

## 10 things to know about the Sicilian mafia

A guide to the Sicilian crime organisation and its continuing battle with the police

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- 1) Gaetano Lo Presti, the Mafia boss who killed himself last week, was arrested in an operation involving 1,200 police officers backed up by helicopters.
  - 2) The hilltop town of Corleone has become synonymous with the Mafia: the place where bosses Salvatore Riina and Bernardo Provenzano were raised was also chosen by Mario Puzo as the home town of his characters in *The Godfather*.
  - 3) Although Provenzano changed the Mafia's strategy to focus on high-tech, white-collar crimes, he never trusted telephones or email because they could be intercepted too easily by the authorities. All his messages were written with a typewriter and carried by hand.
  - 4) Corleone residents have petitioned to change the town's name in disgust at its criminal connotations.
  - 5) About 80 per cent of small businesses in Palermo, the Sicilian capital, pay *pizzo*, or protection money.
  - 6) Across the whole of southern Italy, the mafia is believed to make more than £20 billion a year through extortion.
  - 7) Libero Grassi, a shopkeeper whose letter to an anonymous "dear extortionist" was featured on the front page of a local newspaper in 1991, was murdered three weeks after the edition was published. But his defiance inspired the creation of an anti-*pizzo* movement.
  - 8) The government only moved seriously against the Mafia after 1992, when mobsters murdered two judges, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, who were trying to stamp out organised crime.
  - 9) While the Sicilians have suffered from a government backlash, Italian crime has been taken over by the Camorra of Naples, the Ndrangheta of Calabria, and the Sacra Corona Unita, in Puglia.
  - 10) Initiates into the Mafia – otherwise known as Cosa Nostra or "our thing" – must let their own blood onto a picture of a saint and then swear an oath as the image is set on fire.
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