion

Drug-related crimes have emerged as one of the most dangerous contemporary threats due to their strong ties with transnational organized crime. These crimes rely on flexible networks and substantial financial and technical capabilities, amplifying their socio-economic and security impacts (Ovsianiuk & Ustymenko, 2024; Chidume & Mugambiwa, 2026). According to UNODC's 2024 World Drug Report, global trends in consumption and production reveal a growing challenge that transcends national borders and sovereignty. This research established that framing the drug problem within transnational crime provides a more accurate lens for understanding its complexity—particularly when analyzed through its networked, technological, logistical, and societal impact dimensions. As such, combating drugs requires effective security governance based on responsive legislation, institutional coordination, and anticipatory planning. The study highlights the UAE's response as a pioneering institutional model that blends law enforcement with community-based prevention, comprehensive awareness, and the use of advanced technologies. The state also strengthened its national structures (committees and strategies) and broadened institutional partnerships. The diversity and reach of its preventive programs indicate a dual-track approach focused on both supply and demand reduction—enhancing community security and reinforcing public trust in the security system.

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