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RESEARCH INSIGHT

The impacts of intensive municipal governance and community organization on gang governance in Medellín



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The policy issue

Urban armed groups, especially criminal gangs, are a growing threat to peace and economic growth in cities across the world, and often exert state-like powers such as enforcing contracts, policing, and taxing businesses. Gangs, mafias, and urban militias have turned large portions of many cities into violent hot spots where government officials and police forces do not go. In certain neighborhoods in Latin America and elsewhere, criminal organizations also act as local governing bodies, exerting state-like control over populations that are underserved by the government.

Despite the prevalence of such "criminal governance" in cities around the world, there is very little information available to policymakers about effective strategies to reduce the influence of urban armed groups. **Can the state begin to provide everyday governance in place of these unofficial groups, and thereby increase its own legitimacy?**

About the research

In partnership with the City of Medellín and community officials, EDI researchers co-designed a program of intensified government outreach and service delivery to test the impact of increased municipal governance on the roles and legitimacy of local gangs and the state. To design the program, researchers conducted interviews with more than 30 members of 19 criminal organizations over two years. Researchers combined findings from those interviews with administrative crime data and with surveys of city residents and

¹ This Policy Brief arises from research undertaken for the EDI Randomized Control Trial "Gangs of Medellín: variation in state provision of order and justice" <https://ediconsortio.org/research/medellin-variation-in-state-provision-of-order-and-justice/>

The Impacts of Intensive Municipal Governance and Community Organization on Gang Governance in Medellín

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criminal organizations over two years. Researchers combined findings from those interviews with administrative crime data and with surveys of city residents and businesses to learn about the organization and political economy of organized crime in Medellín. This EDI Policy Brief provides a summary of those findings to date

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