

Coercion, Capital, and The Latin American City

Understanding Territorial Control and Governance in Marginalised Urban Communities



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Abstract

Across the developing the world we find marginalised communities where State presence is low, and armed nonstate actors exercise de facto territorial control. While extant research on civil wars and organised criminal violence has recognised this variation in territorial control and offered important insights into its *effects*, scholars lack an overarching, comparative theory to account for this heterogeneity to begin with. This dissertation begins to rectify this oversight, providing a theoretical framework to explain the shifting patterns of territorial control held by a particular set of actors– State and organised criminal groups (OCGs)– in the specific context of urban Latin America. How then can we explain variation in territorial control in Latin American cities? And, relatedly, why do we observe durable expansions of State territorial control into areas dominated by OCGs in some instances, but not others? In this dissertation, I argue that in response to the emergence of particular *politicised security threats* (those that affect the urban upper-classes), two core variables– *elite coordination* and *police capacity*– interact to shape variation in territorial control. I test my theoretical framework across several empirically rich case studies, for which I undertook hundreds of research interviews and extensive archival research in six cities across Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. Leveraging longitudinal within-case variation, I match different time periods from my case studies to distinct theoretical outcomes from my framework, showing how my independent variables change across time to shape diverging responses to OCG-related insecurity, and, in turn, varying constellations of territorial control. This dissertation contends with core questions in the social sciences, shining light onto the development of political order and processes of political violence, whilst making important theoretical contributions to the scholarship on subnational politics, urban security, criminal governance, and State-building.

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Acronyms

ADA: Amigos dos Amigos (Friends of Friends, organised criminal group, Rio de Janeiro)

AMAC: Asociación de Maquiladoras (Manufacturing Association, Ciudad Juárez)

AUC: Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, paramilitary group)

BCN: Bloque Cacique Nutibarra (Cacique Nutibarra Bloc, paramilitary group, Colombia)

BLO: Beltrán Leyva Organisation (Drug trafficking organisation, Mexico)

BOPE: Batalhão de Operações Especiais (Police Special Operations Battalion, Rio de Janeiro)

CAI: Centros de Atención Inmediata (Rapid Response police base, Medellín)

CISEN: Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional (Center for Research and National Security, Mexico)

CV: Comando Vermelho (Red Command, organised criminal group, Rio de Janeiro)

DTO: Drug trafficking organisation

ELN: Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army, rebel group, Colombia)

FARC: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, rebel group)

FECHAC: Fundación del Empresariado Chihuahuense (Foundation of the Chihuahuan Business, Ciudad Juárez)

FICOSEC Fideicomiso para la Competitividad y Seguridad Ciudadana

FIRJAN: Federação das Indústrias do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (Industry Federation of the State of Rio de Janeiro)

FOMERREY: Fomento Metropolitano de Monterrey (Monterrey Metropolitan Development)

GAFES: Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales (Special Forces Airmobile Group, Mexico)

GEA: Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño (Business Group of Antioquia, Medellín)

GPAAE: Grupamento de Policiamento de Áreas Especiais (Special Area Policing Groups, Rio de Janeiro)

INFONAVIT: Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores (Institute for the National Housing Fund for Workers, Mexico)

JAC: Juntas de Acción Comunal (Communal Action Group, community organizations, Colombia)

MPP: Mutirão Pela Paz (Mobilisation for Peace, Rio de Janeiro)

MUC: Marginalized urban community

NSA: Nonstate Actor

OCG: Organized criminal group

PAC: Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento (Growth Acceleration Programme, Brazil)

PAN: Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, Mexico)

PMDB: Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party)

PMERJ: Polícia Militar do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (Military Police of Rio de Janeiro)

PRI: Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, Mexico)

PRONAPRED: Programa Nacional de Prevención del Delito (National Programme for Crime Prevention, Mexico)

PT: Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party, Brazil)

PUI: Proyectos Urbanos Integrales (Integral Urban Projects, Medellín)

TCP: Terceiro Comando Puro (Pure Third Command, organised criminal group, Rio de Janeiro)

UPP: Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora (Policy Pacifying Units, Rio de Janeiro)

1. Introduction

During a visit to Popular, a *barrio* in Medellín's deprived north-eastern zone, a friend who resides in the neighbourhood pointed out an elderly woman, struggling to push a cart full of refuse and scrap metal up the sharply inclined hillside. This recycler, it was revealed to me as we walked away, was the mother of a young man who awaited death. The man had been caught stealing in one of the adjacent *barrios*, a neighbourhood dominated by a rival criminal group. His actions had violated the unwritten rules used to uphold the local territorial order, and he now faced a severe and brutal penalty. He was still alive, I was informed, solely because he was protected within the small area of intersecting streets surrounding his home, protection afforded by his close connections to a local gang leader. Should he stray beyond the bounds of his friend's authority, he would be murdered. Still, the behaviour of the community suggested that this protection was fragile, and that his days were numbered. Community residents had stopped talking to him. They avoided him on the street. People he had known for years no longer associated with him. They feared becoming the accidental victims of his impending punishment.

The death foretold of this young man illustrates the power that organised criminal groups still exercise in Medellín's marginalised urban communities. Armed territorial groups have operated in these neighbourhoods for decades, and they are unlikely to disappear in the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, conversations I had with community residents— both in Popular and elsewhere in the city— revealed important changes in the behaviour of these organisations. Dozens of interviewees agreed that while armed gangs still existed in their neighbourhoods, they exercised far greater discretion, moderation, and involved themselves far less in residents' day-to-day lives than in the recent past. Many residents associated this change with the expansion of State institutions into the urban peripheries, a process

which began in earnest the early 2000s. Indeed, across the valley from Popular, on the Western side of Medellín, residents recounted how within the course of two decades they had seen their neighbourhood transformed: whereas at the turn of the millennium it was inaccessible to the police and governed by armed nonstate actors, it was now a thriving hubs of economic activity, and the site of police stations, impressive public works, and State-sponsored schools and health centres. Criminal groups, while still numerous, no longer exercised exclusive control over “no-go areas” as they had two decades prior. The State now exercised territorial control over these spaces like never before.

The image of change imparted to me by Medellín’s residents stands in sharp distinction to what I saw in many of Rio de Janeiro’s marginalised residential neighbourhoods, or *favelas*. In favelas such as Maré, Alemão, Cidade de Deus, and Rocinha, youths openly sold crack, solvents, and cannabis from tables set up on street corners. Enormous steel beams were lodged vertically into the ground, forming robust barricades across roads and other access points. Men carrying assault rifles patrolled the streets, monitoring the flow of people throughout their territories. All this despite the fact that these areas had in recent years been targeted as part of a security initiative that explicitly drew inspiration from Medellín.¹ This programme, the *UPP* (or *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora*), was designed to expand State institutional presence and build State territorial control in Rio’s long marginalised communities. Despite much initial fanfare following its initiation in 2008, by 2016 the programme had all but collapsed. Its failure was succinctly conveyed by graffiti I saw by an abandoned police base, formerly of the UPP. Surrounded by gang insignia, it read “Shoot up the UPP” (“*Bala na UPP*”).

These anecdotes emphasise the profound variation in territorial control found across Latin America’s urban centres. While Rio and Medellín offer a particularly stark set of contrasts, in many other cities we find comparable examples of criminal organisations that exercise territorial control over urban

¹ Maré did not have a UPP established in its territory, and instead was targeted with a lengthy military occupation. Official accounts show, however, that this occupation was—at least initially—designed to precede UPP installation.

space and who involve themselves to greater or lesser degrees in the lives of civilians. What is more, we see marked heterogeneity in the willingness and ability of State actors to attempt to build control in these spaces themselves. Consequently, there is a great deal of variation in the exercise of territorial control across Latin America's marginalised urban communities. This thesis studies these communities and the heterogeneous patterns of territorial control exercised within them. In doing so, it seeks to answer the following question: How can we explain variation in territorial control in Latin American cities?

Across the multiple empirical chapters in this thesis, which include cases from Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, the reader will be introduced to contexts in which State and criminal actors have produced distinct constellations of territorial control during the recent past. The reader will see how State actors have adopted contrasting approaches to the challenges presented by organised crime in marginalised spaces within their major cities. Not all of these approaches have sought to build State territorial control in these spaces, and of those which have, few have succeeded (especially in the long-term). Indeed, this thesis will repeatedly demonstrate that there is nothing automatic or predestined about States attempting to build territorial control in communities dominated by armed nonstate actors. With this in mind, it is not just the existence of these enclaves of nonstate territorial order which makes their analysis relevant to political scientists. It is also the fact that the processes by which States intervene and sustain their involvement in these spaces are inherently political, contested, and influenced by a host of actors with distinct interests. As such, the reader will note as I develop my argument that both elite interactions taking place outside these long-neglected areas, and interactions between police and organised criminal groups within them, help define the character of territorial control in marginalised urban communities— henceforth frequently referred to in the shorthand as 'MUCs'.

1. Outlining the Argument

This thesis presents a theoretical framework to explain variation in territorial control in marginalised urban communities. Specifically, it seeks to account for how and why *States* are able to build territorial control in marginalised spaces *controlled by organised criminal groups* (OCGs). Despite scholars having long recognised how consequential territorial control can be for a host of different outcomes, to date we lack theoretical accounts that explain its variation. The framework advanced here argues that two core variables, *elite coordination* and *police capacity*, shape patterns of territorial control in these spaces. Where both elite coordination and police capacity are high, States are able to increase their territorial control in marginalised urban communities occupied by armed nonstate actors. Still, distinct combinations of these variables result in an array of different outcomes. Indeed, as this thesis will show, for States to increase their territorial control over spaces dominated by organised criminal groups— especially in the long-term— is a *rare* outcome.

To elaborate on the framework, State efforts to build control in marginalised urban areas are the result of decisions taken by *political elites*. I argue firstly that political elites will seek to intervene in marginalised communities dominated by OCGs only where these criminal groups present politicized *security threats*. Where such threats arise, *elite coordination* then affects how States respond to OCGs. Elite coordination refers to collaboration between the national and local levels of government on security matters— or more precisely, between the *political elites* who control these tiers of government. Where *elite coordination is low*, and political elites move to counter OCG threats in isolation, then their actions will tend to be restricted in scope and short-term. They may effectively contain OCG violence, and they may even be able to momentarily increase State territorial control in targeted areas, but actions of this sort undertaken by isolated elites will not produce *durable*, long-term increases in State territorial control. By contrast, where *elite coordination is high* and political elites are united in coalition, they are

capable of mounting more expansive, robust, and better financed interventions in response to OCG threats. These may well go beyond simply deploying police to marginalised territories, and also frequently involve concerted efforts to develop a multifaceted State institutional presence in these contested spaces. Coordinated responses are therefore key in allowing the State to build its territorial control in marginalised urban communities, with ongoing coordination allowing for durable expansions of State territorial control.

Many factors are capable of undermining coordination between political elites, not least the turbulence of democratic politics. Given this, another set of elite actors can be crucial to safeguarding political elite coordination, and thus strengthening State responses to OCG violence. These are *economic elites*, private sector actors who seek to protect their (business) interests. Powerful business actors can leverage their resources and connections to directly support State security programmes or indeed facilitate coordination between political elites. Economic elites can thus be key actors in uniting elite coalitions in response to OCG security threats and ensuring long-term policy continuity. However, they only do so under particular conditions, and if they view State actions as favouring their interests. Thus, economic elites frequently do not lend support, imperilling effective coordination between political elites.

In sum, where elite coordination is high, and elite actors are united in coalition, they are capable of mounting robust and durable State responses to OCG security threats. They are therefore far more likely to produce durable gains in State territorial control than disunited political and economic elites.

Nonetheless, elite coordination (or a lack thereof) does not provide all the answers. Indeed, while the reified stratum of elite politics is important to determining the direction and aims of policy, as well as the funding and political will behind particular State actions, it is in fact “street level bureaucrats”—to use Lipsky’s (1980) terminology— who are crucial to shaping policy outcomes and implementation on

the ground. In this case, I identify the most important of these as the local police in a given city. For the State to increase its territorial control, local police need to have sufficiently high *institutional capacity*. Where this exists, police can be present, mobile, and operate effectively across the marginalised urban communities to which the State lays claim. This provides the stability necessary for ensuring other State agents can access a given area, but also incentivizes behavioural changes from local OCGs, forcing them to adapt, and encouraging them to abandon more brazen manifestations of criminal governance. Where police capacity is low, the opposite is true, and the State will not be able to increase its territorial control. However, where elites are united in coalition, they are able to initiate security reform processes, which can in turn increase police capacity and thus allow for the State to augment territorial control.

State capacity is a multidimensional concept that varies across both institutions and territory. As such, when discussing police capacity, I focus on two dimensions of the *local police* institutions in particular: I) the *resources* at their disposal; and II) their *autonomy* from OCGs. While high police resources allow the State to increase its territorial control, the autonomy of local police from OCGs shapes the practices of *governance* that then emerge in these spaces, with high and low levels of autonomy encouraging OCGs to adapt in distinct ways to the newfound presence of the police.

I test my theory throughout the empirical chapters of this thesis, which include case studies from a diverse set of cities. All of these cities are partly constituted by marginalised urban communities occupied by organised criminal groups. However, all have distinct histories, with OCGs exercising territorial control and civilian governance with varying degrees of intensity and sophistication. In all cities, elite responses to OCG security threats differ in important ways, as do interactions between police and criminals. The empirical diversity of these cases therefore offers a rich bedrock in which to ground and substantiate my theoretical claims.

Table 1.1 Outlining the Argument			
<i>Police Capacity</i>			
		Low	High
<i>Elite Coordination</i>	High (Elite Coalition)	<u><i>Security Reform</i></u> No durable increases in State territorial control, but local police reform efforts are undertaken to boost police capacity.	<u><i>State Territorial Expansion</i></u> The State is able to increase its territorial control in marginalised urban communities.
	Low (No Elite Coalition)	<u><i>Unchecked OCG Competition</i></u> The State cannot increase territorial control. OCGs can expand and compete, all but unchecked by the State.	<u><i>Containment and Experimentation</i></u> No durable increases in State territorial control, but capable police can contain OCG security threats to marginalised urban communities.

The nuances of my argument will be elaborated upon thoroughly in Chapter 2. For now, I lay out a simplified version of my argument above in **Table 1.1**. Assuming the presence of OCG threats, this table shows the interaction between elite coordination and police capacity, and how they affect territorial control in marginalised urban communities.

As the reader can see from this brief outline, the theory I propose in this thesis is *State-centric*. Thus, although a significant amount of the primary data for this thesis was gathered through conducting interviews with residents of marginalised urban communities, and although the testimony and behaviour of these actors has informed how I assess changes in territorial control (see Chapter 2), the thesis that follows does *not* foreground the lived experience of these individuals. In explaining how and why States build territorial control in marginalised urban communities, I do not find the residents of these spaces to be the most *theoretically* consequential actors in determining my outcome of interest, even if their lives are shaped in profound ways by the processes I describe. Instead, the State, and the actors that comprise it, are primarily responsible for driving my theory forward.

2. Understanding Territorial Control

Having foreshadowed the argument to come, in this section I take the time to discuss two concepts that are central to this thesis. The first of these is *territorial control*, my outcome of interest. The second is *governance*, which has a nuanced relationship with territorial control. I begin by briefly reviewing the literature on conflict, nonstate governance, and the politics of organised crime, which has shown that territorial control is central to shaping different outcomes of interest to scholars. Nonetheless, as I point out, there is a clear gap in this literature: while many of the *effects* of territorial control and its variation have been demonstrated, the *causes* of this variation remain underexplored. Moreover, what territorial control consists of as a concept is not always clear, and indeed distinct logics motivate the pursuit of territorial control by different actors, including States and OCGs. I therefore unpack this concept at length. From this, I discuss the relationship between territorial control and *governance*.

2.1 Why Explain Territorial Control?

Territorial control has been a centrally important concept to the development of the civil war scholarship over the last two decades, with the distribution of territorial control among State and rebel actors used to explain the intensity and nature of violence in conflict zones (Kalyvas, 2006), the systems of governance that coercive actors develop in these contexts (Mampilly, 2011; Arjona, 2016), and even the patterns of resistance adopted by civilians in the face of these coercive actors (Masullo, 2015). Although important differences exist between civil wars and outbreaks of criminal violence (Arias, 2017; Kalyvas, 2015), territorial control once again emerges as an important explanatory variable when studying this latter phenomenon.

Scholars have long understood that State capacity and territorial control are far from uniform (O'Donnell, 1993; Giraudy and Luna, 2017; Pierskalla et al., 2017), and that armed nonstate actors, including OCGs, thrive in contexts of State “weakness” (Gambetta, 1993; Duffield, 1998). Latin

America's low-capacity, and often fragmented, States therefore offer ripe conditions for OCGs to embed themselves territorially and compete violently (Yashar, 2018; Durán-Martínez, 2018). Still, while low *State territorial control* is often a permissive condition for OCG power and violence, it is the distinct patterns of *OCG territorial control* that are generally considered to affect its emergence and intensity, with criminal territorial competition often leading to inter-OCG conflict (Magaloni et al., 2020; Arias, 2017). What is more, OCG territorial competition can also increase levels of *anti-State* violence (Barnes, 2022) and impede the implementation of State policy in marginalised areas (Moncada, 2016).

Moreover, it is widely recognised that where statehood is limited, nonstate actors are often incentivized to perform governance functions (Berti, 2018, p.278). In recent years there has been increased scholarly interest in the practices of *criminal governance* (Venkatesh, 1997; Arias, 2006; 2013; 2017; Bergman, 2018; Barnes, 2017; Lessing and Denyer Willis, 2019; Feldman and Luna, 2023; Blattman et al., 2021). While OCGs do not always seek to govern civilians,² they are *frequently* incentivized to do so (and not for exclusively economic reasons (Lessing, 2021)). Territorial control emerges once again as key to shaping *if and how* OCGs govern civilian populations. Whether OCGs are secure in their territories, or face competition (from rivals) or threats (from the State), affects their time horizons. This, in turn, influences their willingness (and ability) to invest in civilian governance (Magaloni et al., 2020), and the extent to which they predate from the populations within their territories (Moncada, 2021).

Thus, in both civil wars, and amid OCG competition, the extant literature has shown that distinct patterns of territorial control condition the nature of governance as well as the intensity of violence across geographical space. Despite the importance of territorial control in this regard, seldom have

² As Lessing (2021) correctly notes, we can distinguish different types of criminal governance; here I am focusing solely on the governance by criminals of civilian populations.

scholars questioned the *causes* of its variation. Moreover, explaining variation in territorial control in contexts where States and OCGs share space is made all the more compelling given the complexity of the relations between these two actors; unlike States and rebels, and unlike rival OCGs, States and OCGs are not *necessarily* in antagonistic competition.

Indeed, State actors regularly collaborate with OCGs for mutual gain (Auyero, 2010; Arias, 2006; 2017; Grillo, 2016; Paes Manso, 2020; Varese, 2018), offering them protection in return for favours and financial kickbacks (Bailey and Taylor, 2009; Barnes, 2017). So closely bound is the success of OCG operations with State protection that Trejo and Ley (2020) consider State support to be “ontologically constitutive of organised crime” (p.83). As such, the relationship between the State and organised crime is increasingly being recognised as approximating “symbiosis” (Lessing, 2021; Auyero and Sobering, 2019), existing as part of an “ecosystem” in which criminals and State actors interact in operating illicit markets (Trejo and ley, 2020, p.62) and exchanging “political merchandise” (Misse, 2007).

Given the complexities of State-OCG relations, offering an explanation for if, when, and how States are able to build control in areas dominated by criminal groups has widespread theoretical relevance, helping bridge the burgeoning scholarship on organised crime, governance and violent conflict with that on State-building. While typologically distinct to insurgent “competitive State-builders” (Kalyvas, 2006), and subnational warlords (Duffield, 1998; Reno, 1998), territorial OCGs are nonetheless a variety of armed nonstate actor with social power and political leverage, particularly at the subnational level. They thus comprise part of the tapestry of authority and governance found throughout the developing world, which remains characterised by “strong societies and weak States” (Migdal, 1988). Understanding the conditions under which, and the means through which, State actors augment their control in areas dominated by this unique subset of violent nonstate actors therefore has clear

implications for the State-building literature— implications that are made especially theoretically compelling given the dynamic and nuanced relations between States and OCGs.

In sum, through studying variation in territorial control this research firstly seeks to provide new insight into the politics of organised crime and (State and nonstate) governance in the developing world. As this review shows, territorial control is often analytically prior to other variables that interest scholars, conditioning the nature of governance as well as the intensity of violence across geographical space. And yet, despite the importance of territorial control in this regard, seldom do scholars seek to understand the causes of its variation. Aronson et al. (2024) argue that rebel groups seek to control territories that offer them supplies and strategic advantages, but beyond this, the causes of variation in territorial control (especially *outside* of civil wars) have yet to be elucidated. By exploring the means through which States are able to build control in OCG-dominated areas, my research seeks to correct this oversight. Additionally, OCGs are gradually coming to be recognised as political actors with subnational influence, distinct to, but not wholly unlike other armed nonstate actors, such as warlords. Complicating the picture further, OCGs are political nonstate groups with whom State actors are all too often *willing* to collaborate, collude, and protect. Explaining the processes through which States dedicate themselves to increasing control over areas dominated by OCGs therefore has wide-reaching theoretical implications. These go beyond the literature on organised crime and governance, as well as related scholarship on security and conflict, and extend to discussions on State-building. Indeed, far from the Weberian ideal, States often choose not to eliminate violent nonstate actors within their territorial domains. Especially in cases where these groups do not unambiguously threaten State survival, “enduring containment and collusion” can be “perfectly compatible” with State interests (Staniland, 2015, p.788). Thus, it is high time that territorial control, and the study of its variation, took centre stage.

2.2 The Logic of Territorial Control

What, then, *is* territorial control? The concept of territorial control has been developed chiefly in the literature on civil war, and has thus formed in reference to conflict settings in which both a State and insurgent group(s) vie for political power, engaging in violent competition over territory. Given this, territorial control is often associated with sovereignty, that is the exclusion of enemy (State/insurgent) presence from a territory (Aronson et al., 2024; Stewart, 2018; Arjona, 2016, p.44; Kasfir, 2015, p.26). Distinct degrees of territorial control are generally conceived of as existing on a continuum, with rebels and State actors sharing (contesting) territory between two poles of exclusive control (Kalyvas, 2006). While many scholars effectively equate territorial control/sovereignty with the presence or absence of a coercive actor from a given area, Kalyvas (2006) provides some further detail on what territorial control entails, outlining that State or rebel combatants exercise effective control over spaces where they are *present*, able to *move around freely* day and night, and able to *perform their basic functions* unincumbered by rivalrous actors (p.88). This includes accessing the information and resources within a territory (Rubin, 2020). The diminishing ability of either actor to do these activities is indicative of greater enemy control. The sliding scale of territorial control depicted by civil war scholars is therefore zero-sum: increases in *State* territorial control imply decreases in *insurgent* territorial control, and vice-versa.

At first glance, the marginalised urban communities studied here replicate in certain ways the dynamics of territorial contestation we observe in civil wars. Marginalised urban communities have historically been areas where the presence of State agents has been relatively low (discussed further in Chapter 3). Indeed, State actors have often lacked any incentives to expand institutional presence into these areas, meaning that situations of limited State territorial control have arisen thanks to State *neglect*. However, State territorial control over marginalised urban communities has also been actively *restricted* by armed

nonstate actors,³ including OCGs. While OCGs are not aspiring sovereigns who seek to definitively exclude and ultimately replace the State, their control over historically neglected urban territories has allowed them to constrain State presence, freedom of movement, and the capacity of State agents to enact policy within these spaces. The vignettes from Rio de Janeiro at the beginning of this chapter are illustrative of this reality.

OCG territorial control *can* therefore place restrictions on State institutions and actors. However, it does not necessarily *have* to. Indeed, *criminal territorial control* is underpinned by a distinct logic to State (and rebel) territorial control. Criminal territorial control is primarily based around ensuring “exclusive access [to a territory] *vis-à-vis* other criminal groups. This allows [OCGs] to monopolize illicit markets, multiply their economic interests, and expand their political and social influence within those areas” (Barnes, 2022, p.794, my emphasis), which in turn helps safeguard against incursions from criminal rivals. As such, State and OCG territories frequently overlap without placing these actors into conflict or competition: they do not *intrinsically* aspire to exclude one another from the territories to which they lay claim, as do States and rebels, or rivalrous OCGs. Indeed, many OCGs throughout the world thrive in territories in which State control is robust and State institutional presence consolidated. This therefore entails that the dynamics of State and OCG territorial control *need not be zero-sum*.

The distinct logics motivating State and criminal territorial control have important implications for how changes in territorial control are to be understood. As this thesis shows, under certain conditions OCGs can be incentivized to accept expansions of the State into the areas they have historically controlled (even while they still seek to exclude criminal rivals). In other words, States can increase territorial control in marginalised urban communities *without excluding* OCGs, eliminating their illicit economic activities, or preventing them from keeping their rivals at bay. Though State territorial

³ To borrow Giraudy and Luna’s (2017) terminology.

expansion necessarily causes OCGs to lose any *exclusive* control they might have exercised over an area, this does not necessarily mean that they or their illegal markets will be driven out— as we would expect in cases where the State successfully builds a foothold in *insurgent* territory. Changes in territorial control are therefore understood here in *relative not absolute* terms, and gauged in relation to the ex-ante conditions that obtain within a given area.

To synthesize a definition of the core concept, territorial control is an actor's ability to ensure *access to* and *mobility within* a geographical space. Thus, for a given group to exercise territorial control, its agents need to be able to access an area, be present in it, and be able to traverse it without hindrance. Moreover, territorial control also encompasses the ability to determine which *other actors* can access a territory and exercise freedom of movement within it. The ability to control territory in this way is therefore— unsurprisingly— predicated on the recourse to coercive force. As such, territorial control relies specifically upon the presence of coercive actors within a given area. This is why the civil war scholarship focuses on the presence of State or insurgent *combatants* in distinguishing between types of territorial control, and why police play a central role in my theory.

Thus, where the State increases its control over territory, State (coercive) actors will gain access and mobility within that space, and thus also be able to determine who can enter and be present within it. OCGs operating in areas controlled by the State will still seek to restrict criminal rivals, but will *not necessarily* be displaced by— or seek to displace— the State. The empirical chapters of this thesis exhibit variation in this regard: in Medellín, increased State territorial control in the city's MUCs did not drive out OCGs from these spaces, even though they still sought to keep rivals out of their turfs. Meanwhile, in Monterrey, OCG territorial control declined significantly as the State began intervening in the city's MUCs. In Rio de Janeiro, many OCGs fled *favelas* in which the State built a territorial foothold. Years later, they then resisted State presence, and reasserted near-exclusive control over these communities.

Precisely why OCGs responded in these diverging ways is discussed on a case-by-case basis in my empirical chapters.

We now turn to the relationship between territorial control and another of this thesis' key concepts, *civilian governance*. This too has a nuanced relationship with both State and OCG territorial control.

2.3 Territorial Control and Governance

Felbab-Brown, Trinkunas, and Hamid (2018) define governance as the ability of actors to “develop and enforce binding decisions upon others within the social and territorial context in which they operate” (p.6). This largely resonates with Börzel and Risse’s conceptualisation, which conceives of governance as the set of “institutionalized modes of social coordination to produce and implement collectively binding rules, and/or to provide collective goods” (Börzel, Risse, and Draude, 2018, p.9; Börzel and Risse, 2010, p.114). From these definitions, we can identify two core tenets of civilian governance: the imposition of order, and the provision of collective goods and services. Note therefore that whereas territorial control relates to a coercive actors’ ability to access and be mobile within a given area, governance concerns attending to, and influencing the behaviour of, the human population therein.⁴

Both State and OCG actors– to greater or lesser degrees– regularly govern civilian populations in the areas they control. States are expected to ensure a basic level of order and provide certain public goods within their borders (Centeno et al., 2017, pp.14-16), and would-be States– such as insurgents– almost universally try to establish governance institutions in the territories they occupy (Arjona, 2016; Kasfir, 2015).⁵ Such is the nature of an (aspiring) sovereign. Meanwhile, criminals are incentivized to govern

⁴ This echoes the distinction between *territorial* control and *social* control made by others. (Jentzsch and Steele, 2023)

⁵ Indeed, it is difficult to identify cases where rebel groups control populated territories “but do not establish some form of government” (Kasfir, 2015, p.28).

civilian populations for a host of reasons, including garnering “loyalty” from residents (which can help OCGs evade persecution from the State or criminal rivals) and accessing revenue streams (e.g., community ‘taxation’, charging for services, or fining unauthorised behaviours). Moreover, OCGs often govern over communities in which they or their families reside, and thus are personally invested in ensuring the availability of certain public goods. Thus, while in this thesis I often distinguish between “OCGs” and “community residents”, in reality these categories are seldom discrete. Finally, OCGs can accrue political power through controlling territory and governing civilians, as these allow criminal groups to bargain with State officials to extract benefits.⁶

Insofar as the governance of civilian populations is concerned, territorial control is *generally* a precondition for providing services and/or maintaining order. However, it is important to note that territorial control and governance *do not always* go hand-in-hand. While some OCGs control territory and seek to heavily regulate the lives of the population therein— as the reader will see in case studies such as Buenaventura— other OCGs control territory but show little interest in providing civilian governance— as in my case study of Monterrey. Conversely, *States* can provide governance functions *without* controlling territory. In Medellín, throughout the mid-2000s, municipal workers seeking to implement ambitious public works in slum areas had to first negotiate their access with local OCGs.⁷ In Monterrey, the same occurred when in 2011 government workers sought to build a community centre in the conflict riven neighbourhood of *La Independencia*. Local OCGs placed severe restrictions on which streets they could use, how many government workers could enter the neighbourhood at any one time, and the hours of the day during which they could work.⁸ The same applied to

⁶ This can be illustrated in cases where OCGs organise voting, influencing the democratic decisions of residents in order to get material benefits and favours from politicians, or even elect representatives of their own to positions of power.

⁷ Interview with Social Leader, Comuna 3. 21/02/2022, s0gpn; Interview with Municipal Worker and MUC Resident, Comuna 13, 03/02/2022, fx7q3; Interview with JAC President, El Popular, Comuna 1, 18/02/2022 3ryfb.

⁸ Interview with former senior official, Secretariat for Social Development, Nuevo León government 09/08/2022, grxyf

government-employed teachers who came to work in the neighbourhood's schools.⁹ In these instances, State functionaries had a heavily restricted presence, minimal freedom of movement, and were fundamentally reliant on the good graces of armed nonstate actors to perform their duties in marginalised urban communities. The State therefore *lacked* meaningful territorial control over these spaces, with OCGs determining who could enter, for what purposes, for what length of time, and under what conditions. However, through arriving at agreements and accommodations with these OCGs, certain State actors were *still involved in the provision of governance* in these territories. Indeed, OCGs in these instances did not seek to provide public goods such as infrastructure or education, and so were willing to allow State agents entry.

Given that State territorial control and governance do not always go hand-in-hand, their variation cannot necessarily be explained with the same set of factors. State actors may choose to provide certain governance functions— such as infrastructure and services— in OCG dominated areas *but not attempt* to develop State territorial control in these same spaces. In other words, there are many (dis)incentives for why a State might choose to provide different governance functions to an MUC (be this under OCG control or otherwise), for which my framework does not account. That said, as I will show throughout my case studies, where levels of elite coordination in response to OCG threats are high, we do *very often* see multifaceted interventions into marginalised territories designed to build 'thicker' forms of State governance, beyond mere policing. Increases in State territorial control, therefore, very often *do precede* increases in State governance

Indeed, allowing for the exceptions already noted, it is *generally* the case that the degree to which a State controls a territory will align with its provision of governance therein. Where a State exercises active, unrestricted control over an area, it is usually the case that State actors play a major role in directly

⁹ Interview with social worker, Monterrey 30/08/2022, xi14h

providing numerous governance functions.¹⁰ In areas of *low* State territorial control, then, *nonstate actors* can be expected to exercise a more prominent role in executing governance functions— especially those that are reliant upon coercive force, such as the maintenance of order. Where State access to an area is restricted by violent nonstate actors— such as OCGs— then the State’s provision of governance is likely to be more limited and supplementary, *but will not necessarily be absent*. This corresponds with Post, Bronsoler, and Salman’s (2017) typology of hybrid governance, in which in areas of low State territorial penetration, States “supplement” services and public goods.

As we shall see in this thesis, in situations where States increase territorial control in MUCs, the relations between the State’s coercive, street-level bureaucrats and OCGs shape distinct patterns of governance (recall the importance of *police autonomy* to my theoretical framework). Where police autonomy is low, OCGs can retain a great deal of influence in shaping local level orders and the provision of services *even despite increased State territorial control*. By contrast, where State territorial control increases and this autonomy is high, it is not necessarily the case that OCG governance ‘decreases’, but rather that OCGs tend to adapt, abandoning some of their previous behavioural patterns, and seeking out new facets of civilian life to govern. This is discussed further in Chapter 2.

Summing Up

The definitions of territorial control and governance outlined herein are suitable for a wide range of different contexts, including the marginalised urban communities discussed in this thesis. However, there are clearly problem cases where they are less applicable. Take, for example, Latin America’s prisons. These embodiments of State repression are on one level the very nuclei of State territorial control, areas in which access and mobility are determined strictly by State agents. That said, the governance of these spaces is frequently heavily reliant on OCGs, who maintain order among inmates,

¹⁰ Though of course the State may still delegate some governance functions, such as services, to private sector actors.

and provoke disorder for instrumental purposes. Moreover, while the State ostensibly controls carceral institutions, State agents very often only have limited mobility within them, and are sometimes only capable of entering heavily-armed or at the pleasure of criminal groups. These contradictions arguably make prisons unique. However, the point remains: just as we cannot rely on definitions of territorial control from civil war contexts to translate neatly to non-civil war contexts, the definitions of territorial control and governance I have advanced here cannot be expected to apply universally.

I discuss how different degrees of State territorial control can be identified in the next chapter, after laying out my theoretical framework in depth. Now, we move to the research design.

3. Research Design

In order to demonstrate the validity of my argument, I adopt a Small-N research design. The fine-grained approach of Small-N research allows for the preservation of “the texture and detail of individual cases” (Gerring, 2011, p.3), crucial in evidencing the different stages of my theory and hypothesised causal chain. While Large-N quantitative research might be useful in identifying broad patterns of territorial control in civil war settings, where control can be equated simply with the *presence* of belligerent actors, it is ill-equipped for capturing or *explaining* the complexities of territorial control and governance in cities where States and OCGs coexist, collaborate, and— sometimes— contest one another’s authority. A careful understanding of actors, their incentives, and actions, is essential for the causal theory-building process I undertake here, rather than a concern with the average *effects* of treatments. A Small-N research design is thus better suited in enabling me to unpack the dynamic processes and mechanisms that lie at the heart of my theoretical argument.

Given that this research seeks to shine new light on the processes that shape distinct patterns of territorial control in urban settings, I engaged in an iterative theory-building approach. This involved

shifting between deductive and inductive inferential techniques in order to identify the main causal factors and mechanisms that shaped my outcome of interest (Beach and Pederson, 2019; Fairfield and Charman, 2019). Directed iteration for the purposes of theory-building necessarily relies upon a “constant process of correction and refinement driven by [the] ongoing consideration of the evidence gathered and [the] continual mapping of evidence to theory” (Kapiszewski et al., 2015, p.25). In practice, this meant that I routinely revisited the cases and theory, refining and adjusting both after entering new field sites and further developing my ideas, rather than following a strictly linear process (e.g., moving from hypotheses to testing). Indeed, the iterative approach of my research was particularly well suited to theory-building (rather than simply *testing*), given the lack of existing, “off-the-shelf” explanations accounting for how and why States succeed in building territorial control in spaces controlled by OCGs (or otherwise).

Drawing on diverse cases from Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, I take the city as the unit of analysis, using intensive *within-case* analysis to maximise inferential leverage. Studying different cities through time, I employ process tracing in order to ascertain the validity of my hypothesised causal chain and the mechanisms within it. The portability of my theory is enhanced by drawing on cases from different countries, and while within-case analysis necessarily offers the main leverage for Small-N causal inference (Goertz and Mahoney, 2012, p.88), my final empirical chapter is built around cross-case analysis. This comparative chapter (Chapter 8) synthesizes findings from across the case studies, using these to both contend with alternative explanations and probe the strength of my theoretical claims.

3.1 Scope Conditions

The scope of my argument is restricted by regime type, subnational decentralisation, and the presence of territorial armed nonstate actors. Firstly, my argument is designed to apply to democratic States, given that the theory makes certain assumptions that cannot be taken for granted in non-democratic

contexts. While I do believe in the portability of certain core ideas of my argument to non-democratic systems, the politics of authoritarian regimes diverge in enough ways from those of (even low-quality) democratic ones so that I consider them beyond the scope of my theory. I will discuss the potential applicability of my theory to authoritarian regimes further in the conclusion. Secondly, given the prominence of subnational politics in my thesis (as well as interactions between national and subnational tiers of government), my theory is also only applicable to contexts in which there is meaningful political decentralisation. Thirdly, my argument is also restricted to discussing contexts in which 1) armed nonstate actors control territory; 2) in urban areas where State presence is low. I discuss these latter conditions further below.

Although I focus on a particular type of armed nonstate actor here, the territorial/governance-type OCG (discussed shortly), there is no reason why this thesis should not apply to other types of armed nonstate actor as well, provided that they are also territorial organisations. This may well include groups with far more developed ideological platforms and more overt political aspirations than OCGs, for example, paramilitaries. While occasionally these groups directly challenge State sovereignty, they can also have varied and nuanced relationships with State actors, and so it does not automatically follow that the State will seek to eliminate them or take control of their territories. Thus, my argument should be applicable to a wide variety of cases in which armed nonstate actors control territory. Indeed, although territorial armed nonstate actors (NSAs) can be subdivided by type, drawing clear typological boundaries is not always straightforward. Even if an armed NSA participates in organised criminal activities, we may not classify it as an “OCG”—organised criminal activity may not be perceived to be the most pertinent feature of an actor’s identity, and so defining the actor on this basis may be misleading. My case studies from Colombia underscore the empirically nebulous boundaries between OCGs and more overtly political nonstate actors.

While my argument therefore is designed to have widespread applicability, I do limit its scope to cases where armed nonstate actors control urban spaces with low State presence (which, as Chapter 3 will explain, is tantamount to my definition of marginalised urban communities). There are OCGs throughout the world that operate in areas of *high* State presence and control, such as the *Cosa Nostra* or *'Ndrangheta* in Italian and American cities, or the *Yakuza* in Japanese cities. In cases such as these, it is redundant to talk about the State *increasing* territorial control, as State agents can generally move freely, unincumbered from fulfilling their mandates in these mafias' turfs. Groups such as the Yakuza may play a selective role in enforcing certain governance functions and will ensure that rivals are kept out of their spheres of influence, but the urban spaces in which they operate *are not* characterised by low State presence, control, or governance. The same, cannot be said of the favelas of, say, Rio de Janeiro where OCGs such as the *Comando Vermelho* and the *Terceiro Comando Puro* control neighbourhoods in which State presence is far thinner than in the city's more developed centre, and as such have developed quasi-exclusive territorial control supported by entrenched civilian governance structures. I also choose not to study rural areas for simplicity's sake. With more expansive and less densely populated territories than cities, State and nonstate actors are often more mobile in remote and rural contexts, leading to more fluid territorial control than in urban spaces. The territorial size and low population density are also factors that *might* plausibly produce different incentives for State (and OCG) actors, meaning that the causal chain proposed here might not travel neatly to explain my outcome of interest in rural settings.

I do not deny that the theory here was built with Latin America in mind. The confluence of political decentralisation and spiking OCG-related violence since the Third Wave of Democratisation makes the region ideally suited for exploring my research question. Latin America provides ample arenas in which to investigate the subnational political processes that shape State responses to armed nonstate actors, and thus explore the channels through which States can increase territorial control over OCG-

dominated areas. With the vast number of marginalised settlements across its major cities— many dominated by violent criminal groups— the region therefore provides an extraordinary number of cases in which to develop and probe my argument. We now move to case selection.

3.2 Case Selection

Although in this thesis my focus is at the subnational level, I nonetheless adopt a multi-level case selection strategy. This allows me to “control” for structural factors operating at the country-level, whilst exploiting variation at the city-level.

Firstly, while my potential “universe of cases” extends across many different parts of the developing world, focussing on cases from a *single region* offers certain benefits to my research design.¹¹ Indeed, Latin America’s States generally share broadly comparable historical legacies, endowing them with similar political and administrative systems. Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico, the States from which I draw my cases, are no exception to this. Moreover, in recent decades these three States have all witnessed the proliferation of marginalised urban communities, and have all emerged as major nodes in the international drug trade, as I detail in Chapter 3 when discussing antecedent conditions. What is more, these States all consistently rank towards the very top of the region in terms of GDP (according to the World Bank),¹² and have all been scored as ‘High’ on the United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Index.¹³ At a macro-level, then, indicators suggest that these States are relatively developed and prosperous— unlike some others in the region that also face OCG-related insecurity in their cities. As such, these are States in which we might reasonably

¹¹ It is also important to be transparent about the *practical* considerations that shaped this decision (see Koivu and Hinze, 2017). My background living in the Latin America, studying its politics, my pre-existing cultural familiarity with two of the countries I ultimately elected, and my language skills, were all important factors in influencing how I chose from the universe of possible cases. While cases from the Philippines, Thailand, Nigeria, and South Africa would be *fascinating and relevant* to this study, the practical barriers to conducting *high quality* research on my chosen subject matter in these countries—especially *within the timeframe* of my research programme— were far higher than those I faced in Latin America.

¹² <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>

¹³ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>

expect to find (successful) efforts at building State territorial control in criminal controlled areas.¹⁴ Of course, by nature of their selection, these States all suffer from security deficits, with Colombia consistently ranking the worst of the three (as indicated by the Global Peace Index¹⁵ and the Fragile State's Index).¹⁶ Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that these States approximate most-similar systems at the macro-level, allowing for “controlled comparisons” to be undertaken across, and, presumably, within them (Slater and Ziblatt, 2013).

From the macro-level of the State, we move to the micro-level of the city. Scholars face numerous challenges in undertaking comparative subnational research, not least in identifying and bounding the most relevant spatial level of analysis. Here, I pitch my analysis at the city-level. While it is common practice to study and compare cities (see Le Galès and Robinson, 2023), I am cognisant of the potential traps that can arise when assuming “cross-system equivalence” between subnational units (Giraudy, Moncada and Snyder, 2019). Still, as per Soifer (2019), I study cities for theory-driven reasons, given that these are the subnational units in which the *actions* and *processes* that shape my *theoretical framework* are located.¹⁷

By studying political processes at the city-level, some discrepancies emerge in the specifics of the cases, given that cities often do not have clear administrative boundaries and thus vary in their jurisdictional configurations. While in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), the state governor is in charge of security policy, in Medellín (Colombia), it is the city's mayors who manage public security matters. Thus, governors are

¹⁴ Haiti, by contrast, displays deep-rooted problems of OCG territorial control but is *not* a context in which we would *expect* to find (successful) efforts at State territorial expansion, given that it is widely considered to be a “failed State”.

¹⁵ <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/#/>

¹⁶ <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>

¹⁷ Zooming out to a higher analytical level (e.g., studying regions or states) would draw us away from the often highly *localised* (political) processes that occur in cities, as well as their particular MUCs. Zooming in to a lower, more magnified level— say, by focusing on quadrants, or neighbourhoods— would fail to account for the fact that urban spaces are heavily interconnected. Violence, insecurity, and urban political economies frequently transcend the boundaries we use to divide and administer integrated urban conglomerations, rendering an *exclusive* focus on intra-city units to be of limited use. This naturally implies that to explain changes in territorial control *in MUCs*, it is important to look *beyond* these spaces.

more relevant to my case study of Rio, and mayors to Medellín: although these figures differ, they are both the subnational political elites *most relevant* to understanding the politics of security in their respective cities. Similarly, both Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey are Mexican cities. However, whereas the city of Juárez falls within the administrative boundaries of a *single municipality*, Monterrey's metropolitan area is divided into 13 municipalities. This means that municipal mayors and the municipal police force play a much more prominent role in my case study of Juárez¹⁸ than do municipal mayors and police in my case study of Monterrey: these actors are much more theoretically relevant to shaping the politics of security in the former city (as a whole) than in the latter.¹⁹

Even if specific jurisdictional configurations cannot be matched perfectly across cases, this does not undermine the basis for their comparison. Indeed, cities vary in many ways besides their administrative composition (population size, geographical expanse, etc.). However, irrespective of these differences, they remain the *most relevant spatial context* for probing my theory and the political processes that comprise it, each city studied here displaying the actors and interactions that are theoretically relevant to shaping my framework. That is, even despite some distinctions across cases, the cities studied here are *analytically equivalent* in relation to my theory.²⁰ To echo Arjona (2019), then, cities are my “locus of choice”, providing the most suitable level of analysis for this study.

Of course, my theory takes into account the influence of actors at both higher levels of analysis (national political elites) and lower levels (police and OCG interactions in marginalised urban

¹⁸ As my case study of Juárez shows, the city's municipal police force is also far larger than the Chihuahua state police force, thus making this the main policing institution in upholding local law and order, and thus the most *relevant* when studying crime, violence, and the politics of security in the city.

¹⁹ Instead, my case study of Monterrey focuses much more on the state governor and state police, actors who have been far more important in shaping security and policing outcomes *at the city-level*.

²⁰ Indeed, other scholars have drawn on cases from far more diverse spatial and institutional contexts than those of the cities studied here (e.g., Moncada, 2021; Lessing, 2018). The success of the comparisons undertaken in these instances is not due to how neatly the *spatial level* of analysis or *institutional context* is held across cases. Rather, this is due to the presence of certain *theoretically relevant characteristics* across the different cases. Though certain distinctions exist between my cities, they remain analytically comparable, displaying the theoretically relevant actors and processes that drive my framework, ensuring sufficient “cross-system equivalence” (Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder, 2019).

communities). In this regard, I follow Moncada (2016), adopting an approach that “takes the city as the primary unit of analysis but that also theorizes how and when forces situated above or beneath the city-level influence the institutional outcomes of the politics of urban violence” (p.6).

To recapitulate, I have chosen to study States which share key similarities, and to focus on comparable subnational units, cities. The cities I chose were ones in which I was aware of the presence of *territorial criminal groups* that operated in deprived urban spaces. This awareness was, admittedly, often due to the fact that intense OCG-related violence had emerged in these cities in recent history. Selecting cities on this basis meant that certain of my cases had already been subject to considerable scholarly enquiry (Ciudad Juárez, Medellín, Rio de Janeiro). Still, in selecting cases where I knew that violent territorial OCGs were *present*, I had grounds to reason that these would be suitable sites in which to study variation in territorial control. No doubt there would be enormous benefits to conducting greater research on *less* familiar cases. Nonetheless, the cities chosen here offered the ideal empirical substrate for theory-building, providing a diverse array of contexts in which to probe causes and mechanisms.

Importantly, my cases display heterogeneity in my independent variables, and thus produce distinct theoretical outcomes. In this sense, my city case studies exemplify a mixture of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ cases, whereby States were able to successfully increase territorial control in some instances, but not others. Moreover, my case studies exhibit important within-case variation, showing how different stages of my causal pathway were activated at different moments in time, and how this consequently produced distinct outcomes in terms of territorial control. Thus, whereas my chapter on Medellín exemplifies a ‘negative’ case (elite disunity and *Unchecked OCG Competition*) eventually moving towards a ‘positive’ outcome (*State Territorial Expansion*), the latter half of my chapter on Rio showcases retrenchment in State territorial control, and thus the shift from a ‘positive’ to a ‘negative’ outcome.

Table 1.2. Matching the Cases to Different Theoretical Outcomes			
<i>Police Capacity</i>			
		Low	High
<i>Elite Coordination</i>	High	<u><i>Security Reform</i></u> Monterrey (2010-2012) Ciudad Juárez (2011-2012) Rio de Janeiro (2008-2010)	<u><i>State Territorial Expansion</i></u> Medellín (2002-2020) Monterrey (2012-2015) Rio de Janeiro (2010-2016)
	Low	<u><i>Unchecked OCG Competition</i></u> Buenaventura (2000-2020) Ciudad Juárez (2007-2010) Medellín (1980- late 1990s) Monterrey (2007-2010)	<u><i>Containment and Experimentation</i></u> Ciudad Juárez (2012-2020) Medellín (late 1990s-2002) Rio de Janeiro (1999-2004)

Above, in **Table 1.2**, I match each of my case studies with the four theoretical outcomes discussed in the next chapter. As the reader can see in this table, my case studies have been broken down into discrete temporal periods, each of which aligns with a different theoretical outcome. While the parcelling of historical time in this way is somewhat arbitrary, these different periods represent moments of flux within my case studies, in which we can see variables at different stages of my theory interacting. Correspondingly, these are intervals in which we see different theoretical outcomes in each of my cases. Given within-case variation, most of my case studies— all except Buenaventura— cross the boundaries between different quadrants of this table over time.

In allowing me to probe the plausibility of my argument in different contexts, my case selection also enables me to contend with certain alternative explanations *by design*. I discuss alternative explanations at length in my comparative chapter, but I flag some of these now given their relevance to case selection.

Firstly, and most obviously, my case selection allows me to rule out the notion that aggregate levels of State capacity necessarily produce increases in State territorial control in subnational locales. Drawing on case studies from multiple cities in both Colombia and Mexico, and demonstrating the

varied outcomes of security strategies implemented in these sites at different points in time, I can therefore dispel the “aggregation fallacy” (Gerring, 2017, p.140), which in this case would imply that increasing levels of State capacity at the national level translate into improved State capacity and performance at the subnational level. My case selection therefore helps demonstrate that factors operative at the national level are only so relevant to explaining subnational dynamics of territorial control, conflict, and governance.

My case selection also allows me to account for the effects of overarching institutional design, as I study cases from both federal (Brazil, Mexico) and unitary (Colombia) States. By looking at both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ cases from these countries, my empirical chapters allow me to probe whether these broader systemic conditions influence subnational outcomes. While Colombia’s police are a national institution, a feature widely associated with their success in tackling organised crime in recent decades, my contemporaneous case studies of Medellín and Buenaventura point to important discrepancies in the capacity of this national institution across subnational space. Additionally, it might be tempting to assume that collaboration on security matters across different tiers of government would be easier in unitary rather than federal States. By studying cases from both types of State, I am able to test for this possibility.

Moreover, I select cases in which only comparable *types* of organised criminal group are present. Some scholars (Jones, 2016) emphasize that the type of OCG in an area can affect the security policies States adopt, and the levels of resistance these State policies will face. This is not an alternative to which I dedicate further consideration, given that by design I am focused on a *specific* type of organised criminal group. We might term this the “territorial OCG”, or the “Governance-type OCG”, to draw from Varese’s typology of Production, Trade, and Governance varieties of organised crime (Campana and Varese, 2018; Shortland and Varese, 2016; Varese, 2017).

In sum, my case selection allows me to evidence (impediments to) the activation of my causal chain in both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ case studies and demonstrate the portability of my argument in distinct subnational settings. This is ideally suited for the purposes of theory-building, given that I am able to leverage important variation both within and across my cases, as well as contend with certain alternative explanations by design.

3.3 Data and Analysis

My research relies upon process tracing in order to substantiate the different stages of my hypothesised causal chain. Process tracing involves the systematic examination of evidence in relation to hypotheses and research questions (Collier, 2011, p.823), requiring the researcher to first collect causal process observations (CPOs), and then gauge their evidentiary value relative to both the researcher’s own hypotheses as well as any competing explanations (Bennet and Checkel, 2015, p.16). As such, in assessing every node in my causal chain, I “cast the net widely” (ibid) and consider how other factors and mechanisms may better account for the processes I seek to explain. As stated already, alternatives are addressed fully in Chapter 8.

Triangulated from a diverse array of sources, the critical analysis of data gathered both prior to undertaking fieldwork (through online archival resources and media reports), and then when in the field (through conducting interviews and visiting marginalised urban communities), has been essential to test my argument and substantiate my claims. Given that my empirical chapters recount histories of State interventions into MUCs undertaken in recent decades, archival sources have helped me build timelines of events across all of my case studies. They also helped me identify changing patterns of territorial control and governance in the MUCs of each of my chosen cities, indicating how State actors, OCGs and community residents act in these spaces at different points in time. Primary sources have generally been accessed online, and have included newspapers, local blogs focussed on crime,

and archives published by NGOs. For example, in Colombia, these included the archive for the *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica* and the *Comisión Intereclesial de Paz y Justicia* (among others), the former of which provides scanned primary sources and the latter of which has an extensive collection of original reports of human rights violations.

Additionally, in some instances I have also used publications produced by local governments, useful sources for understanding the aims of government policy, as well as the resources pledged to State interventions. These were particularly valuable in the case of Medellín, where during the time period under investigation, local governments produced periodic reports which included detailed accounts of their MUC interventions— part of their effort to promote transparency in public spending whilst also publicising their developmentalist agenda. Moreover, I have also drawn on numerous autobiographies and memoirs, with all the obvious caveats that apply to citing these texts. In my case study of Rio de Janeiro, memoirs written by senior public functionaries involved in security policy were very informative, offering insider looks at the origins of programmes designed to build territorial control, alongside the complexities of articulating State institutions and implementing security sector reforms. Specifics from these sources were corroborated where possible with first-hand interview testimony.

Indeed, a great deal of the data used to test my causal chain is drawn from interviews. These were conducted between 2021-2023, during extensive multi-site fieldwork in cities in Brazil, Colombia and Mexico. Interviews were essential in allowing me to question actors involved in the different phases of my theory, as well as other experts with insight into the emergence and development of State security interventions in marginalised urban communities. I have conducted 214 interviews in different field sites, with a multitude of actors relevant to my causal chain, including with police, State bureaucrats, politicians, journalists, marginalised community residents, and former OCG members.

Elite interviews were crucial in allowing me to document how different security policies originated, as well as probe the interests of elite actors, and the constraints they faced in implementing policy. Where elected political elites themselves were not available for interviews, former advisors and deputies (now either working as journalists or academics) were able to provide accounts of the thinking and decision-making in elite circles at different points in time. These testimonies allowed me to explore the dynamics of elite cooperation and (the impediments to) the formation of elite coalitions, enabling me to show how political elite interests affected collaboration across different tiers of government, and consequently produced State responses to insecurity which counted on different degrees of political support. Interviews with both government and private sector actors were also crucial to understanding the interests of business elites and their role in security policy. Complemented with interview evidence from independent NGOs and experts, I was able to evidence how private sector actors influence political elites across different tiers of government, and thus test my argument relating to their role in sustaining elite coalitions.

In studying organised crime and nonstate order, reliable data is not always readily available. As such, one of the best ways of understanding these phenomena is to talk to the individuals whose lives they shape. Thus, I was very grateful to speak to many MUC residents while in the field, as well as police with experience operating in OCG-controlled territories. While I readily acknowledge that human memory is imperfect, the testimony of these actors was incredibly useful in helping me understand broad changes in territorial control in MUCs across time, and in relation to specific historical moments. Interviews with MUC residents helped me appreciate the nuances of control and governance prior to, during, and following State interventions. They also helped me grasp the (changing) relations between police and OCGs in their communities, and assess the degree of police autonomy from criminal nonstate actors. Likewise, interviews with police were often very revealing

and offered sobering insight into the institutional difficulties that these street-level bureaucrats face in implementing State policy in historically marginalised areas.

3.4 Data Collection

I generally connected with interviewees through “cold calling” and then through a “snowballing” strategy, targeting interviewees based on the potential value of the evidence they could provide. Thus, for example, in Monterrey I spoke to many MUC residents, because after reading numerous primary and secondary sources I was still unclear about the nature (and variation) of territorial control in the city’s MUCs. Conversely, in Rio de Janeiro I did not speak to as many MUC residents, as various excellent studies already exist which draw on MUC resident testimony and could thus be employed to understand changes in the city’s favelas. Experts also informed me that favela residents might be unwilling to talk to me given the degree of OCG control exercised in their communities and the fatigue that residents felt towards foreign media and researchers after years of attention from these groups. I thus prioritised speaking to other actors whilst in Rio, in order to try and illuminate parts of my causal chain that were less clear. Of course, questions of sample bias arise when adopting snowballing techniques. Thus, I reiterate that I triangulated evidence from multiple different sources, and cross-validated data where possible, in order to increase the reliability of my claims.

Naturally, security concerns affected my data collection. I did not intentionally seek OCG members for interviews, though I did conduct interviews with former criminal actors with knowledge relevant to my research (interviewees are now community leaders and NGO workers, and were not approached in the knowledge of their past ties to organised crime). Data collection in marginalised urban communities was complicated. Access to marginalised community residents was facilitated by building trust with community leaders, researchers, journalists, NGO workers and others who helped me gain access to these spaces and accompanied me as guides. This could be a long and drawn-out process,

though one which proved to be extraordinarily revealing and enriching. In adopting this strategy to access marginalised urban communities, I was able to make multiple visits to certain communities in some cities, though only more limited visits in other contexts. Again, as with my snowballing technique for approaching interviewees, the practicalities of safely accessing and conducting primary research in OCG-controlled communities introduced potential biases in the data collected; I cannot claim to have visited a representative sample of such communities in each of my chosen cities. That said, while I acknowledge that stark variation can exist between different communities in cities (Barnes, 2021; Magaloni et al., 2020; Arias, 2017), this approach provided detailed snapshots of many different locales in my field sites, yielding an enormous amount of data with which to reconstruct the changes in territorial control throughout recent history, as well as identify broad differences across communities.

The security concerns that come with undertaking research in OCG-controlled territories limited my access in other ways that I had not initially anticipated. For example, in the case of Buenaventura, at the time I conducted fieldwork the city's main OCGs, "*Los Shottas*" and "*Los Espartanos*", were passing through a particularly intense and brutal period of conflict. This prevented me from entering many communities (especially at night), but also inhibited me from entering a community controlled by one of the groups and then immediately entering a community controlled by the other, as I could be mistaken for a gang affiliate or other unwelcome actor attempting to gather intelligence. Although this restricted community access, I was ultimately able to interview residents from MUCs controlled by both groups, both in these spaces and more neutral ones (e.g., the city centre). Having been transparent about the limitations on data-gathering in my field sites, I am nonetheless confident that my interview data— when used in conjunction with other primary sources— is sufficiently rich to evidence the different stages of my causal chain.

All interviews were conducted in full compliance with Oxford University's Research Ethics body, CUREC, with all interviewees providing informed consent. Many interviews are referenced solely with unique alphanumeric codes, categorized by interviewee type (e.g., "MUC resident") alongside data on interview dates and locations. This is to protect the identity of interview participants. For further details on the interviewing process, please see the Appendix. This also includes a full list of all 214 interviews undertaken for this thesis.

4. Thesis Layout

This thesis proceeds as follows. The next chapter lays out my theoretical argument in full. In this, I elaborate on how the distinct independent variables in my theory interact to explain how States are able to increase territorial control marginalised urban communities. This focuses on processes which, as the reader will recall, take place both *outside* of marginalised urban communities (elite coordination) as well as *within* them (police institutional capacity and its effects on OCG behaviour).

Following this, Chapter 3 conceptualizes and describes marginalised urban communities, defining these as *areas of low State presence*. The chapter also traces the particular patterns of development that have encouraged the proliferation of marginalised urban communities across Latin America, as well as how these areas have become enclaves of OCG control and governance. From this region-wide perspective, I then narrow in on my case studies, introducing each of these in sequence and describing the unique processes through which OCGs came to control marginalised communities within them.

Subsequently, I test my theoretical framework across the case studies. We begin with Medellín, a case in which we see marked variation in territorial control over time exercised by both State and OCG actors. This ultimately serves as a 'positive case', describing a multi-decade process whereby the State was able to augment its territorial control in the city's marginalised urban communities. Medellín's forty-year timespan is unique in this regard; other case studies focus on more truncated temporal

periods, given that they exhibit less relevant within-case variation. Following this, I include my case study on Monterrey. While united elites were able to implement significant security reform, and produce *limited* increases in State territorial control in this instance, what is perhaps more striking about the Monterrey case study is the extent to which State actions led to a significant rollback in the exclusionary forms of territorial control that OCGs had developed in the city's deprived communities. Next comes my case study of Rio de Janeiro, which demonstrates dramatic success in expanding State territorial control in the short-term, but ultimately failure in the long-term. Following this, I include a paired comparison of Ciudad Juárez and Buenaventura. While these represent 'negative cases', they do so in different ways, and so still provide important empirical plausibility probes for the different sections of my causal chain.

Following my case studies, Chapter 8 draws together and synthesizes my individual case studies, reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of my theory by engaging in cross-case comparative analysis. I also use this chapter to systematically address alternative explanations. In my conclusion, I reflect upon the theory's limitations, the contributions of my findings to different bodies of scholarship, and suggest new avenues for future research based upon these insights.

2. Changing Territorial Control in Marginalised Urban

Communities

In this chapter I lay out my theory. This explains how and why States are able to build territorial control in OCG-dominated urban spaces in some instances, and not others. In responding to *politicized OCG security threats*, two factors interact to produce increases in State territorial control, *elite coordination* and *police institutional capacity*. However, variation across these two factors can also result in other outcomes. Therefore, I begin the chapter by outlining these distinct outcomes, which range from *State Territorial Expansion* through to *Unchecked OCG Competition*. From this, I dive into explaining the moving parts of the theory in detail. First, I discuss political elites and the security threats that can galvanize them to confront OCGs. Then, I underscore the importance of elite coordination, elaborating on the circumstances in which political elites coordinate, and the role that economic elites can play in this regard. Following this, I discuss how different dimensions of police institutional capacity shape the dynamics of territorial control and governance in marginalised spaces. While discussing my variables, I also identify some observable implications for each stage of my theory. These are offered as plausible empirical footprints—indications of what to expect if the different stages of the theory are true. The chapter then summarizes how I assess variation in State territorial control in marginalized urban communities. While my theory is State-centric, the nuanced understanding of territorial control I employ in this thesis requires that I look to both State and nonstate actors (including both OCGs and MUC residents) when assessing my outcome of interest. The chapter finishes by reviewing and visualizing the argument in sequence.

1. The Interaction of Coordination and Capacity: Outlining Possible

Outcomes

Territorial OCGs regularly present all kinds of threats to different strata of society. Only sometimes, though, do their actions result in the emergence of security threats to the State. The politicized nature of these threats will be discussed shortly. Suffice to say that where such threats emerge, State responses are likely to lead to expansions of territorial control only where there exist high levels of *Elite Coordination* and *Police Institutional Capacity*. If elite actors at both the national and subnational tiers of government have shared interests in responding to OCG security threats, and especially when they are supported by powerful private sector actors, then high levels of elite coordination will be achieved. This results in the formation of elite coalitions, which are capable of producing robust, wide-reaching, and durable State responses to OCG security threats. Disunited elites with contrasting interests produce the opposite. Elite coordination, as I explore further in this chapter and evidence in my case studies, is therefore essential, securing the political will and investments necessary to stay the course when pursuing the ambitious and costly process of *State Territorial Expansion*. However, elite coordination is also fundamentally a dynamic variable, that, as we shall see, is highly contingent on the alignment of distinct actors' interests in response to OCGs threats.

Nonetheless, even with high levels elite coordination, the ability of the State to increase territorial control in marginalised urban spaces is also dependent on the street level bureaucrats charged with actually implementing State policy on the ground. Given the inextricable link between territorial control and the recourse to coercion, my analysis here privileges the role of the police—actors who historically served as the “domestic missionaries” of the State and its efforts to propagate (Reiner, 2010, p.8). Here, I focus on the *local police* in a given city, and their *institutional capacity*, foregrounding two of its dimensions in particular: police *resources* and *autonomy*. Police with high resources are able to

increase State territorial control, whereas police with low resources are unable to do so. Police autonomy from OCGs, however, has an independent effect, shaping patterns of *governance* in marginalised urban spaces. As already established, increases in territorial control here are relative, rather than absolute. As such, successful increases in State territorial control are not dependent on the definitive exclusion of OCGs from an area— my discussion of police *autonomy* underscores this point starkly. Moreover, while *police institutional capacity* certainly can change (as my case studies show in instances of *Security Reform*), it is a generally quite a *static* variable. That is, the levels of police capacity in a given locale are usually far less prone to the highly dynamic, conjunctural processes that shape *elite coordination*.

To recapitulate, where both elite coordination and police capacity are high, the conditions exist for the State to increase territorial control. This is visualised in the top right quadrant of **Table 2.1** (overleaf). However, as the reader can see from this table, variation across these two factors can also result in other outcomes. I now discuss these, and flag where they are showcased empirically in my case studies.

What happens when there is the will but not the way? That is, when elites *coordinate* effectively, but police *lack the institutional capacity* to control OCG territories? In these circumstances, elites are not idle. Rather, they seek to rectify existing deficiencies in police capacity and build the policing institutions they require to contend with OCG security threats. As such, where elites coordinate but police capacity is low, we can expect to see the instigation of *Security Reform*, with investments designed to bolster the *resources* available to police, as well as measures to try and increase oversight and internal investigations, with the aim of increasing police *autonomy* from OCGs. In such instances, then, *elite coordination* helps directly shape *police capacity* at the local level. My chapters on Rio, Monterrey, and Ciudad Juárez exemplify this course of action. In these case studies, I will show how subnational political elites, with

Table 2.1 The Interaction of Elite Coordination and Police Capacity

		<i>Police Capacity</i>	
		Low	High
<i>Elite Coordination</i>	High (Elite Coalition)	<p><u><i>Security Reform</i></u></p> <p>United elites initiate reform in police institutions in order to redress deficiencies in police capacity (resources and autonomy).</p>	<p><u><i>State Territorial Expansion</i></u></p> <p>The State is able to increase its territorial control in marginalised urban spaces. Patterns of governance in these communities are then shaped by police autonomy from OCGs.</p>
	Low (No Elite Coalition)	<p><u><i>Unchecked OCG Competition</i></u></p> <p>The State cannot increase territorial control. OCGs can expand their presence, and compete with one another, all but unchecked by the State.</p>	<p><u><i>Containment and Experimentation</i></u></p> <p>Capable police can contain OCG security threats, and deliver short-term projects, but not achieve (durable) increases in State territorial control.</p>

the support of their national counterparts and engaged private sector actors, pushed for expansive police reform, purging the rank and file of local law enforcement in an attempt to break their linkages with OCGs, and investing heavily to provide reformed forces with ample resources to fulfil their mandates. As the case studies will show, long-term success in actually overhauling local police institutions varies. Still, the main point here is that the instigation of *Security Reform* is heavily reliant on elite coordination, and the financing, planning, and political will this affords.

Likewise, where elite coordination is lacking, this does not necessarily mean that the police do nothing. Low elite coordination means that attempts to build State control in OCG territories will be limited and are likely to be short-lived, the absence of a unified elite coalition hindering ambitious, longer-term interventions. However, high-capacity local police can still contain OCG security threats in marginalised communities, countering OCGs engaged in violent competition and limiting spillover

effects. Furthermore, isolated political elites can use these high-capacity forces to implement small-scale pilot schemes in these spaces, allowing them to “test the waters” and attempt to mitigate OCG security threats in marginalised communities. Thus, high-capacity police can still play an important role in *Containment* and security policy *Experimentation* even where elite coordination is low. This outcome is apparent in my case study of Medellín towards the end of the 1990s, where after years of OCG violence across the entire city, an increasingly well-funded and effective State security apparatus began containing violence to the city’s marginalised territories. Additionally, in Rio de Janeiro, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, innovative policing experiments were attempted in some of the city’s favelas, though these quickly collapsed due to a lack of political support. In sum, where police have sufficient capacity, they are capable of containing security threats and undertaking security policy experimentation in OCG territories, even if their long-term prospects of controlling these territories are poor.

Where both elite coordination and police capacity are low, OCG threats may go unchallenged by the State, allowing OCGs to expand and engage in violent competition with their rivals. This outcome, *Unchecked OCG Competition*, is visible for example in my case study of Buenaventura, and the first years of my analyses of Medellín and Ciudad Juárez. Police with low institutional capacity are incapable of limiting OCG security threats, let alone increasing State territorial control. If elites are divided, the possibility of implementing meaningful police reform, and thus building the institutional capacity necessary to counter or contain OCG threats, will also be limited. With OCGs all but unchecked by State forces, acute security crises can emerge across entire cities. An important caveat should be added to this final possibility. Where there is low elite coordination, the national government can still deploy high-capacity (non-local) security forces to subnational domains (e.g., the military) in response to OCG violence. These forces, acting unilaterally, very often *can* impose State order in marginalised urban spaces. However, gains in State territorial control achieved through these means are generally

time sensitive, with military crackdowns tending to occur only in response to emergencies. Consequently, increases in State territorial control will be temporary, and prone to collapse following the withdrawal of external forces. Hurried crackdowns in response to crises do not, generally speaking, provide solid foundations for lasting increases in State territorial control.

Some considerations should be taken into account as the reader proceeds with the chapter. Firstly, this theory rests upon a *probabilistic* causal logic. Thus, for the sake of transparency, throughout both this chapter and the rest of the thesis, I acknowledge where outcomes might diverge from the framework's expectations. I return to address the implications of this more fully in the final chapters of thesis, especially in Chapter 9, the conclusion. Secondly, it is worth noting that while I consider both elite coordination and police institutional capacity to both be *necessary* factors in determining my outcome of interest, the reader will recognise an imbalance regarding the lengths at which I discuss each variable, evident both in this chapter and the empirical case studies. This imbalance is in large part due to the fact that, as already acknowledged, elite coordination is arrived at through highly dynamic, agentic processes, whereas police capacity is more static. There is therefore more to *unpack* regarding elite coordination— both theoretically and empirically— than police capacity. However, it is also the case that these two variables are not *co-equal* from a theoretical perspective. Indeed, it is elite coordination that is the *main driver* of State efforts to build territorial control in MUCs, not the capacity of the police. While police capacity is *still essential* for achieving this outcome, it does not impart the *same momentum* to my causal chain as elite coordination. Indeed, elite coordination is responsible for actively driving forward processes of *State Territorial Expansion*, and can even play a direct role in augmenting levels of police capacity through the pursuit of *Security Reform*. Given this, it plays a more prominent role in the presentation of the thesis. *Both factors* nonetheless remain *necessary* to shaping my outcome of interest, each contributing an indispensable element to my framework, and as such the two— and their interaction— are considered throughout.

Having outlined four different outcomes that can arise from the presence or absence of elite coordination and police institutional capacity, and noted some important characteristics about the framework and its causal logic, I now turn to examining the different components of the theory in detail. I begin with *OCG security threats* and how they galvanize elite action. I then elaborate on *elite coordination*, exploring how and why diverse elite actors coordinate and form coalitions in response to these threats. Lastly, I examine the distinct dimensions of *police institutional capacity* that shape territorial control and governance in MUCs targeted by the State.

2. OCG Security Threats

Firstly, I argue that efforts to build State territorial control in marginalised communities dominated by OCGs are only likely to be undertaken by elite decisionmakers when particular *politicized security threats* emerge. OCG actions can be threatening to many different groups in society, but only certain types of threats affect the interests of political leaders. While OCG activities can also affect the interests of economic elites, with crucial implications for my theory (discussed presently), elected political elites are the decisionmakers who are primarily responsible for defining State security policy in this framework. As such, this section of the chapter specifically discusses the threats which affect their interests, and thus directly galvanize State security responses.

Though traditional Weberian theory would have us think that the State seeks to exercise exclusive territorial control across its nominal domain, States are in fact often *willing* to cede territorial control and governance functions to nonstate groups. Indeed, as I emphasize in the next chapter when discussing the development of marginalised urban communities in Latin America, governments may *choose* to not to develop a ‘thick’ presence uniformly across their urban territories, and State actors may be *incentivised* to perpetuate the marginalisation of certain areas. In other words, States often forfeit both territorial control and governance to (armed) nonstate actors. Low levels of State territorial

control, therefore, are not simply the result of State “weakness” or “incapacity” in the face of armed nonstate actors such as OCGs. Rather, they are also the result of the policies chosen by States. A quick glance at Latin America’s recent history reveals that where States have not simply ignored insecurity in marginalised urban communities, they have tended to favour deploying security forces aggressively and sporadically to these areas, detaining and combatting armed nonstate actors and then departing, rather than seeking to build any lasting institutional presence. Expansions of State presence, control, and governance in these contexts are just as much the product of decision-making, political willpower, and policy innovation as they are capacity.

State efforts to build territorial control in marginalised urban areas are therefore the result of inherently agentic and political decisions, ones taken by *political elites*. These are the elected officials who occupy national and subnational leadership positions in government.²¹ Political elites manage the levers of State institutional power, and are thus capable of deciding how and where to allocate State (security) resources. However, naturally, their decisions are influenced by their own particular perceptions, interests, and incentives. I argue that subnational political elites will push for interventions into marginalised communities dominated by OCGs only where they perceive these groups to present a *security threat*. Given that this theory focuses on subnational locales, and given the process of political decentralisation that has occurred in Latin America in recent decades, OCG security threats tend—unsurprisingly—to be more relevant to the decision-making of subnational political elites than they do national ones. Thus, State efforts to build territorial control in OCG-dominated spaces are generally led by subnational leaders. However, the interests of political elites at the national level can still be threatened by localized security threats— as case studies such as Ciudad Juárez demonstrate— and

²¹ As outlined in the previous chapter, subnational elites will vary from case to case, depending on their relevance to security policy. In Brazil, state governors are directly in charge of security and police institutions. In Colombia, by contrast, following the Constitution of 1991, Colombian Mayors gained greater latitude over determining local security policy, and are officially at the head of local police forces (despite the police being a national institution).

national political elites play an important role in enabling and empowering subnational security responses to threats, as the subsequent section on *elite coordination* outlines. Still, before turning to elite coordination, we must understand *what constitutes an OCG security threat*.

Firstly, not all OCGs and the actions they undertake represent security threats. Should an OCG maintain close linkages to State actors, it may be viewed as non-threatening. Indeed, OCGs can acquire distinct identities, leading to them being securitized to greater or lesser degrees. These are usually informed by their histories of conflict or collaboration with the State, as well as factors such as the ideological orientation and priorities of State leadership at different moments in time. Indeed, State officials might willingly coproduce governance with an OCG, or even use it as an auxiliary in a given area (Paes Manso, 2020; Civico, 2012). This can be seen in the case of Rio de Janeiro's *milicias*, or Medellín's paramilitary and post-paramilitary structures. OCGs may also control territory surreptitiously (and peacefully), attracting scant State attention. Indeed, low-level violence inflicted by OCGs in marginalised communities may fail to elicit any substantive response from political elites, who have historically been willing to neglect these spaces and the needs of their populations.

Assuming that political elites rationally care about maintaining popular support—elected officials need to win votes and (so) seek to safeguard their reputations—then OCGs are likely to be perceived as security threats when they commit high-impact crimes that reflect poorly on political elites and their competence (regardless of any linkages they may have with State actors). Gross failures to maintain public order, exemplified by massacres and high-publicity murders, are therefore likely to constitute security threats to these elites—especially if they gain public salience through media attention or protests. Similarly, the spill-over effects of OCG activities from marginalised spaces can heighten broader perceptions of insecurity, such as kidnappings and extortions in wealthier areas, or shootouts

which cross over from marginalised neighbourhoods into other urban spaces.²² As Magaloni et al. (2020) put it: “police interventions are seldom driven by the security needs of poor communities”, these are instead targeted “against OCGs whose activities are threatening to the State and the upper classes” (p.553). Indeed, where marginalised communities become staging areas for OCG activities that threaten non-marginalised neighbourhoods, then the absence of State control over these spaces becomes particularly pertinent to elite considerations. In sum, both salient violence and spillover effects from MUCs can alter perceptions of (in)security within a city at large, drawing attention to government failures to uphold order. These security threats thus cast a negative spotlight on political elites and their performance, but also provide these actors with opportunities and incentives to implement highly visible displays of State power. These particular threats are thus highly likely to instigate State security interventions into areas controlled by OCGs.

Often, the short-term incentives that elected decisionmakers face in democratic systems provide them with little reason to develop long-term strategies to counter OCGs, let alone undertake the arduous task of expanding State institutional presence into the territories they control. Indeed, State actors face a variety of choices in responding to OCG-related insecurity. They might simply crack down on crime, repressing and detaining OCG actors. Or, they might try to negotiate with these groups and create pacts to minimize the insecurity they pose. Thus, in identifying the importance of particular security threats and how these affect political elite interests, I am not arguing that these threats will only, or always, produce State efforts to build territorial control— in this sense, my theoretical framework displays *multifinality*, the relevance of which I discuss later in this thesis (see Chapter 9). How State

²² Sentiments that reinforced this fact were repeated to me on numerous occasions in different cities in which I undertook field-research: “statistically it makes no difference if people get killed in [marginalised urban communities] or in commercial areas. But the perception is completely distinct. It makes all the difference”; “working in these areas, we expected violence. However, if it had happened in a wealthier neighbourhood it would have been completely shocking”. (Interview with Arturo Luján, state director of FICOSEC. 23/07/2022. v6asy.2; Interview with former social worker in Medellín’s MUCs, 08/12/2021. 20qsh)

actors choose to respond to OCG threats is influenced by a range of different factors, including policy diffusion, preceding policy failures, and ideology. While important, unpacking the precise process which leads to the adoption of one policy over another is beyond the scope of my argument. Rather, this argument is concerned with *explaining the conditions* under which States are able to increase their territorial control in OCG dominated communities. In this sense, politicized security threats of the variety outlined above are necessary, as they increase the likelihood of decisive State action against OCGs and incentivize political elites to project State power into the areas in which they operate. However, elite coordination and police institutional capacity then play a more crucial role in shaping whether States increase (and sustain) their territorial control over the long-term. OCG Security Threats can therefore be considered an *essential* precondition for the framework, the outcomes of which are ultimately shaped by the interaction of elite coordination and police capacity.

In sum, salient OCG violence and spillover effects from OCG territories will be perceived as security threats by political elites, who in turn will mobilize State resources against these criminal actors. Still, some caveats are in order. Firstly, this is not to strip OCGs of political agency. We know that OCGs enact violence strategically, often with the intention of provoking State responses (Lessing, 2018). However, whether violence is enacted for strategic purposes or not is somewhat beside the point. What matters here is not the intent behind OCG violence, but rather if and how it manifests, and with what intensity. Secondly, this is not to minimize the fact that OCG violence is often provoked and escalated by *State* actions. OCG violence does not emerge from a vacuum, and the role of the State in securitizing OCGs and the spaces they occupy should not be ignored.²³ Nonetheless, where OCGs

²³ To characterize the eruptions of violence that frequently occur in, say, the favelas of Rio de Janeiro as nothing other than “OCG security threats” is simplistic, and risks painting the city’s OCGs as the (sole) originators of the ongoing bloodshed. To do so is ahistorical and occludes the fundamental role that Rio’s Military Police (PMERJ) and politicians have played in recent decades in securitizing favelas, as well as the fact that violence in these communities is frequently the direct result of police actions, and the armed resistance that follows their interventions.

are involved in episodes of salient violence, irrespective of the State's role in these events, the likelihood that political elites perceive these criminal groups as security threats will increase.

Empirical Footprint

Highly salient violence is easily identifiable, and can be found in media reporting on events such as massacres, murders, mass displacements, and other such instances of OCG brutality. That said, localized instances of violence and other high impact crimes are very likely to attract coverage from local media outlets: the existence of reports on OCG criminal activity in a local newspaper is not therefore necessarily sufficient evidence of an OCG security threat. As such, whether local level violence and other manifestations of OCG insecurity are salient is more accurately judged by their coverage in regional, national, and international media sources. Where OCG-related security crises emerge in a city, these can be identified through spiking homicide rates and intense, widespread media attention. The salience of violence can also be identified by looking at protests and other forms of civil society mobilisation, which are designed to help amplify the security concerns of citizens (including, often, MUC residents). To identify spillover effects, whereby OCG activities that were previously confined to MUCs begin affecting other areas in a city, we can look to media evidence of extortions, kidnappings, and attacks taking place on transit routes, in commercial spaces, or in wealthier residential communities. Where spillover effects occur, they are likely to have a chilling effect across these non-marginalised areas, as middle and upper-class civilians respond to a heightened sense of generalized insecurity. Reports of behaviour such as the increased use of private security as well as self-imposed curfews to limit exposure to potential danger would be indicative of this effect.

3. Elite Coordination: Shaping the State's Response to OCG Threats

Elite coordination *shapes how States respond* to OCG security threats in urban settings. Consequently, it is the main driver of the increases in State territorial control that we see throughout this thesis, affording important momentum to my causal chain. As the next section of this chapter lays out, and as my case studies evidence, where elite actors coordinate closely with one another in their efforts to address OCG security threats, they are capable of implementing far more ambitious responses to OCG security threats, and (insofar as coordination can be sustained) increase the likelihood that these responses remain durable in the long-term.

To elaborate, efforts at *State Territorial Expansion*, but also localized processes of *Security Reform*, are fundamentally very *ambitious* responses to OCG security threats, ones whose emergence, development, and sustainability is heavily dependent on financing, planning, and expertise, as well as concerted political will. Indeed, inserting the State into MUCs controlled by armed criminals, or attempting to overhaul local police institutions, are arduous processes that present significant challenges; they thus need the backing of elite decisionmakers with the determination and ability *to both instigate* bold changes in policy and *then stay the course*. Thus, I argue that these actions are reliant on the buy-in and active input of multiple elite actors. This includes political elites at both the *local and national level* of government, as well as urban economic elites. These latter actors can provide important assets to local security programmes, as well as help facilitate collaboration between political elites— no mean feat given the tumultuousness of democratic politics.

As I discuss below, there are many factors that can prevent collaboration between political elites at different tiers of government, and economic elites are only willing and able to shape local security politics under certain conditions. Indeed, just as *political elites* respond to politicized security threats, *economic elites* similarly mobilize to counter threats that affect *their* particular interests. This entails that

only certain types of OCG threats, capable of affecting the interests of *both of these actors*, have the potential to induce high levels of coordination between them. Dynamic conjunctions and contingent interest alignments therefore shape elite coordination, making this difficult to achieve and sustain at high levels, with knock-on effects for the development and durability of ambitious State responses to OCG security threats. It is therefore unsurprising that *State Territorial Expansion* is a *rare* outcome.

3.1 Working Together: National-Subnational Governmental Alignment

Elite coordination amounts to collaboration between the national and local levels of government on security matters— or more precisely, between the *political elites* who control these tiers of government. Scholars have shown repeatedly that “State fragmentation” (Durán-Martínez, 2018), and partisan vertical dealignment across governmental tiers (Trejo and Ley, 2020), allow criminal violence to rise as States fail to repress OCGs at the subnational level. We therefore know that intergovernmental collaboration across national and subnational levels is crucial to shaping State responses to OCG insecurity. Building off these insights, I argue that levels of elite coordination are not only important for understanding the escalation— or effective suppression— of OCG violence, but also central to explaining how States are able to build territorial control in areas controlled by these criminal groups.

The process of expanding territorial control is not easy, requiring both sustained political will from elite decisionmakers in support of particular security policies, as well as significant financial and material investments by State authorities. Coordination between political elites at different tiers of government therefore probabilistically increases the likelihood that States will be able to undertake ambitious, costly, and longer-term strategies to counter OCG security threats, such as *Security Reform* or indeed *State Territorial Expansion*. Elite coordination alone is therefore not sufficient to guarantee that the State will augment its control over contested territory. However, it is *necessary*, enabling State actors to undertake ambitious, expansive, and durable interventions of the sort that allow for this

outcome to be achieved. Elite coordination thus affords important momentum to efforts at expanding State territorial control.

Thus, where *elite coordination is low*, and political elites act to counter OCG threats in isolation, then their responses to insecurity will tend to be restricted in scope and short-term. This may result in important security policy experimentation, and some temporary increases in State territorial control in targeted communities. For example, political elites at the national level might achieve this simply by deploying the military, cracking-down as an emergency response to violence in a subnational locale. Nonetheless, actions against OCGs supported by isolated elites and advanced amid intergovernmental disunity will not produce *durable* increases in State territorial control.

By contrast, where elite coordination is high and political elites unite in *elite coalitions*, they can mount more ambitious and long-term strategies in marginalised urban communities controlled by criminals. Elite coordination therefore makes State territorial expansion far more probable. Moreover, sustaining elite coordination ensures that any gains in State territorial control remain durable; where elite coalitions collapse, this can undermine the State's ability to retain a foothold in the marginalised spaces in which it intervenes.

As outlined already, the political fallout from OCG security threats tends to disproportionately affect subnational political elites. That said, due to constitutionally enshrined divisions of labour, and asymmetric resource endowments, subnational governments are often significantly less equipped to respond to OCG threats—particularly with ambitious and resources-intensive security strategies—than are national authorities. Thus, they frequently require assistance (financial, technical, military, etc.) from their national level counterparts. Moreover, even if subnational governments *do* have the institutional tools, resources, and technical capabilities to counter OCG threats, coordination with national authorities is still preferable; national political elites with divergent priorities can undermine

local initiatives (intentionally or not), overruling local actors, interfering with or opposing their programs, or implementing distinct and non-complimentary policies. This is true also in reverse, as actions undertaken by subnational authorities in contexts of intergovernmental disunity can undermine the implementation of national government policy. Furthermore, national government actions in subnational spaces may well be time sensitive by their very nature (e.g., temporary states of emergency). As such, to ensure long-term policy efficacy and continuity, coordination between these two tiers of government and the political elites that manage them is vital. Elite coordination over security matters— or its absence— therefore plays a crucial role in shaping State responses to OCG threats.

In practice, coordination manifests in national and subnational State authorities undertaking collaborative and complementary efforts to respond to the localized OCG security threats that emerge in particular cities. Firstly, this involves routine dialogue and planning to ensure cohesive actions towards a common goal. Moreover, coordination will include significant transfers of financial, technical and institutional resources from national authorities to local settings in order to ensure effective inter-governmental planning and to boost the local government's ability to act against OCGs and intervene in the territories they control. Furthermore, in instances of high national-subnational political elite coordination, we can expect to see the development and implementation of strategies which pool resources, expertise, and input from both tiers of government, as well as policies and interventions that serve to reinforce one another, advancing a shared mission. For example, in cases of *State Territorial Expansion*, just as local authorities may deploy police to MUCs, national authorities are likely to back-up their efforts, sending (military or police) auxiliaries to assist. However, national level political elites might not only marshal *State security forces*, but also other government departments (education, health, social development etc.) to enact policies in MUCs— all activities designed to 'thicken' State institutional presence, and increase the provision of State governance. Of course, to

reiterate a point from Chapter 1, I do not mean to suggest that political elite coordination *guarantees* multifaceted State interventions into MUCs; rather, I mean to underscore the fact that coordination *promotes actions* from the different tiers of government that complement and reinforce one another. In sum, coordination amounts to planning and dialogue between political elites at different tiers of government, their sharing resources (broadly understood) with one another, alongside developing joint strategies and implementing complementary policies, all towards shared goals.

And yet, coordination is by no means guaranteed. Naturally, political elites at both tiers of government may perceive OCG threats differently. Indeed, “buck-passing” may occur, whereby political elites at one level of government may perceive the other to be (chiefly or solely) responsible for addressing an OCG security threat— this is a pattern evident across several of my case studies. Democratic alternations may also break down collaborative intergovernmental relations, or, conversely, facilitate them. Indeed, newly elected political elites are often incentivized to distinguish themselves from their predecessors, particularly on high visibility issues that are priorities for voters, such as security (though the importance of security can *also* encourage political elites to seek effective solutions through collaboration). Additionally, partisan differences (Trejo and Ley, 2020) can lead to disunity in response to threat, with national political elites effectively “punishing” their subnational counterparts by depriving them of security assistance. Indeed, political elites are subject to many incentives and predispositions which prevent their successful and/or long-term collaboration. Ensuring policy survival within democratic systems is therefore no simple feat, and indeed policy discontinuity is common. The challenge of ensuring continuity is especially onerous for ambitious and financially costly programmes which may not deliver short-term results, and more burdensome still in tumultuous democracies in the developing world, where voters and politicians clamour to find swift solutions to the entrenched problem of insecurity.

Empirical Footprint

Where both local and national political elites coordinate on security matters, we can expect to see a variety of different interactions between these two tiers of government. It is highly likely that routine meetings will be organised between national and subnational authorities, or new institutions developed to ease communication and coordination between both parties. For example, national authorities may appoint (permanent) representatives to subnational arenas, providing a direct channel between local and national decisionmakers. In these instances, we can expect subnational political elites whose interests are aligned with their national counterparts to be active participants in these institutions. Where there is coordination, we can also expect the transfer of significant resources (financial, material, human) from national to subnational governments in order to confront local OCG threats. More decisive evidence of coordination can be found in the implementation of joint programmes to combat insecurity with representation from both tiers of government, or the implementation of programmes by one tier of government which are designed to complement or work in conjunction with those of the other. Additionally, an obvious but important symptom of political elite coordination is mutual endorsement, and sustained public expressions of support over security policy.

By contrast, I expect political elite disunity to be identifiable by very distinct outcomes. In response to OCG threats national and subnational political elites will seek to deflect responsibility, (publicly) denouncing and allocating blame to one another for OCG-related insecurity. Evidence for this could be found in speeches, through media campaigns, or even through examples of private disclosures to confidants and collaborators. Moreover, where elites are disunited, I expect only limited collaboration on security matters, exemplified by (comparably) small or short-term resource transfers from national to subnational authorities, and only limited dialogue between political elites at different tiers of government.

3.2 The Role of Economic Elites

Given the difficulties of sustaining coordination, another set of elite actors can also be crucial to shaping the State's response to OCG threats, and indeed securing effective collaboration between political elites. I identify these as *economic elites*, the major private sector actors that comprise a city's economy. Indeed, scholars have shown that private sector support can play a significant role in financing State efforts to counter insecurity (Flores-Macías, 2012; Rodriguez-Franco, 2016), and indeed can improve the efficacy of State responses to urban violence (Moncada, 2016; Ley and Guzman, 2019). Drawing on Fairfield's terminology, I argue that economic elites are able to involve themselves in elite coalitions insofar as they command *instrumental power*. This amounts to the capacity for *deliberate political actions*, which "include lobbying, direct participation in policymaking, financing electoral campaigns, editorializing in the press, or engaging in various types of collective action." (Fairfield, 2015, p.28). Thus, the ability of economic elites to intervene in politics is predicated on the relationships and resources at their disposal: where economic elites have greater clout and connections, they are more capable of influencing political decision-making, as politicians are more likely to heed their interventions and take these seriously. Indeed, political elites sensitive to electoral competition can be expected to try and maintain the support of these powerful private sector actors. Where these actors lack instrumental power, the opposite holds.

What, then, is the role of economic elites in my theory? These private sector actors can use their instrumental power and financial assets to support the State in its efforts to counter OCG insecurity: they can use their resources to generate support for State policy (or at the very least shield it from any backlash), such as through publicizing in the media. Or, they can use their money and influence to provide oversight and promote accountability, publicly and privately pushing to ensure governmental efficacy, and applying pressure to redress violence and insecurity. They can even offer up their own

financial resources to the State, funding policies and programmes, or provide technical support to help boost institutional capacity. Still, instrumentally powerful economic elites can also use their connections to directly lobby the political class— both nationally and locally— to demand and facilitate greater elite coordination.

To be clear, economic elite support is no substitute for effective coordination across different tiers of the State: subnational political elites will be better equipped to confront OCG security threats with the support of their national level counterparts than with the support of local business leaders. However, given the ability of economic elites to pledge financial resources and other forms of support, these private sector actors are able to *strengthen* localized responses to insecurity, empowering the State to undertake more ambitious and expansive policies and interventions. Moreover, given their abilities to provide oversight and accountability to State actions, and facilitate coordination between political elites, instrumentally powerful economic elites can also emerge as key actors in ensuring *long-term policy continuity*, helping ensure the sustainability of ambitious State responses to OCG insecurity over successive governments— even despite the partisan changes and challenges to intergovernmental collaboration that democratic politics routinely present. As such, the support of economic elites can be *vital* to implementing and sustaining politically ambitious, financially costly, and arduous processes such as *State Territorial Expansion*.

And yet, economic elites only fulfil this crucial role in promoting elite coordination under particular conditions. I argue that economic elites will seek to exert their political influence when their *security* and/or their *economic interests* are threatened by OCG activities. These threats to economic elites may occur in conjunction with the politicized security threats that impel political elite decisionmakers to act (that is, OCGs activities can threaten both political and economic elites simultaneously), but they do not necessarily. That said, even if threatened, economic elites will only *turn to the State* and attempt

to involve themselves in the politics of security where *private protection* fails to safeguard their interests. Where these two conditions are not present, economic elite actors will not leverage their instrumental power to influence State security policy. This in turn can imperil the chances of (durable) political elite coordination, and thus leave ambitious State efforts to counter OCG insecurity vulnerable to collapse. To elaborate, even if principally confined to marginalised neighbourhoods, OCG activities can directly affect economic elites: business leaders and their families can become the targets of kidnappings and robberies, and their companies attacked and extorted. Additionally, where OCGs commit high impact crimes, a city's economy can suffer as the private sector becomes reluctant to invest, and existing businesses begin to withdraw or downsize as profits shrink. When faced with these threats, economic elites will often enlist (or form) private security forces. While these may be legal agencies, my case studies demonstrate that economic elites can also turn to armed nonstate actors for protection, meaning that local businesses can be heavily implicated in reproducing the patterns of urban violence from which they seek to be shielded. If, however, the recourse to private security *does not* mitigate the threats these elite actors face, then they may seek to protect their interests *through the State*, attempting to influence public security policy to their benefit. Their ability to do so is of course dependent on their instrumental power, as outlined already.

Empirical Footprint

Where economic elite actors mobilise and leverage their power to influence government security policy, the empirical traces of these actions may be identified firstly through examples of private sector lobbying and publicizing. It is likely that powerful economic elites will use the media (or, increasingly, social media) to amplify their support or opposition to security policies being implemented locally, appearing in interviews, paying for advertisements, writing open letters, and penning articles to articulate their opinions, interests, or demands for accountability. While evidence of private

conversations between economic and political elites may be impossible to acquire, we can expect to see economic elites (begin to) engage political elites in meetings and conferences explicitly focussed on security. Alternatively, these actors may seek to influence political elites less directly (especially if they lack dense linkages to them), in which case it is more probable that they will fund think tanks, civil society organisations, and watchdogs which promote security policies amenable to their interests as well as government oversight on security. Secondly, economic elites seeking to influence security policy can be expected to finance particular politicians, attempting to elevate certain political elites to positions of power (or impede others) where these better protect their interests. Thus, during electoral campaigns, we can expect economic elites to channel their resources towards supporting those political elites who promote security policies that align with their interests, and against those who do not; beyond elections, economic elites should pledge financial resources and technical capabilities to administrations that adopt security policies which favour their interests.

A key proposition of my theory is that the ability of business actors to influence political elites will depend on their instrumental power. This implies that although we are likely to see mobilisation of economic elites wherever their interests are affected by OCG insecurity, we are only likely to see *political elites* acting in response to this mobilisation where indicators of economic elite instrumental power are high. Thus, where local business actors have close ties to political elites and other government officials, media access (or control), and (of course) wealth, we can expect them to influence political elites. Only when and where local economic elites have these relationships and resources, then, will they affect local security matters or political elite coordination.

Finally, economic elites threatened by urban insecurity are likely to turn to the State for protection only if private security is insufficient to protect their interests. As a first response to OCG insecurity, we should therefore not necessarily expect to see economic elites leveraging their power to galvanize

State action, but instead investing in nonstate protection— including private security, but also, perhaps, groups such as paramilitaries and death squads. Only where these investments *fail* to protect their interests (either economic or security), therefore, will we observe elite actors invest serious time, money, and effort in attempting to influence political elites.

3.3 Summarizing Elite Coordination

Elite coordination is key to developing and sustaining ambitious State responses to OCG threats. As such, I argue that high levels of elite coordination, and the emergence of coalitions of elite actors, are crucial factors in explaining how States build and maintain territorial control in marginalised urban communities dominated by OCGs. Elite coordination shapes State responses to OCG insecurity, and as such provides vital momentum to my causal chain.

To be clear, there is theoretically no reason why, say, subnational political elites acting alone would not be capable of mounting effective interventions against OCGs, and building State territorial control in marginalised spaces *absent* any broader elite coalition. However, I argue that this eventuality is highly unlikely; *probabilistically* gains in State territorial control achieved without broader elite support will not be durable. Electoral incentives, partisanship, and democratic turnover can provoke rapid policy changes, with knock-on effects for gaining and sustaining territorial control. OCGs, in turn, can quickly reclaim territory when they perceive political will behind a given course of action to be waning. Indeed, examples of this very outcome can be seen in case studies such as Rio de Janeiro. For long-term *State Territorial Expansion* coordination between local and national political elites is required. Economic elites can help secure this coordination, but are only incentivized and capable of doing so under particular conditions.

To reiterate, the processes that motivate different elites to coordinate closely with one another are dynamic and dependent on these actors' specific interests and incentives. If *political elites* only respond

to the emergence of certain politicized security threats, then the threats that galvanize *economic elites* to involve themselves in local security politics are also quite particular, and may not overlap with those that concern their elected counterparts. Achieving and sustaining high levels of elite coordination is thus extremely challenging.

Still, we might ask, are there no antecedent conditions, or other variables which explain why high levels of elite coordination emerge in response to insecurity in some cities, and not others? That is, beyond the distinct incentives held by elite actors, as laid out above. The framework outlined here is chiefly concerned with the *effects* of elite coordination, rather than providing an exhaustive account of its causes, which are often highly contextually dependent. However, I do return to this question in Chapter 8, where I use comparative cross-case analysis to examine the explanatory leverage of factors such as particular urban political economies in enabling elite collaboration, as per Moncada (2016).

4. Police Capacity and Territorial Control

Nonetheless, elite interactions (or a lack thereof) cannot alone explain my outcome of interest. While elite coordination plays a key role in *shaping* State responses to OCG insecurity, the State's ability to *durably increase* its territorial control in areas dominated by OCGs is *also* fundamentally reliant on the street-level bureaucrats it deploys to these spaces. *Police institutional capacity* is therefore also necessary to explain the *outcomes* of State responses to OCG security threats.

State capacity is a multidimensional concept that varies both across institutions and territory (Centeno et al., 2017). In studying *police institutional capacity in a given city*, then, I argue that two of its dimensions in particular interact to determine whether the State successfully expands its territorial control. The first of these are the *resources* that a local police force commands. Resources include financing, materiel, and manpower. The availability of these resources affects institutional performance— that is, the police

force's ability to fulfil State mandates. Resources afford the police sufficient "boots-on-the-ground" to run patrols, high-tech communication and surveillance systems, vehicles for rapid mobility, and even the ability to install and maintain fixed bases in marginalised neighbourhoods. Of course, resources also allow local police to exercise considerable coercive force, enabling them to access weaponry, materiel, and other technologies that facilitate the imposition of State order and the punishment of deviance. Resources therefore allow police to be present across an area, coordinate effectively, and thus validate the State's claim to territorial control.

The second relevant dimension of local police capacity is police *autonomy* from OCGs. Whereas police *resources* are crucial to explaining the State's ability to *control* OCG-dominated territories, police *autonomy* primarily shapes how *governance* is produced in these spaces following State intervention. In Latin America (and beyond), the combination of low-paid police officers, long-standing ecosystems of criminal-State collusion, and the persistence of OCGs with high coercive capacity, creates ample opportunities for corrupt entanglements between police and criminals. Still, police institutions can have greater or lesser degrees of autonomy from OCGs. There is clearly a difference between individual beat-cops being involved in quid-pro-quo arrangements with criminals, versus entire police units routinely coordinating with OCGs for mutual gain.

The extent to which local policing institutions are autonomous from OCGs will therefore influence the systems of governance that emerge in marginalised urban communities. Indeed, distinct *patterns* of governance emerge in territories occupied by high-autonomy and low-autonomy police. Where police have low autonomy, OCGs can be expected to retain a great deal of influence in governing civilian populations. This is *not* to say, however, that *high*-autonomy police will necessarily "crowd-out" criminal governance: we should not perceive governance in this zero-sum sense, as previous studies have shown (Blattman et al., 2021). Certainly, the presence of high-autonomy police in an area may

strip OCGs of *some* governance functions, as the State assumes a greater role in providing services to civilian populations and imposing order. However, OCGs need not lose all their influence. Indeed, OCGs often adapt to increased police presence and oversight by finding *new* market opportunities and services to provide, ones which may well be welcomed by civilians. To borrow from Giraudy and Luna (2017), governance can be understood as a “bargaining outcome”, shaped not only by the desire and ability of States and OCGs to provide certain public goods, but also by the demands of civilian populations. That is, OCGs can be *more effective* than the State at administering particular services, making their continued involvement in civilian governance unsurprising. As extant research and my own case studies show, OCGs often remain key actors in dispute resolution and protecting informal markets in spite of *State Territorial Expansion*. To reiterate the core point, then, OCGs will respond in distinct ways to the arrival of high- and low-autonomy police in their turfs, producing distinct constellations of (hybrid) governance in these spaces as a result; this is different to characterizing criminal governance in marginalised urban communities as simply “decreasing” in response to *State Territorial Expansion*.

Having discussed these two dimensions of police institutional capacity— resources and autonomy— below I elaborate on the distinct possible outcomes that emerge from their variation.

High Resources, High Autonomy

Where local police have high autonomy from OCGs and access to ample resources, they can *increase State territorial control and State governance* in (previously) marginalised urban communities. In these cases, different State institutions can develop their presence and provide public goods. Police with high levels of autonomy and resources do not achieve this by eliminating OCGs. Rather, their presence incentivizes behavioural changes from these criminal actors. When forced to share territory with police with high resources, OCGs are motivated to discipline themselves and self-regulate their behaviour to

avoid punishment, hiding and moderating activities which might cause friction with State forces and thus provoke repression. These might, for example, include openly carrying weapons, inflicting violence, limiting freedom of movement, or carrying out other overt manifestations of civilian governance. OCGs care about maintaining access to their illicit revenue streams, so with the arrival of well-resourced, autonomous police, they will adapt to continue maximizing profits even despite greater State oversight.

High Resources, Low Autonomy

Where local police are engaged in ongoing collaborative entanglements with OCGs, and thus their autonomy from these organisations is low, then *State territorial control can still increase* if police resources are high. Nonetheless, this comes with caveats. In these circumstances, well-equipped and competent police can coordinate closely with OCGs and avoid friction. This allows police and other State institutions to act unimpeded and deliver on State policies in marginalised spaces, symptomatic of meaningful increases in State territorial control. Particular facets of State governance may well increase, exemplified by the increased provision of services and an increased regulatory presence of the police. However, in areas controlled by high-resource and low-autonomy police, criminal actors are likely to retain a considerable degree of influence over civilian life. That is, even while State territorial control increases, and some facets of State governance augment, OCGs are likely to remain key actors in shaping local order, effectively coproducing governance with the State. OCGs in such areas may still be incentivized to moderate their behaviour (to avoid upsetting corrupt arrangements with law enforcement), but they might equally employ their well-resourced police allies to aid and facilitate their criminal activities. High-resource but low-autonomy police can therefore increase State territorial control, but with ambiguous implications: they afford the State the latitude to act unimpeded in a territory, but also maintain— and even further strengthen and legitimize— OCG power in these spaces.

Alternatively, low-autonomy police with high resources may be incentivized to *predate on OCGs*, using (the viable threat of) State repression to extract as much money from them as possible (a pattern typical of Rio de Janeiro, for example).²⁴ This, in turn, can incentivize OCGs to *violently resist police*, which may then jeopardize the State's ability to build/sustain territorial control over a given area. Low police autonomy can therefore have distinct effects on the State's ability to control territory, depending on whether police choose to extract from or collaborate with OCGs. Both collaborative and conflictive police-OCG arrangements of this sort can have alarming implications for citizen security and human rights protections in marginalised urban communities.

Low Resources, High/Low Autonomy

By contrast, regardless of their autonomy from OCGs, where local police are deployed to criminal-controlled communities and lack the necessary resources to fulfil their mandates, State territorial control cannot increase. Where both police resources and autonomy are low, police are incapable of imposing order or punishing OCGs, and thus unable to incentivize changes in their behaviour. OCG territorial control and governance will therefore remain unaffected by State interventions in which both dimensions of police institutional capacity are low. Where resources are low, but autonomy is high, police are far more likely to be the targets of OCG violence. They will be unable to ensure access or mobility across a territory, limiting their presence as well as that of other State agents. Local police acting amid these inauspicious circumstances often adopt different strategies to try and counter OCGs, such as collaborating with other armed nonstate actors (fuelling further bloodshed). However, they may also simply enter into agreements with OCGs, lessening their autonomy from criminal actors in order to try and ensure their own survival.

²⁴ See Lessing's (2018) chapter on Rio de Janeiro for more information.

This last possibility underscores the fact that although police capacity is more static than elite coordination, it does still fluctuate. As we have seen, police resources and autonomy can *increase* over time, as in instances of *Security Reform*. However, the reverse is also true, and these dimensions of police capacity can thus *decrease*: should resources dry-up, police may *no longer* have the materiel or manpower to meaningfully sustain territorial control in an MUC to which they have been assigned. Moreover, the dimensions of police capacity discussed here are also often contextually dependent and thus, to some extent, relative. For example, a police force may have the resource endowments to build State territorial control in a given area in which an OCG threat emerges. And yet, should it then be tasked to increase its scope, and take control of new areas, its existing resources may become *insufficient* for the task. Finally, as alluded to above, police autonomy *can* be influenced by police resources: well-equipped, well-paid police might plausibly be less easily influenced by OCGs, and police that are poorly paid, have low manpower, and are ill-equipped, might be incentivized to work with OCGs. Indeed, it is unsurprising that different facets of State capacity can reinforce one another (see Centeno et al., 2017). Nonetheless, available police resources (or a lack thereof) cannot fully explain police autonomy, and as such these two variables can be considered independently, both conceptually and in terms of their effects.

Empirical Footprint

Police *resources* can be identified through a number of different means. Certainly, injections of funds, equipment, and manpower to local policing institutions are indicative of *increasing* resources. Reports of budget increases, salary raises, recruitment drives, the construction of new police bases, as well as spending on equipment and other law enforcement infrastructure and technologies are all useful evidence in this regard. That said, having acknowledged the relative quality of police institutional capacity, disclosures or observations of conditions on-the-ground in the spaces to which police are

deployed are just as revealing. Testimony from police, or indeed MUC residents can thus be useful in helping assess whether police resources in a given territory were high or low at a given point in time, as well as tracking changes in police resources.

As outlined, where police resources are sufficiently high, State territorial control will increase. This will result in numerous empirically observable effects. These should be discoverable through government and media reporting, as well as through interview testimony with police and residents of areas targeted for intervention. Firstly, Inter-OCG violence should diminish as the presence of high-resource police increases the cost of engaging in turf wars, evidenced by the declining frequency of shoot-outs in MUCs. OCG violence towards civilians should also decrease in these contexts, as well as instances of violent conflict between OCGs and State actors (where these previously occurred). Relatedly, we can expect that OCGs will be reported to no longer brandish weapons openly in areas in which police operate, as a consequence of their desire to avoid police repression. An empirical corollary of this is that civilian freedom of movement can be expected to increase in areas in which the State gains territorial control, manifesting in reports of greater flows of civilians in and out of communities in which mobility was circumscribed by OCGs. Moreover, with increased State territorial control, OCGs will undertake measures to avoid provoking police repression. We should therefore expect to find evidence of OCGs hiding their illegal activities from State detection. For example, if OCGs previously sold drugs in open-air markets, we might expect local residents to report that they switched to clandestine, indoor locations, to draw less attention from the police. Where evidence suggests that local police resources are low, we should not expect to find evidence of these changes.

Police autonomy from OCGs can be more difficult to gauge. Data on corruption are, by design, not readily accessible. However, it is possible to identify greater or lesser degrees of police autonomy from OCGs by both examining media reports (e.g., reportage that describes corrupt entanglements),

speaking to relevant experts (e.g., watchdogs and other civil society organisations), and through interviewing MUC residents. Indeed, where residents describe instances of police (routinely) meeting or collaborating with OCGs, then this points to low police autonomy. Where specific instances cannot be identified by interviewees, then this does not categorically point to high police autonomy, but does at least indicate that flagrant police-OCG collaboration is unlikely to be taking place. Where the autonomy of the police in a given community is higher, we should expect evidence of more conflictive relations between police and OCGs, such as higher numbers of OCG arrests. While hardly a perfect metric, testimony and observations of these sorts are useful in helping to gauge changing police-OCG relations, and greater or lesser degrees of collaboration between these two actors.

Additionally, if indeed police autonomy affects governance, we can expect to see OCGs retain their role in governing civilians where empirical indicators of autonomy are low. In other words, there will be little change in how OCGs exercise their power over community life regardless of any changes in State territorial control. This will of course depend on how (whether) OCGs had provided systems of civilian governance in a territory prior to the arrival of the police. Where police autonomy is higher, I expect to find evidence of OCGs responding to increased police presence by adapting and evolving. In situations such as these, I would expect MUC resident testimony to show OCGs ceasing to enforce particular rules and norms on civilians (where these had been previously upheld), in an effort to avoid being denounced to— and repressed by— the police. However, I would simultaneously expect to find evidence, such as newspaper reporting, police communiqués, or resident testimony, of increased OCG involvement in governing new groups and markets, in particular those less likely to attract State attention.

5. The Outcome: Assessing State Territorial Control

Having discussed the moving parts of the theoretical framework at length, I briefly summarize how I assess variation in State territorial control in marginalised urban communities in which OCGs operate. Kalyvas' (2006) five-point scale of wartime territorial control, in which patterns of “divided” control exist between “full” State or rebel control offers an important conceptual reference. Indeed, State's exercise “full control” over many urban spaces, such as in the commercial centres of most cities around the world, and OCGs are also capable of heavily restricting the State and exercising very high levels of (near) exclusive territorial control themselves. However, beyond these fairly clear-cut examples, the scale does not travel well to the contexts discussed here, not least because States and OCGs do not generally contest territorial control in a zero-sum fashion. A five-point scale of *State territorial control* might be more applicable to this context, but still I avoid categorizing State territorial control in this way: fixing discrete types of territorial control, with associated qualities, is overly prescriptive— my cases display far too much variation for such an approach to be of much analytical use. Just as how in all my case studies governance in MUCs remains within the broad category of “hybrid governance”, so too does territorial control in most instances fit something approximating the “divided” category. Thus, employing such categories in this instance occludes a great deal of important heterogeneity. Indeed, rather than seeking to explain distinct *types* of territorial control, this framework instead explains *changes* in territorial control *relative* to the ex-ante conditions that pertain in a city's MUCs. By avoiding categories and instead describing changes (relative increases/decreases) in State territorial control, the nuances of the individual cases come to the fore.

Where States intervene in marginalised urban communities dominated by OCGs, changes in territorial control can be assessed by triangulating from a multitude of indicators. Of course, the presence of State actors and the extent of their distribution— that is, whether they can access all areas within an

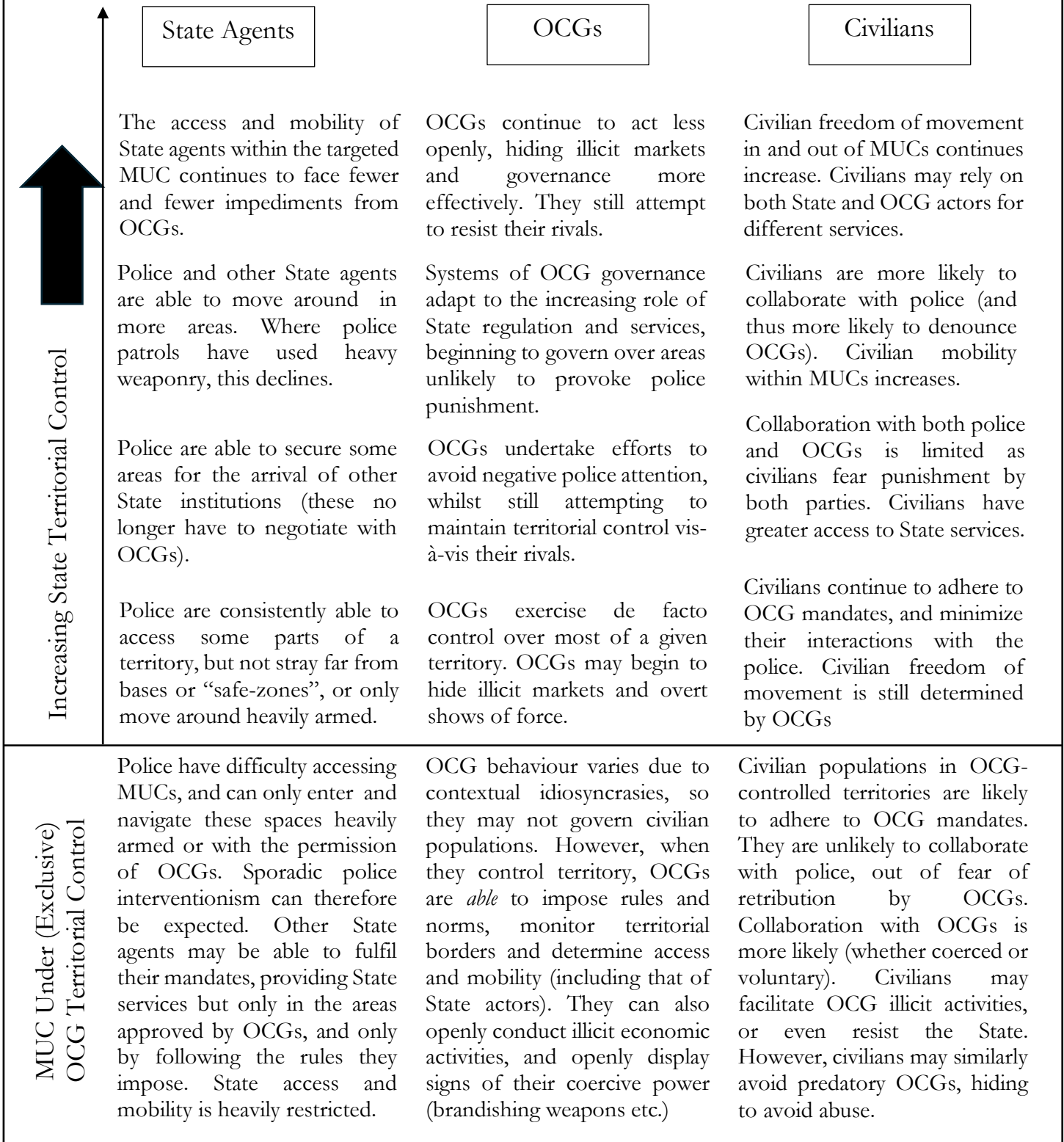
MUC– is a first, obvious indicator. However, beyond this, the *behaviour* of State actors is also highly revealing. As State territorial control increases, the ability of State actors to access, remain in, and traverse territory without let or hindrance should be made evident. Naturally, this is likely to also then manifest in observable signs of increasing State governance, such as increased service provisions.

However, as I have outlined in this chapter, OCGs can also be expected to alter their behaviour in response to the arrival of the State in the MUCs in which they operate. This is likely to leave observable traces, such as increasing efforts to hide illicit markets to avoid repression, or adapting systems of governance. As such, by studying OCG behaviour, we are afforded another important indicator of changing territorial control in MUCs. As State territorial control in a previously OCG-dominated space increases, OCG behaviour is likely to alter further still.

Nonetheless, beyond the State and OCGs, the coercive agents who control territory, the behaviour of other actors within marginalised urban communities is also extremely revealing. As such, in assessing territorial control and its variation I also look to the civilians who reside in MUCs. This does not make my theory any less State-centric, as MUC residents here are not included for their role in the causal story I tell, but rather due to their relevance as indicators of my outcome of interest. By studying the behaviour of MUC residents, as with State actors and OCGs, we are capable of building up a nuanced picture of the changing patterns of (State) territorial control in marginalised urban communities.

Examples of such behaviours are provided overleaf in **Figure 2.1**. This shows a set of indicators that could plausibly be found in an MUC in which police with high institutional capacity (high resources, high autonomy) intervened, increasing State territorial control as a result. Effectively, then, this figure illustrates what we might expect to see happen when observing different actors in an MUC in which *State Territorial Expansion* occurred (the top-right quadrant of **Table 2.1**, shown earlier in this chapter). The figure charts changes in the behaviours of the three groups of actors discussed above– State

Figure 2.1 Assessing State Territorial Control in MUCs



agents, OCG, and civilians. These are simply illustrative approximations, and these specific indicators are unlikely to emerge in strict sequence or unison in empirical reality. Thus, the information from the figure should be viewed as notional, and the indicators as helping illustrate a direction of travel in my outcome of interest; the figure does *not* present categories that can be matched in the cases.

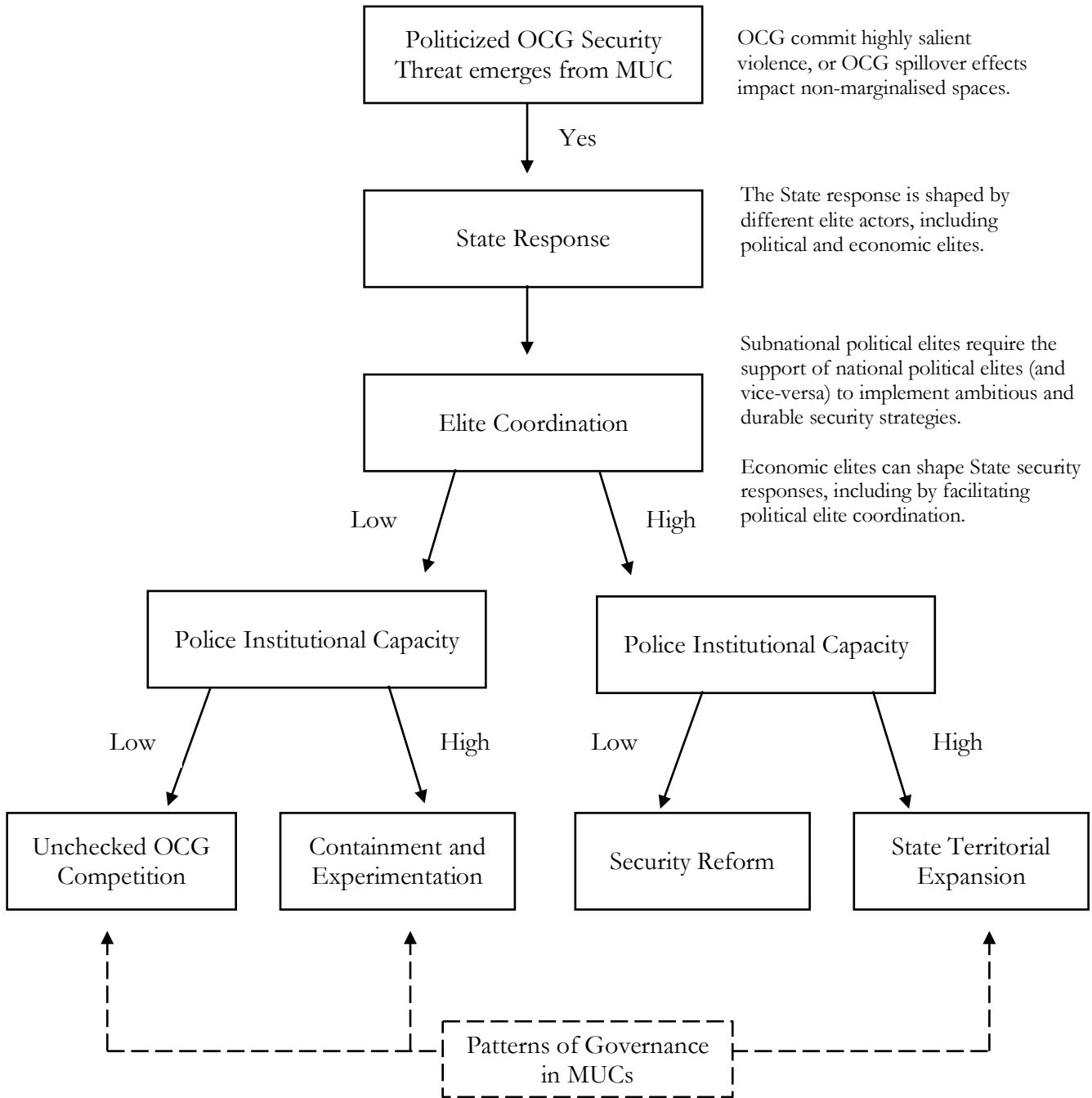
Of course, territorial control can on some occasions appear to be extremely fluid. If a heavily armoured group of police or military officials enters an OCG territory, conducting raids and detaining criminals over the course of an afternoon, they may well be able to exercise unimpeded access and mobility. They might therefore appear, for all intents and purposes, to have increased State territorial control during that time. However, my framework does not consider such transitory, fleeting changes. Rather, I seek to explain— and using indicators such as those above, identify— relatively *stable* changes in State territorial control in MUCs. My case studies therefore reveal changes in territorial control in marginalised urban spaces that generally endure for years at a time.

6. Reviewing the Argument in Sequence

Finally, **Figure 2.2** (overleaf) illustrates the different steps of my argument in full. This shows how OCG security threats spur State interventions into OCG controlled territories, and how elite coordination and police institutional capacity then interact to shape different outcomes.

In reviewing the argument, it is worth reiterating that although elite coordination and police capacity are independent from one another, the former can nonetheless influence the latter— through the process of *Security Reform*. That said, this only occurs under particular circumstances, where high levels of elite coordination arise, thanks to the dynamic convergence of political and economic elite interests, *but* local police institutional capacity is insufficiently high to contend with the OCG security threats that affect these elites. In contrast to elite coordination, then, police capacity is generally quite static,

Figure 2.2. Visualizing the Argument



OCG commit highly salient violence, or OCG spillover effects impact non-marginalised spaces.

The State response is shaped by different elite actors, including political and economic elites.

Subnational political elites require the support of national political elites (and vice-versa) to implement ambitious and durable security strategies.

Economic elites can shape State security responses, including by facilitating political elite coordination.

Whereas police *resources* primarily determine the State's ability to build territorial control, police *autonomy* from OCGs shapes distinct patterns of governance in MUCs.

with local police resources and autonomy generally being fixed unless altered by shocks, such as those that emerge thanks to elite coordination. This is illustrative of the fact that elite coordination affords greater momentum and “causal energy” to the framework than does police capacity, even while both remain necessary to shaping the outcome of interest.

A brief note on the sequencing of this framework. The conditions necessary for *State Territorial Expansion* as outlined here suppose a particular order to events: OCG security threats prompt State responses; Elite coordination shapes and drives forward these responses; Police institutional capacity then determines outcomes “on the ground”. What would be different if this order were to change?

Firstly, I do not anticipate that OCG security threats would be likely to emerge in urban settings where both levels of elite coordination on security matters and localized police institutional capacity were *already* high. The ability of the State to punish OCG infractions in these cases would likely serve to deter organised criminals from undertaking activities that might incur State repression—such as highly salient violence or activities that affect non-marginalised urban communities, as outlined previously. Consequently, under these conditions, we would also be unlikely to observe *State Territorial Expansion* into areas under OCG control. We might similarly question the interaction between elite coordination and police capacity: why can coordinated elites affect police capacity, but high levels of police capacity not galvanize elites to work together? Fundamentally, the answer to this lies in the difficulties of ensuring elite coordination. Simply having high-capacity local police is not enough to encourage collaboration among different elite actors; political elites at different tiers of government need to be incentivized to collaborate in addressing local insecurity (something which economic elites can help with), but they are unlikely to do so simply because local police have high enough institutional endowments. Indeed, it is not implausible to imagine a scenario where national authorities might *refuse* to assist subnational security efforts *because* they perceive local authorities to be sufficiently capable of

addressing OCG threats alone (amounting to “buck-passing” at the national level). Lastly, OCG security threats are essential to prompting State efforts at territorial expansion. Thus, where OCG security threats subside, any elite coordination they have prompted is likely to as well. This does not mean that State territorial control will necessarily *collapse*, but without the impetus behind its expansion, nor will it continue to increase: politicized security threats galvanize responses from elected decisionmakers, and thus instigate State action.

The next chapter introduces the reader to the empirics. Examining the emergence of marginalised urban communities across Latin America, this chapter explains how these territories went from being areas of State *neglect*, into being areas in which OCGs became embedded and State territorial control *restricted*. This chapter also recounts the particular trajectories that led OCGs to control MUCs in each of my case studies.

3. Antecedent Conditions: Marginalised Urban Communities in Contemporary Latin America

This chapter provides important contextual information for my subsequent empirical case studies by discussing antecedent conditions. After defining *what* marginalised urban communities are, the scope of the discussion narrows to focus on Latin America, underscoring how important structural transformations over the course of the 20th century endowed many Latin American cities with vast tracts of marginalised urban space. Contemporaneously, though especially during the final decades of the 20th century, OCGs spread across the region. The intersection of these phenomena is key to explaining the prevalence of OCG territorial control throughout Latin America. This convergence thus helps us understand why many marginalised urban communities went from being areas characterized by State *neglect*, to being areas in which OCG territorial control became consolidated, and State territorial control *actively restricted*. Indeed, this chapter also provides insight into why marginalised urban communities are environments that are particularly conducive to the development of expansive systems of civilian governance by OCGs. Finally, from this regional-level structural analysis, we turn to particular cities, the cases studies. Thus, the last section of this chapter briefly discusses the factors that led to the onset of OCG territorial control in each of my case cities. This helps underscore the variation across my cases, demonstrating that although all were shaped by comparable structural processes during the 20th century, OCG territorial control emerged in each instance in distinct ways, and with diverse characteristics, organisational features, and criminal governance structures.

1. Conceptualizing Marginalised Urban Communities and Explaining their Development

Marginalised urban communities are defined here as areas of *low State presence* relative to the rest of the city in which they are situated. While these communities may suffer from crime, poverty, and nonstate order, these can be considered conceptually as “peripheral characteristics”, of far less importance than their “core attribute” (Gerring, 1999), low State presence. Deficits in State presence mean that such MUCs benefit less from the legal protections and services (both public and private) which are more readily accessible elsewhere throughout better integrated, ‘non-marginalised’ parts of the city. At the risk of occluding a great deal of heterogeneity, then, we can broadly generalise that these communities tend to have “lower intensity” citizenship (O’Donnell, 1993) than elsewhere in the city.²⁵

Slums, land invasions, or shanty towns– makeshift informal settlements– represent a widespread example of marginalised urban communities. Slums have generally emerged during periods of intense rural-to-urban migration, evident throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries across the global North, and then throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the developing world. As Dürr notes, slums are created as an outcome “of mobility and movement” and thus ironically also partly out of “progress and modernity” (2012, p.708). Cities act as focal points for migrants seeking to benefit from the perceived opportunities that lie within them. As such, slums have tended to arise in contexts where city authorities are ill-prepared (or indisposed) to meet the basic needs of their increasing urban residents; that is, where rapid influxes in population outstrip the supply of public goods, including housing, sanitation, and available land. From Delhi (Pandley, 2001; cited in Ghertner, 2010, p.188), to Cochabamba (Goldstein, 2004, p.62-70), to Rio de Janeiro (Perlman, 2011, p.25),

²⁵ Citizenship, as Yashar (2013) notes, is a “fragile and dynamic” variable, and one both affected by the presence or absence of the State’s formal institutions as well as other informal institutions operative in society (p.431).

uncontrolled migration towards cities has produced (often enormous) tracts of unregulated urban sprawl across the developing world. Deprived of legal recognition, at least when they initially form, slums generally lag behind other urban areas in terms of State institutional presence and access to public services.

Nonetheless, it is inaccurate to categorise all marginalised urban communities as *informal* settlements. Indeed, many MUCs have emerged as the direct result of State action, such as the townships of the Cape Flats (Standing, 2006, pp.3-6), or innumerable other State-led housing developments across the developing world. Moreover, as the result of gradual land titling, many marginalised urban communities which originated as “illegal”, unregulated settlements are now recognised by the State, a pattern exemplified by several of my case studies.

This highlights that although MUCs are *in part* the result of State incapacity— that is, incapacity to provide shelter, regulate services, or control urbanisation etc.— upon examining urban marginalisation more critically, it becomes evident that State presence is *also* often lacking in such spaces due to the lack of political will to ensure their maintenance, regulation and improvement. Indeed, it is generally easier for State authorities to *not* extend services and governance to what are often viewed as undesirable areas and populations. Moreover, there may well be *benefits* to perpetuating marginalisation: political parties may exploit the deprivation of these places to establish clientelist ties with residents and secure votes; business elites might draw cheap labour from these areas, effectively profiting from their impoverishment; and politicians may benefit from these repositories of stigmatised and securitised populations in order to buy support from an “in-group”. In sum, although urban marginalisation may well arise from State *incapacity*, the emergence and persistence of marginalisation is also the consequence of conscious, interest-driven decision-making.

Finally, to be clear, marginalisation is deep-rooted. As such, even in cases where the State extends territorial control into an MUC, this does not mean that *it ceases* to be marginalised. Indeed, relative to the rest of the city in which it is situated, it is very likely that— at least in the near-term— such a community will continue to exist in a state of marginalisation. State territorial control and urban marginalisation are therefore not considered here to be mutually exclusive.

With this definition and context in mind, we now direct our gaze towards Latin America, and ask: how can we explain the prevalence of marginalised urban communities across the region? And, why are so many of these communities the sites of OCG territorial control?

1.1 MUCs in Latin America: ISI, Urbanisation, and Informal Economies

Marginalised urban communities, as we have seen, are generally found in contexts of intense cityward migration and State administrative neglect. In attempting to understand these spaces and their development in Latin America, then, it must first be acknowledged that the pace of regional urbanisation has been staggering. In 1950, around 40 percent of the region's inhabitants resided in urban areas. By 1990, however, this rested at approximately 70 percent, reaching nearly 80 percent circa-2010 (Arsht, 2014). By this time, then, Latin America had become the most urbanised region in the global south, and the rate at which it has undergone the urbanisation process was unparalleled (Perlman, 2011, p.46). To understand this rapid urban growth, we can start by looking to the developmental strategies pursued across Latin America throughout the 20th century.

To draw from Davis (2017), Latin America's marginalised urban communities can be conceived of as the direct spatial legacies of the priorities set by the region's developmental States in the last century (p.63). Davis argues that during the heyday of Latin American Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI), the support offered by the government to manufacturing prompted unchecked urban growth, but at the expense of agriculture, which was undermined. Nonetheless, while factory-led

industrialisation was established as a development priority, it failed to provide sufficient jobs to meet the massive groundswell in urban demand. What is more, the same set of protectionist ISI policies also simultaneously fostered “the unparalleled economic vibrancy of the informal sector” in Latin America, as restrictions on imports encouraged the formation of black markets across the region for the illegal importation and resale of foreign goods. Thus, the informal sector became both enormously lucrative and capable of absorbing many of the underemployed who had migrated to the cities (p.69). Similar spatial and economic legacies of development and industrialisation were not observed throughout *all* developing countries during the 20th century. Certain East Asian Tigers, for example, remained predominantly rural for longer, and thus witnessed comparatively more moderate rates of urbanisation. Moreover, deriving from the fact that these States prioritised “employment over capital intensity in commercial and industrial production”, the pace of industrial growth matched that of urbanisation, meaning that cities were not over-saturated. Consequently, this ensured that the informal sector was far smaller than in Latin America (p.70).

The Statist development model pursued across Latin America therefore bears responsibility for producing sprawling urban panoramas rife with under-serviced, unregulated, marginalised communities— themselves centres for booming informal economies. This is not to overlook the fact that other dynamics drove Latin America’s population towards its cities, such as horrific rural violence in Colombia, Peru and throughout Central America. Nor should this regional trend occlude that other factors have influenced *where* marginalised communities have developed within particular cities. Illegal land speculation in Rio de Janeiro has contributed to the city’s westward expansion in recent decades (Perlman, 2011, p.32), and semi-legal land speculation by economic elites with close ties to politics shaped the outward spread of urbanisation in cities such as Medellín²⁶ and Ciudad Juárez in the 20th

²⁶ Interview with Sandra Ramírez Patiño, Economic Historian, Universidad de Antioquia. 15/12/2021, p0x55

century. In Juárez, squatters are reported to also have been provided with plots of land by clientelist politicians in exchange for votes, populating near-inaccessible areas at the foot of the *Sierra de Juárez* (Rodríguez Nieto, 2012, pp.127, 128).

Regardless of these particularities, the subscription of Latin American States to ISI strategy came with costs, and strongly influenced the extent to which marginalised urban communities and informal economic activity proliferated across the region's cities. The production of these spaces, as Davis summarises, undermined State capacity in Latin America's cities primarily in two ways. Firstly, in fostering the creation of communities bereft of services, the State undermined (or at least failed to accrue) its legitimacy, and instead encouraged other nonstate actors to take on the role of core service providers. Secondly, in tolerating the proliferation of informality, the rule of law was eroded, as both States and citizens alike became habituated to the thriving informal economy, and associated illegality. Relatedly, this entrenched informality provided incentives and opportunities for bribery and corruption among police, who could profit from extortion, leveraging their power over vast numbers of informal actors. This allowed for dense profit-oriented linkages to be built between law enforcement and illegal markets (p.65). Indeed, Trejo and Ley (2020) have compellingly evidenced that across Latin America's non-democratic regimes during the second half of the 20th century, State security services were actively involved in protecting and profiting from illegal markets, especially narcotrafficking. This practice was evident in Chile, Brazil, Panama, Guatemala, and Mexico, to name just a few examples, and was a means by which authoritarian regimes secured the loyalty of their coercive actors, thus helping mitigate the dilemma of "authoritarian control" (Svolik, 2012) and quelling internal challenges to their power.

The particular path of State-led developmentalism in Latin America therefore encouraged the formation of marginalised urban communities, marginalisation which was further entrenched through

the embeddedness of these spaces within networks of illegal and informal economic activity. However, it would take the massive expansion of international drug trafficking in the 1980s to transform these spaces from being ones *neglected* by the State, to being ones *controlled* by violent organised criminal groups.

1.2 The Cocaine Boom: OCGs Take Root in Marginalised Urban Communities

The onset of OCG territorial control in Latin America's marginalised urban communities varies enormously: we cannot, for example, explain the emergence of violent street gangs in Central America without accounting for US immigration policy and deportations in the 1990s, but US deportations offer us little explanatory leverage for understanding the emergence of territorial OCGs elsewhere (e.g. Colombia, Brazil). Indeed, as this chapter will presently show, the particular trajectories that led to the onset of OCG territorial control in each of my case studies are distinct. Nonetheless, it is still clear that certain factors have widespread relevance to explaining the *proliferation of OCGs regionally*. The international drugs trade throughout Latin America— particularly in the late 20th century— played a considerable role in propagating OCG territorial control, even while its effects were staggered, and felt in different areas at different times.

With State neglect, and the collaboration of law enforcement agents, marginalised urban communities in many Latin American cities were already repositories for illegal activities, such as smuggling, theft, and other petty and organised crimes. Autonomous neighbourhood self-protection groups— be these vigilantes, strongmen, or local *caciques*— were common in these spaces, as were youth gangs. However, with the cocaine boom of the 1980s, well organised criminal networks began to consolidate across the region, typified at the time most famously by the so-called *Cartels* of Medellín and Cali in Colombia. Large drug trafficking networks of this sort would, for different reasons, occasionally engage urban gangs for support; whether this was for helping with the transportation or storage of illegal

merchandise,²⁷ or using them as foot soldiers in their bids to secure protection— and even wage war.²⁸ These connections, in conjunction with the glut of cocaine circulating throughout the region bound for the United States and Europe, soon meant that many such gangs turned to the highly lucrative street retail of cocaine (and later crack). As such, in the final decades of the 20th century, gangs had spread throughout marginalised urban communities across the region, and were commonly involved in the retail of cocaine as well as other drugs. Given rampant police corruption, and the embeddedness of some of these groups in transnational smuggling networks, many gangs could quite easily access weaponry, which could be used to control illicit markets and fend off competition.

To be clear, the emergence of drug retail across Latin America has been one of *the primary factors* in catalysing urban OCGs to control territory. Recall that the driving logic of OCG territorial control is to exclude rivals, largely for economic gain.²⁹ Succinctly put, then, territorial control allows for monopolisation of highly lucrative local drug markets by criminal actors. Of course, OCGs might also seek control over territory to extort, or monopolize other markets, but in the dwindling years of the 20th century, drugs became a major incentive for many of these groups to try and dominate fixed turfs. Beyond simply incentivizing OCGs to control territory, there is compelling evidence that involvement in the drug trade has also provided criminal groups with incentives to *govern* civilian populations, as this is instrumentally advantageous in mitigating civilian discontent, and thus helps to decrease the vulnerability of incumbent OCGs to challenges from their rivals or repression from the State (Blattman et al., 2021). We return to the question of OCG governance again shortly.

²⁷ As in the cases of Rio de Janeiro (Grillo, 2016), or Ciudad Juárez (Wolff, 2015).

²⁸ As in the case of Medellín (Durán-Martínez, 2018).

²⁹ As Lessing (2021) points out, there are many other reasons why OCG actors might seek to control territory beyond rational economic incentives. Indeed, youth gangs without any economic interests can display territorial behavior (see Schneider, 1999), which is arguably unsurprising if we consider that not only human communities, but also animals value and delineate territory (Johnson and Toft, 2013).

1.3 Structural Adjustment: Escalating Urban Marginalisation and Violence

Another region-wide juncture relevant to understanding Latin America's marginalised urban communities is the period of structural adjustment. This accompanied the end of the ISI-era, following the debt crisis of the 1980s and the acute economic downturns of the 1990s. In many cases structural adjustment reinforced the patterns of urban marginalisation heretofore described. The adoption of the so-called Washington Consensus across Latin America— otherwise termed regional “neoliberalisation”— brought with it a shrinking of the State, with many State-owned industries closing or privatising and austerity measures being favoured over social spending. This in turn exacerbated social and income polarity and fuelled further growth in the informal sector, “patterns [which] lie at the root of growing violence and insecurity” in the region (Davis, 2017, pp. 68, 69). Violence and criminality soared throughout Latin America's urban centres in the 1990s following the region's dual transitions to democracy and market liberalism, a trend evidenced by studies from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia (González, 2021, p.175), Mexico (Davis, 2013) and Central America (Yashar, 2018), to cite just a few examples. This sharp regional spike in ostensibly apolitical violence in the 1990s can therefore at least in part be associated with the decline of formal employment and the undermining of existing social safety nets which accompanied market liberalism. Coupled with this, the fallout of structural adjustment also helped consolidate the conditions of marginalisation present in many of Latin America's cities. While peasants had migrated to cities in search of manufacturing jobs during the ISI era, these had all but dried up. Now, as State retrenchment and privatisation led to price hikes, marginalised community residents faced increasing barriers to accessing formal services. Thus, if region-wide *industrialisation and protectionism* had previously helped supercharge informality, urban mass-migration, and the emergence of marginalised urban communities, *deindustrialisation and market liberalism* then only further exacerbated these problems.

That said, structural adjustment did not slow the pace of rural-urban migration, with MUCs continuing to grow unabated. Naturally, sustained urban growth in conjunction with persistent levels of unemployment and informality provided an abundant reservoir of potential recruits for the region's thriving illicit economies. Indeed, as traditional exporting sectors declined, the importance of grey and black markets for local economies increased: for example, as textile production in Medellín died-off, its role in the local economy was arguably replaced by illicit international trade networks operating in the city (Briscoe, 2014, p.35). As such, while the push towards free-trade and economic integration witnessed in the 1980s and 1990s compounded urban marginalisation, fuelling informality, unemployment, and violence, it also contributed to the expansion and consolidation of transnational illicit networks, facilitating cross-border flows of goods between the global north and south— a dimension of market liberalisation termed “deviant globalisation” (Gilman et al., 2011).

1.4 Democratisation: The State Reinforces Marginalisation

Nonetheless, the contemporaneous regional transition towards democracy also failed to bring about significant changes in many State institutions, preserving intact powerful vestiges of their authoritarian pasts. This included the widespread perseverance of undemocratic policing institutions across the region, which continue(d) to exercise “authoritarian coercion” despite democratisation (González, 2021). During the preceding decades of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, police power had grown exponentially, a process which afforded these actors “extraordinary leeway” and minimal oversight, establishing the “foundations for abuse of power” (Davis, 2010, p.40). These foundations remained largely intact for most of the 20th century and beyond. The persistence of unreformed policing institutions therefore perpetuated not only abusive and nondemocratic forms of State coercion, but also helped preserve the clandestine linkages between State and criminal actors that had

been forged decades prior, and which were integral to the flourishing of the region's illicit economies (Auyero, 2007; Trejo and Ley, 2020).

As Yashar (2018) has shown, institutional ruptures during the 1980s and 1990s did help significantly improve the autonomy and efficacy of certain police forces, even despite otherwise inauspicious circumstances— as in the case of Nicaragua. Nonetheless institutional continuity prevailed in a great many contexts, facilitating the persistence of selective, authoritarian policing practices at the cost of democratic rule of law. Additionally, as the literature on “penal populism” has highlighted, democratic politics often *reinforced and validated* authoritarian coercive practices, demonstrated by the widespread support for *mano dura* strategies across Latin America's post-Third Wave democracies.³⁰ Indeed, the practices of democratic partisan politics have often only further complicated the process of comprehensive security sector reform, as found by analyses from across distinct spatial and temporal contexts in Latin America (Arias and Goldstein, 2010; González, 2021). Needless to say, the contemporaneous stepping-up of the US War on Drugs that accompanied the Third Wave and post-Third Wave period also reinforced the tendency towards militarisation in Latin America's police, providing training, arms, and structural incentives to ensure that these institutions remained focussed on combatting “internal enemies” and penalising the rural and urban poor rather than strictly safeguarding the rule of law.

With the perpetuation of ineffective rule of law institutions, continued urbanisation, and a spike in violence and criminality in Latin America's urban centres, reports of vigilantism in the region's marginalised urban communities not only persisted (Huggins, 1991; Goldstein, 2004, ch.5; Davis, 2006, pp.55, 56), but from the mid-1990s rose dramatically (even accounting for better documentation) with an estimated 6000 vigilante murders occurring across the region per year

³⁰ Though this phrase was originally associated with Central America, it is now used more widely by scholars (Seelke, 2007)

(Johnson, 2004; Cited in Ungar, 2007, p.24). Indeed, vigilante justice continues unabated even today in neglected parts of the region's major cities.³¹ The emergence of vigilantism was accompanied in some cases by the formation of death squads and militias, who often maintained very close ties to State coercive institutions, and thus received a degree of (tacit) acceptance in carrying out social cleansing in poor and marginalised neighbourhoods. Simultaneously, there was a boom in the private security sector across Latin America, a trend which had begun in the 1980s but which in the 1990s and 2000s grew massively (Ungar, 2007, p.20). Exemplifying this, by 2010 private security guards outnumbered police in every country of Central America besides El Salvador (UNODC, 2012, p. 71, Cited in Blackwell, 2015). Another trend which accompanied the beginning of the private security boom of the late 1980s and 1990s was the increasing segregation of Latin America's urban landscape. Those with sufficient resources withdrew to private gated communities, protected high-rises, or to peripheral enclaves far from the increasingly dilapidated city centres. This spatial segregation which emerged in the late 20th century, with rich and poor occupying their own separate urban domains, is captured by Caldeira's (2000) terminology of the "city of walls"; an elegant descriptor for the socially stratified city found throughout the contemporary Americas.

Across Latin America's cities, then, the changes provoked by the structural adjustments in the latter two decades of the last century compounded the conditions of marginalisation and informality in which many urban inhabitants resided— themselves to a great extent the product of previous industrialisation efforts. A wave of insecurity accompanied this period: this was not simply unrestrained *despite* democratisation, but often intensified *because* of democratic politics. These changes further entrenched urban segregation, with elites fortifying themselves in secure enclaves, and privatised forms of protection becoming increasingly widespread. Thus, by the turn of the millennium,

³¹ Interview with MUC Resident, Comuna 2, Medellín. 10/12/2021. lc1ub.; Interview with NGO official who has worked in different Colombian MUCs, 21/01/2022. kp0k2.

many of the region's major cities continued to host large numbers of marginalised urban communities. These remained centres of unregulated informal economies, the targets of hostile and selective policing practices and extra-legal vigilantism, and in many instances the consolidated territorial preserves of organised criminal groups.

1.5 Urban Marginalisation: Shaping OCG Governance

As we have seen, structural changes largely underlay the emergence of marginalised urban communities in Latin America's cities, as well as the consolidation of OCG territorial control in these spaces. Marginalised urban communities thus initially emerged as spaces neglected by the State. Over time, however, they often became areas in which OCGs developed territorial control, and the State's ability to act was sometimes restricted.

To conclude with this section, and its regional perspective, it is worth underscoring that the existence of urban marginalisation is essential to understanding the expansive systems of civilian governance that organised criminal actors sometimes exercise. That is, marginalised urban communities are environments that *are particularly favourable* to the development of OCG civilian governance structures. This can be exemplified by looking at illustrative evidence from Medellín; though comparable patterns are observable elsewhere.

In Medellín's marginalised residential *comunas*,³² areas historically neglected by the State, local gangs known as *combos* govern community life to varying degrees, imposing rules on residents, restricting entry to their turfs, controlling local markets, and extorting. Given the relatively fixed residential populations of the comunas and the longstanding State absence from these areas, the combos have

³² In actual fact, *comuna* is the administrative term used for an urban territory— Medellín's centre is also a *comuna*. However, it is also colloquially used in reference to the residential neighbourhoods that surround the city centre and stretch across the Aburrá valley.

been able to embed themselves over recent decades, and develop expansive, *generalized* systems of civilian governance that apply across these communities. This contrasts sharply with the highly *selective* systems of criminal governance that are imposed in Medellín’s commercial centre, a space where State administrative power is concentrated, and the State exercises unrestricted territorial control. Here gangs known as *convivir* control territory, deal drugs and extort, but do not have the same wide-reaching influence as the combos. Informal vendors are obliged to pay the *convivir* for “protection”,³³ as are other actors who might affect the profitability of these vendors. This includes thieves, who pay the *convivir* a commission to carry out theft in the city centre (or risk violent punishment).³⁴ Thieves are not permitted to steal from individuals when they are transacting with vendors, but once transactions are concluded, civilians can become targets for (approved) theft.³⁵ However, *beyond this narrow set of actors*— those involved in commerce and those who can detrimentally affect it³⁶ — *the convivir do not govern civilian populations* in the generalized manner of the combos.

Thus, the combos and *convivir* both *control territory* in order to monopolize illicit markets, but *govern* distinctly. The *convivir* offer a form of *selective* governance, regulating the conduct of specific actors, but do not involve themselves in a more *generalized* way in the lives of civilians in the territories they control. Indeed, they *cannot*, given that the city centre is a hub through which tens of thousands of citizens pass every day, unlike the residential neighbourhoods controlled by the combos. Moreover, it would be *against their interests* to do so, as these gangs profit from the commerce associated with the

³³ This form of compulsory payment therefore could technically be considered a form of taxation levied in exchange for services.

³⁴ Interview with leading crime reporter at El Colombiano. 16/02/2022. 6lbtF; Interview with Ricardo Aricapa, prominent local journalist and author, 09/02/2022. 59rrp

³⁵ Interview with MUC resident and JAC affiliate, Comuna 1, Popular. 12/02/2022. jogb6.

³⁶ Additionally, as Moncada (2021) has shown, the *convivir* also regulate the presence and conduct of homeless people and drug addicts, recognising that any antisocial behaviour from these groups can also affect the business interests of vendors. Moncada sites an example where a particular *convivir* forced homeless people to stop using a particular area as their toilet, as the smell negatively affected the ability of nearby informal vendors to attract customers.

unimpeded access of outsiders to their turfs— once again, unlike the combos in their residential communities.³⁷

Certainly, the presence/absence of urban marginalisation does not *alone* explain heterogenous patterns of OCG governance. In this thesis, we see enormous variation in the OCG provision of governance, despite focussing exclusively on marginalised urban communities. Indeed, diverse economic, social, and political factors all motivate OCGs to provide governance functions in different contexts (Lessing, 2021), and variation in armed nonstate actors’ time horizons are clearly influential in shaping their incentives to govern— echoing the logic of Olson’s (1993) “roving” and “stationary” bandits (Arias, 2017; Lessing, 2021; Felbab-Brown, et al., 2018; Arjona, 2016). However, the core point raised here is that marginalised urban communities, with their low State presence and established residential populations, offer *unique opportunities* for OCGs to develop expansive civilian governance structures; these are *not* found everywhere across urban space.

2. OCG Territorial Control across the Case Studies

From the regional-level we now go to the city-level, and discuss the onset of OCG territorial control in each of the chosen cases. This is useful in one sense in allowing my empirical chapters to jump straight into an analysis of State responses to OCG insecurity, and focus solely on tracing the processes that led to the activation of my theoretical causal pathway in each distinct locale. However, this section also adds empirical texture to the case studies, introducing certain local level specificities that cannot be captured when discussing structural changes at the regional-level. I embrace this *ex-ante* heterogeneity given its potential theoretical relevance (which I return to discuss in Chapter 8). Indeed,

³⁷ As one marginalised community resident explained, the dynamics between the centre and the *comunas* are so different because while the *comunas* are primarily residential neighbourhoods, the centre is overwhelmingly commercial, making it a criminal “no man’s land”, one where control is looser and governance far more circumscribed (Interview with MUC resident and Municipal worker, Comuna 13, 04/02/2022. fx7q3)

variation in the onset and development of OCG territorial control, as well as the emergence of OCG security threats in marginalised urban communities, produces distinct pre-existing conditions across my case sites. The final section of this chapter therefore foregrounds some of the particularities of the cases, offering short historical overviews of the ascent of OCG territorial control in each of the chosen cities.

2.1 Medellín

Medellín, an economic powerhouse of Colombia, has long attracted mass migration, driven by economic opportunity as well as rural violence. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, a huge wave of migrants settled in the city. While initially local landowners sold off plots of their *fincas* to settlers,³⁸ the unabated rate of urbanisation meant that soon any vacant areas became occupied, including the municipal rubbish dump. In areas including what would later become the notorious Comuna 13, entirely new neighbourhoods were rapidly birthed, with over five thousand families settling in only five years in areas such as El Salado, making this the fastest growing land invasion in all of Latin America at the time (Aricapa, 2015, p.24). These patterns continued throughout the second half of the 20th century, as Medellín's industries— including a strong textiles sector— further fuelled urban expansion. Given the illegality of these settlements, they were left without access to formal services, and so community organisations took it on themselves to dig wells, pave walkways, construct drainage channels, and perform the dangerous task of securing illegal electricity connections.³⁹ A priest who worked in Medellín's MUCs in the 1980s summarised the situation in these neighbourhoods as such: “[during that time] the State was entirely indolent and absent”.⁴⁰ To this day, many peripheral areas of

³⁸ The sale of land to settlers was later take up by FARC and ELN militias in the 1990s, and is till practiced by territorial OCGs in Medellín today (Interview with community leader, La Sierra 22/02/2022, uq4v7).

³⁹ Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 3, 11/02/2022, nem3a; Interview with Journalist, Reinaldo Spitaletta 07/02/2022, 1yjfo; Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 3, 26/02/2022 ug69x

⁴⁰ Interview with Priest and MUC resident, Comuna 13, 12/02/2022, laco2

the city still rely on community action to ensure access to water and other basic infrastructure and services.⁴¹

Despite the deprivation and poverty of Medellín's MUCs, testimony from early settlers suggests that these were not typically violent areas. A lack of State governance meant that interpersonal disputes might be settled violently— often with machetes, hallmarks of the settlers' rural roots⁴²— but violence was not widespread or in any way systematic. In the 1970s, youth gangs became more common in these areas, fostered by a lack of educational and employment opportunities. Colloquially, these gangs came to be known as *combos*, a term which underscores their origins as products of neighbourhood socialisation, given that *combo* can also be used to refer to a group of friends.⁴³ Many combos came to be coordinated by *bandas*, more powerful criminal groups who exercise(d) territorial presence through the highly localised combos, and who have traditionally had linkages with drug trafficking organisations (DTOs).

With the cocaine boom and the growth of the DTO known as the *Medellín Cartel* in the 1980s, Pablo Escobar began recruiting Medellín's localised gangs as foot soldiers, or *sicarios*. Particularly during the second half of the decade, the lucrative *sicariato* work offered by the Medellín Cartel fuelled the spread of *bandas* throughout the city's deprived residential areas. The proliferation of these groups dramatically escalated violence across Medellín in both *direct and indirect* ways.

Escobar's war on the State, beginning in the mid-1980s and lasting until his death in December 1993, was *directly* responsible for ramping-up violence across Medellín as the city's *bandas* were armed and

⁴¹ Interview with MUC resident and JAC leader, Comuna 1, 12/02/2022, jogb6; Interview, MUC resident, Altavista, 15/02/2022, k1iwj

⁴² Interview, MUC resident, Comuna 13, 27/02/2022, bsmkc

⁴³ In both empirical chapters focused on Colombia, it is the combos who emerge as the primary OCG of interest at the local level. While many of these groups have coordinated with larger structures at different points in their history (including left-wing insurgencies and right-wing paramilitaries), and while there is considerable heterogeneity between these groups, there is also a great degree of similarity in the nature of these units at the local level, and how they implement "gang rule".

encouraged to wage war, but provided with few incentives for restraint by *either their Cartel sponsors or the State*. Escobar never sought to closely control or discipline these groups, but simply used them as instruments of violence. Moreover, police presence in many MUCs had already been extremely circumscribed, but once the authorities became the targets for Escobar's *sicarios*, certain neighbourhoods became entirely off-limits. Consequently, MUCs began to transition from being areas of *low state presence* into sites of *exclusive OCG territorial control*.

The *bandas* and their constituent *combos* also *indirectly* fuelled bloodshed in Medellín by encouraging the formation of neighbourhood self-defence groups, or *militias*. Given the ineffectiveness of the police, MUC residents across Medellín took up arms to protect themselves from the predation of OCGs (Salazar, 2018, p.186). Naturally, given their underlying *raison d'être*, these urban *militias* sought to more carefully control territory and discharge greater governance functions than did the *sicario* youths they fought. The arrival of guerrilla groups, including the FARC and ELN,⁴⁴ in Medellín throughout the latter half of the 1980s and 1990s compounded this situation. These guerrilla cells further curtailed the ability of the police to act in many MUCs across the city, and integrated existing *militias* into their structures, forming their own territorial organisations as part of their campaign of urban warfare.⁴⁵ The different *militias* and self-defence groups closely protected the borders of their territories, and demanded strict adherence to behavioural codes within them. While these varied from group to group, they might include prohibitions on drugs, the imposition of curfews, or the punishment of disorderly or deviant behaviours: one interviewee recounted to me how they saw a *militia* member publicly castigate a youth who was acting disrespectfully towards his mother, and how children caught with drugs were beaten with a leather strap.⁴⁶ Indeed, while several interviewees

⁴⁴ *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* and *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, respectively

⁴⁵ Interview with Santiago Londoño former City Councillor, Medellín. 08/02/2022, 0z6et

⁴⁶ Interview with JAC Leader, peripheral area of Comuna 1, 18/02/2022, qv8f2

recalled the period of militia control with fear, given that the militias would perform armed patrols and interrogate residents,⁴⁷ others remember them more fondly, as imposing a more ‘moral’ and ‘decent’ order on the community than their criminal successors.⁴⁸

Over the course of the 1980s, then, a vast number of the informal settlements that comprised Medellín’s urban landscape transformed from being areas primarily characterised by State neglect and endogenous development, into areas in which armed, nonstate actors exercised territorial control. With the proliferation of territorial OCGs and other armed nonstate actors throughout the 1980s, violence was escalating to unprecedented levels, representing an unambiguous security threat. While many of Medellín’s OCGs had not *yet* developed expansive governance structures, this would change considerably in the 1990s, with the breakdown of the Medellín Cartel and the arrival of urban paramilitaries. After reviewing the failed State responses to the OCG security threat that emerged in the 1980s, my first empirical chapter picks up at this point, with Medellín poised to become the most violent city in the world.

2.2 Monterrey

For over a century, Monterrey has been one of northern Mexico’s industrial centres, and a key destination for migrants from surrounding States. Following the inauguration of a railway linking Monterrey to Laredo, Texas, at the end of the 19th century, the city boomed from domestic and international investment, with a metal foundry, a brewery, and textiles and glass production industries all emerging in quick succession.⁴⁹ Throughout the 20th century, the city continued to grow, with large areas of unplanned and unregulated urban sprawl emerging around the foothills of the mountains surrounding the city. Between the 1950s-1980s, several different types of MUC developed across the

⁴⁷ Interview with Orlando García, community leader, Comuna 1, 23/02/2022, 0nolh

⁴⁸ Interview with JAC Leader, peripheral area of Comuna 1, 18/02/2022, qv8f2

⁴⁹ Interview with David Canales, local historian, Monterrey, 10/08/2022, yxkkb

urban landscape. Closer to the historic centre, established MUCs that had formed earlier in the century, such as La Independencia ('La Indepe') and La Campana, continued to expand upwards into the mountains thanks to the arrival of informal settlers, or '*paracaidistas*' (parachutists). In other areas, entirely new settlements were created through State programmes. Under FOMERREY,⁵⁰ provided by the Nuevo León state government, *paracaidista* communities were granted formal recognition, as well as access to (some) basic services and infrastructure. Elsewhere, planned communities for labourers were built under the Federal INFONAVIT⁵¹ programme. While distinct in their origins, and with diverse levels of development, many of these different communities would come to share common features as the years passed, including low State presence, uneven access to services, and the appearance of *pandillas*, or youth gangs.

During the 1980s, *pandillas* became widespread throughout Monterrey's MUCs. Nonetheless, these were not particularly violent, and did not exercise strong territorial control. Indeed, despite their regular harassment and detention by the police— who would enter MUCs fleetingly to beat and arrest youths playing football or drinking beer in the street— these were *not* OCGs.⁵² At the time, youth gangs were instead characterised by their conspicuous (often outlandish) outfits, and interest in Colombian cumbia music. Many interviewees noted that gangs would frequently engage in rock fights with their rivals, would often beat one another, and sometimes used blades, but largely left other members of the community alone. By the 1990s, many youth gangs had allied together, forming larger networks and using symbols to distinguish themselves.⁵³ This reinforced divisions between the groups and their neighbourhood 'turfs'.

⁵⁰ *Fomento Metropolitano de Monterrey*.

⁵¹ *Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores*.

⁵² Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 06/08/2022. 09f56; Interview with former-MUC resident and Fuerza Civil training consultant. 03/08/2022. k4nce

⁵³ Two big gang 'blocs' during the 1990s were distinguishable by their use of the 'Lone Star' and the number '1' as identifying symbols. (Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 06/08/2022. 09f56.)

The situation had begun to change by the year 2000, with the spread crack cocaine and guns on the streets. Whereas firearms had been a rarity during the 1980s, by the end of the 1990s handguns began to be more commonly carried (and used) by gang members. This produced upticks in violence, and may have been an early indication of the inroads that OCGs were making into the city's MUCs. Senior figures from major drug trafficking groups, such as the Gulf Cartel, were present in Monterrey at this time, but there is little reason (or evidence) to suggest that these powerful trafficking organisations were involved with the city's MUCs, or their youth *pandillas*.

In 2008, after a war between the trafficking groups the *Beltrán Leyva Organisation* (BLO) and the *Sinaloa Cartel* began, the Beltrán Leyva group moved into metropolitan Monterrey seeking refuge. Another OCG *Los Zetas* soon followed, and began to capture large swathes territory. Indeed, the BLO had recently partnered with the Zetas (Dudley, 2012). The Zetas' methods were brutal, and felt especially acutely in the city MUCs, many of which would become strongholds for this OCG. As the Zetas took control of these neighbourhoods, they first purged them of their *pandillas*, before recruiting local youths as foot soldiers and street dealers— which many of my interviewees simply characterised as “*carne de cañon*” (cannon fodder).⁵⁴ Arming these youths, and conducting vehicular patrols throughout their turfs, the ascendancy of the Zetas brought a fierce form of OCG territorial control to Monterrey's MUCs.

Unlike the entrenched and expansive systems of civilian governance that OCGs have historically upheld in Medellín and Rio, the Zetas imposed a shallow but highly effective system of order in their turfs, maintained through fear and draconian punishment. My case study begins when Monterrey was

⁵⁴ Interview with MUC Resident, La Independencia. 04/08/2022, t83cm; Interview with academic, resident of Guadalupe. 09/06/2022, rexdm; Interview with Tatiana Arambide, former director of the Instituto de la Juventud Regia (2011-2012). 30/08/2022, 6q3ti

on the verge of an unprecedented wave of violence, recounting the Zetas' ascent and detailing the consolidation of OCG territorial control in Monterrey's MUCs.

2.3 Rio de Janeiro

Rio de Janeiro's first favelas are said to have been constructed at the end of the 19th century by decommissioned soldiers from the Canudos War (Perlman, 2011, p.25). Contemporaneously, other large-scale migrations were already underway, such as the mass movement of former slaves from rural plantations to major cities following abolition in 1888. These communities continued to grow exponentially throughout the 20th century, with many favelas emerging in and around the very centre of the city, and immediately adjacent to prosperous neighbourhoods. However, it was only in the waning days of the military dictatorship (1964-1985) that OCG territorial control emerged in the favelas.

In the early 1970s, under the dictatorship's National Security Law, leftist political prisoners and captured guerrillas were confined together with common criminals, in a wing of the Cândido Mendes prison at Ilha Grande, roughly forty kilometres off the coast of Rio de Janeiro. By incarcerating these leftists alongside violent offenders and thieves, the military junta sought to delegitimise and obscure their explicitly political character— though they also believed that the favela criminals with whom the (generally middle class) left-wing militants were incarcerated might also soon “rape and beat the politicos into submission” (Grillo, 2016, p.43). Instead, by the time that political prisoners were released (the culmination of which was marked by the amnesty law of 1979), the prison's common criminals had learned organisational skills and discipline from the leftists. With prison transfers, a nascent network of organised criminals spread throughout the carceral system, eventually taking control of these facilities. As prisoners escaped and were released, this network also spread into Rio's

favelas. This organisation soon came to be labelled the *Comando Vermelho* (CV)– or Red Command– by State authorities, indicative of the prison gang’s early left-wing influences.

As the CV extended across Rio’s favelas, it began to transition away from relying on activities such as bank robberies to sustain its burgeoning mutual aid structure, and instead pivoted towards the growing cocaine industry (Lessing, 2018, p.176; Grillo, 2016, p.70). CV members during the 1980s evidently came into contact with international trafficking networks, including those affiliated with the Colombian FARC (Grillo, 2016, p.74). This ensured access to vast amounts of cocaine, which was then sold at retail points throughout Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, as well as military-grade weaponry from neighbouring countries. With the lucrative revenues that came from the cocaine sales, CV members could further expand, raise private armies, and suppress other smaller OCGs throughout Rio, conquering their turfs in turn. Since the early 1980s, the State had adopted a position of brutally cracking-down on the CV, in part due to its misreading of the group as one composed of leftist militants (Lessing, 2018, p.177). As the decade progressed, this antagonistic relationship continued, with the CV violently resisting police incursions into the favelas.

During the course of the 1980s, then, the CV had transformed into an organisation with clearly defined territorial strongholds in the city’s favelas, financed primarily by the sale of illegal drugs (above all cocaine), and with the capacity to exercise significant coercive power– which it used to great effect, crushing rivals and resisting repression by Rio’s military police. Amidst this context, CV cells began imposing systems of governance in the territories under their control. Although in some favelas, this included the provision of (charitable) services to the community,⁵⁵ this does not appear to have been

⁵⁵ Interview with resident of Complexo do Alemão and NGO worker in Complexo da Maré. 28/04/2023. 7brnl Interview with resident of Cidade de Deus, 05/05/2023. 56ktn (see also Grillo, 2016).

the norm. and with the chaos and bloodshed of the 1990s, CV civilian governance appears to have become solely based around the imposition of order, ensuring survival and profit maximisation.

While coordination exists among CV cells, the organisation was– and remains– non-hierarchical, with each CV territory being commanded its own respective *dono*, or boss. In the 1990s, this became evident when in-fighting over lucrative cocaine market shares led to the fragmentation of the CV, and the formation of the splinter association, the *Terceiro Comando Puro*, (TCP). Later in the decade, this was echoed by the formation of the group *Amigos dos Amigos* (ADA) (Grillo, 2016, p.76). Towards the end of the 1990s and into the 2000s, *milicia* groups composed of off-duty police and firemen also formed. Rio’s military police and firemen are officially a part of the military, and so both have access to weaponry. All such OCGs impose(d) order on civilian populations within their territories, though the militias are particularly notorious for their systematic extortion of residents.

The case study of Rio begins in the late 1990s, where an evident security threat was emerging from the escalating violence between distinct territorial OCGs and the State. While the idea of building territorial control in the favelas had long been circulated in policy circles, as we will see, elite disunity hampered meaningful policy innovation for years. Instead, militarised repression of the favelas– otherwise understood as a ‘war on the poor’– remained the norm.

2.4 Ciudad Juárez

Like Monterrey, Juárez is a north Mexican industrial hub that has attracted strong flows of migration for decades. Located on the border with El Paso, Texas, the city grew considerably under the Porfiriato’s free-trade policy, and then as a destination town for American tourists during the first half of the 20th century. Following the adoption of the Border Industrialisation Program in the mid-1960s, Juárez became synonymous with manufacturing, with many *maquiladoras* (export factories for assembling foreign goods) established throughout the city. Waves of Mexican migrant workers flocked

to Juárez, particularly during the boom years of the 1980s, during which time the city's population doubled in size (Rodríguez Nieto, 2012, p.126). Juárez expanded as a consequence, with both makeshift settlements spreading around the mountains to the west, as well as planned housing for labourers being constructed on the flatter planes towards the city's south. As settlements formed around the maquiladora industrial parks, Juárez' patchwork layout emerged, with disused plots of land left scattered among urbanized areas: "the result was dozens of fragmented neighbourhoods, like islands divided by a sea of sand dunes and trash" (Rodríguez Nieto, 2012, p.125).⁵⁶

Despite the maquiladoras bringing abundant employment opportunities, these disproportionately favoured women, leaving a large unemployed male population (Watt and Zapeda, 2012, p.160), and were highly precarious. When the (international) economy was strong, the maquiladoras would have good business, demand for labour would be high, and migrant workers would come to Juárez. With economic downturns, however, the job market contracted, and labourers would go elsewhere.⁵⁷ This meant that periodically houses and communities were left abandoned, compounding the conditions of social disorganisation that had been produced through unregulated urbanisation and decades of government neglect and corruption.

Juárez had long been a centre for smuggling, given its proximity to the United States. However, in the mid-1980s, smaller drug trafficking operations in the city were monopolised under trafficker Amado Carrillo Fuentes, birthing the so-called *Juárez Cartel*. This organisation had close ties to local politicians and law enforcement to ensure the smooth functioning of its cross-border operations. By contrast, it had only very limited relations with the gangs that were by then proliferating throughout the city's

⁵⁶ Vacant plots of land all over Juárez are filled with refuse. This is both household waste from private citizens (whose refuse is not always collected by municipal authorities), as well as businesses that illegally dump materials.

⁵⁷ Interview with Angela Sánchez, the coordinator of the Mesa de Seguridad, and mesa member for over 10 years. 25/08/2022. hyewy; Interview with Raúl Soto, former senior FICOSEC official, involved in the Mesa de Seguridad. 28/07/2022, bwxjs

MUCs. These gangs, or groups of *'cholos'*, were similar in many ways to those previously described in Monterrey; while they might engage in violent confrontations with one another and participate in recreational drug use, they were not OCGs. In some cases, they appear to have had strong community ties. Indeed, one interviewee recalled how, when returning home late from work after 12-hour shifts at the maquiladoras, local gang members would sometimes accompany her and other women from the bus stop to their homes, in order to prevent them being attacked or raped.⁵⁸ Ciudad Juárez gained international notoriety for an alarming rise in femicides throughout the 1990s, and to this day inadequate lighting, and tracts of refuse-strewn, disused land make daily commutes dangerous for female factory workers.

By the 1990s, there were hundreds of *pandillas* across Juárez' MUCs, including large criminal gangs which had emerged in the late 1980s, such as *Los Aztecas* and *Los Mexicles*. Over the course of the decade, most of the city's street gangs became increasingly involved in the illegal drug trade, with bigger groups able to negotiate directly with the *Juárez Cartel* to procure drugs for resale. Smaller neighbourhood gangs received their illicit goods from smugglers, who had surpluses following the US crackdown on the southern border (Wolff, 2015, p.6). The local drug retail market would then boom after the September 11th terrorist attacks, as the border tightened further still, and larger shipments of illegal merchandise was forced to remain in Juárez.⁵⁹ With the increasing role of drug economy in the city's MUCs, competition for territory became fiercer, as gangs sought to acquire more drug distribution points. As such, these groups began procuring firearms from neighbouring Texas, leading to escalating violence across the city's deprived urban spaces (ibid, p.7).

The death of Carrillo Fuentes in 1997, alongside the weakening of protection arrangements between the local government and the *Juárez Cartel*, led to further increases in violence in the new millennium.

⁵⁸ Interview with MUC resident, South Juárez. 27/08/2022, pfppr

⁵⁹ Interview with Arturo Luján, state director of FICOSEC. 22/07/2022. v6asy

The *Sinaloa Cartel* also made inroads into the city at this time, severely deteriorating the stability that had existed in Ciudad Juárez under the previous criminal monopoly. Former *Juárez Cartel* factions then allied with the *Sinaloa* group, but were confronted by the newly formed *La Línea*: the militarized wing of the *Juárez Cartel*, founded in 2004 and comprised of ex-police officers (Durán-Martínez, 2018, p.205). In late 2007, the *Sinaloa Cartel* would attempt to definitively displace the *Juárez Cartel*. Both drug trafficking organisations turned to the *cholo* street gangs in their attempt to secure dominance over the city. This brought a new set of territorial conflicts to Juárez' MUCs, and set the city on course to become the world's most violent by 2010. As in Monterrey, what emerged from cartel involvement in the city's MUCs was not an expansive form of civilian governance, but rather a form of social control upheld through fear, exploitation, and vicious violence.

As we shall see later in the thesis, my case study of Ciudad Juárez begins at this point of inflection, with the *Sinaloa Cartel's* arrival in the city.

2.5 Buenaventura

Located on Colombia's long neglected Pacific coast, Buenaventura is a city of stark inequalities. Levels of poverty across the city are extremely high, access to basic infrastructure is low (mass protests over the inadequate availability of potable water have been commonplace for decades), and a significant number of residents— close to 90 percent of which are Afro-Colombian— live in palafitte housing; wooden structures built on stilts above the shoreline. Many others live in neighbourhoods built over generations through reclaiming land from the sea, achieved by gradually piling layers of refuse in the water at low tide (a process that continues to this day). In contrast to this poverty, Buenaventura is also of central economic importance to Colombia, as its port complexes serve as the transit point for around 60 percent of all the country's maritime imports and exports (Legiscomex, 2014). Nonetheless, while poverty, uneven development, and marginalisation have long afflicted Buenaventura, they do

not account for the onset of OCG territorial control in the city. Rather, this is explained by two changes at the turn of the millennium.

Firstly, the port's privatisation in the 1990s⁶⁰ has been recognised as a decisive turning point in Buenaventura's fortunes by both analysts (Ibarra et al., 2021; Jimenez and Delgado, 2008) and city residents alike. Locals draw a sharp distinction between the conditions that prevailed prior to the privatisation of the State-owned *ColPuertos* (*Puertos de Colombia*), and those that emerged following its sale and reformation under the leadership of the *Sociedad Portuaria*, an organisation whose ownership is comprised 82.5% by private sector stakeholders (Ibarra et al., 2021, p.143). Local interviewees explained that living conditions had been far better when the port was under State-ownership, describing how ColPuertos had allowed even the lowest rung of port workers to buy their own properties, cars, and access pensions.⁶¹ As such, it effectively produced a middle-class stratum with disposable income and social security.⁶² One interviewee stated that in the context of central State neglect, ColPuertos: “*was* the presence of the State in the city, in the sense that the resources which came channelled through [ColPuertos] covered the basic needs of the people. Health, education, the economy, everything. So, the lack of State presence wasn't so obvious”. She elaborated that not only did the port provide employment to a significant percentage of the population, but that under State-ownership and with strong unionisation, port workers had access to healthcare for themselves and their families, as well as education for their children. Port workers also earned wages which allowed them to employ other city residents, and thus “not just one family, but four or five families would end up eating off of a single salary”. Nonetheless, with privatisation “all of that went like a puff of smoke [...] One element was lost and this provoked other effects. Precarity in health, education, what people

⁶⁰ At the time there was only one port in the city, there are now three.

⁶¹ Interview with MUC Resident and Journalist, Comuna 12, Buenaventura. 17/01/2022. ar2kj

⁶² Interview with Adriana Espinosa, researcher and contributor to the Truth Commission report on the Colombian Pacific. 05/02/2022. 2saqa

were going to eat. Social inequalities emerged which previously the port had covered over.”⁶³ In an effort to make the port more efficient and high-tech, mass redundancies followed privatisation, the social safety-net it had helped sustain collapsed, and in the subsequent years criminality proliferated in Buenaventura’s deprived MUCs.

This brings us to the second factor, the arrival of organised, political violence to Buenaventura. Violence was not unknown to the port city, but had largely been State perpetrated, such as in brutal cases of police ‘social cleansing’ during the 1980s (Becerra et al., 2016, p.68). Following the mass redundancies of the 1990s, low-level criminal gangs appeared. Still, these groups were primarily involved in robberies— such as the notorious “Tumbapuertas” who operated in the late 1990s (CNMH, 2015, p.63), using a felled tree as a battering ram for breaking and entering into people’s houses (Estupiñan et al., 2010). Moreover, these nascent criminal gangs were neither particularly territorial nor violent, a far cry from the *combos* described previously in Medellín. However, towards the end of the 1990s, the FARC insurgency began building up its presence in the rural areas surrounding urban Buenaventura, cultivating coca, attacking State infrastructure, and imposing systems of rebel governance. This then extended to the urban context, with FARC cells taking control of peripheral neighbourhoods. The spread of the FARC was halted not by the State, but by the arrival of far-right paramilitaries affiliated with the AUC⁶⁴ in early 1999. Their presence was felt first in Buenaventura’s rural areas, where several massacres were perpetrated in quick succession, innocent civilians being murdered as part of the paramilitary’s effort to consolidate territorial control and purge insurgent influence. Within a few months, though, massacres and executions began to be carried out in urban neighbourhoods, as paramilitaries took control of the city’s MUCs, imposing severe and vicious order on community residents. Indeed, extreme violence was used strategically to spread fear among the

⁶³ Interview with former-MUC resident and academic from Bellavista, Buenaventura. 29/11/2021. Irtuop

⁶⁴ *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*.

population, as the leader of the paramilitaries in the region later admitted when discussing his organisation's tendency to dismember and mutilate victims (Espectador, 2008). The large numbers of deprived, unemployed youths in the city provided ample supplies of foot soldiers for the ascendant paramilitaries. Thus, as they spread across the city, the logics of criminal territorial control and the brutal governance of civilians took root. As such, the city's MUCs became harshly and stringently regulated by paramilitary-affiliated OCGs and successor groups in the years that followed.

By the year 2000, then, when my case study begins, horrific violence was emerging across Buenaventura's rural and urban spaces, and criminal territorial control across the city's MUCs was becoming entrenched. Tragically, my case shows how little this has changed in the decades since.

Summing Up

As we have seen, structural transformations and State neglect produced marginalised urban communities *throughout Latin America*, that offered fertile ground for the growth (and indeed transplantation) of violent nonstate actors. Still, the social disorganisation and underdevelopment found in these marginalised communities does not *in itself* explain the onset of OCG territorial control. The international drug trade also contributed to this process in important ways. As outlined in the brief historical overviews above, the drug trade had a particularly profound effect across several of my case sites, galvanizing local gangs to violently control territory in order to secure lucrative retail points for the sale of illicit substances. The Colombian cases perhaps stand out in this regard, given the role that *political* armed nonstate actors also had in organizing urban gangs, and moulding them into more sophisticated OCGs. Indeed, while certain trends can be observed across the region, the onset of OCG territorial control in each of my case sites varies.

Relatedly, the OCGs in my cases have had been embedded in their territories for varying lengths of time, as I have shown. Medellín and Rio have had OCGs entrenched in their marginalised urban

communities since the 1980s. By contrast, while gangs first appeared in Monterrey and Ciudad Juárez at around the same time, it was not until towards the end of the first decade of the 2000s, with the arrival of drug cartel competition in both cities, that territorial (and social) control by OCGs would become clearly manifest in these cases. Similarly, while in Medellín, Buenaventura and Rio, OCGs developed expansive, generalised systems of governance in the communities they controlled—regulating civilian behaviour, and in some cases providing services—this was not the case in either of the Mexican cases, where far shallower systems of governance developed. In these latter instances, OCGs simply used fear to uphold order. I will return to discuss the potential theoretical relevance of distinct levels of *OCG embeddedness* when undertaking my comparative analysis in Chapter 8.

Despite their many differences, this chapter has nonetheless shown that the cities studied in this thesis share important features in common, ensuring their suitability for comparison and reaffirming their analytical equivalency: all display organised criminal groups that control territory in marginalised urban communities. Having discussed the processes through which this common characteristic arose both across Latin America as a whole and in each city specifically, we now turn to the case studies themselves, beginning with Medellín. Spanning a period of several decades, the case shows multiple different outcomes that can arise from the interaction of elite coordination and police capacity in response to acute OCG security threats.

4. Medellín: From Unchecked OCG Competition to State

Territorial Expansion

Medellín and its surrounding metropolitan area are located in the Aburrá valley, in the department of Antioquia. Administratively, the city is divided into 16 densely populated urban *comunas*, and 5 *corregimientos*, which are more rural in nature. The city has long stood as an economic powerhouse in Colombia, but in the late 20th century gained notoriety for its extreme violence. This chapter charts the processes which have shaped variation in territorial control across Medellín's marginalised urban communities during the last 40 years. Across this period of time, Medellín displays outcomes ranging from *Unchecked OCG Competition* amid low elite coordination and police capacity, through to durable *State Territorial Expansion*, the result of high levels of elite coordination and high police capacity.

The case study begins by discussing the 1980s and 1990s respectively, periods in which a massive OCG security threat emerged in Medellín's MUCs, leading to *Unchecked OCG Competition*. Towards the end of the 1990s, thanks to a national level police reform process, police capacity grew locally, which in conjunction with the ascent of urban paramilitarism allowed OCG security threats to be increasingly *contained* to the city's MUCs. Simultaneously, a novel political process spurred the formation of collaborative cross-sectoral linkages, which began to unite political and economic elites with civil society actors. This process laid the foundations for the subsequent emergence of an elite coalition which prioritised decisive State intervention into Medellín's MUCs.

The chapter then details how in the mid-2000s this elite coalition invested significant resources in the city's MUCs, driving *State Territorial Expansion* and thus leading to increases in State territorial control. Nonetheless, at the time, powerful OCGs remained dominant across Medellín's MUCs, and heavily influenced governance in these spaces. Still, with an eruption of inter-OCG violence after 2008,

Medellín's OCG security threat was renewed. The State responded by dismantling many OCGs whilst continuing to entrench its territorial presence across the city. These actions relied on sustained high levels of elite coordination. Lastly, the final section of this chapter details the events that followed this period of confrontation. Medellín's OCGs are now highly disciplined, and exercise unprecedented degrees of restraint, but also weaker than in the past. State territorial control has continued to expand, thanks to elite unity, but OCGs remain influential in governing civilian life in many MUCs.

1. A City Overwhelmed: OCG Violence meets Elite Disunity

As outlined in the preceding chapter, the 1980s saw Medellín overwhelmed by a dramatic rise in urban conflict and insecurity. To recapitulate, the uncontrolled development of the city's urban sprawl had left hundreds of thousands of city residents in precarity and neglect, making Medellín's poor comunas ideal sites for the proliferation of different violent non-state actors. The rise of Pablo Escobar's *Medellín Cartel* and its subsequent confrontation with the Colombian State meant that across the city, low-level criminal gangs, *combos*, were armed and encouraged to engage in violence against State security forces. State territorial control over the city's MUCs was therefore minimal. Meanwhile, nonstate control over these territories and their populations continued to grow, as the number of urban militias multiplied. Militias were often independent self-defence groups, but many also acted as urban cells for leftist rebel groups, including the FARC and ELN. The spread of these different (criminal) armed nonstate actors, their confrontations with the State, and with each other, produced a massive increase in violence across the city. This not only affected the MUCs in which these groups were based, but inevitably spread outwards, producing a city-wide security threat.

The State's response was focussed on capturing narcotraffickers, confronting guerrilla groups, and attempting to dismantle the city's criminal structures. The State undertook little effort towards building a permanent policing presence in the city's MUCs at this time, despite the evident peril that OCGs

posed to public order. In the city's marginalised communities, police presence was heavily limited and any incursions into these areas were generally hostile and short-term. Testimony from these communities during the late 1980s underscores that MUC residents had little trust in the regulatory capacity of the authorities, and viewed the police with enmity, and as distant (Salazar, 2018, p.163). Although it seems that some police stations *were built* in the city's MUCs at this time, many police confined themselves to their barracks, not daring to venture outside into the communities they were charged to protect.⁶⁵ Revealingly, when in Comuna 13 two police bases were destroyed in dynamite attacks by guerrilla-affiliated militias in the 1990s, the authorities did not attempt to rebuild them,⁶⁶ signalling the State's abandonment of the urban margins. Contemporaneously, the Colombian army undertook operations in the city's MUCs under *Plan Genesis* (Durán-Martínez, 2018, p.122), though they did not durably expand State presence into these areas.

In succinct terms, Medellín's security forces, including the police, were overstretched and outgunned at the time, and faced with the dilemma of *plata o plomo* by the Medellín Cartel, suffered from widespread institutional corruption. Thus, they had inadequate resources for the challenge they confronted, and their autonomy from OCGs was heavily compromised. In the city's MUCs, police presence was therefore highly limited, ensuring that the State territorial control was minimal.

1.1 Elite Atomisation

Just as Medellín's security forces were overwhelmed, so too seemingly were the city's political and economic elites. In response to the OCG security threat of the 1980s, Medellín's mayors⁶⁷ did *not* collaborate closely with their national level counterparts, and instead "avoided local security

⁶⁵ Interview with "AKA", social leader and activist, Comuna 13. 11/04/2022, uzrc7

⁶⁶ Interview with journalist, Ricardo Aricapa, 09/02/2022, 59rrp

⁶⁷ The arrival of popularly elected mayors across Colombia—beginning in 1986 and then further entrenched through the Colombian Constitution of 1991— would eventually be a key factor in promoting subnational security policy experimentation across the country (see Moncada 2016).

management”, given that “they perceived this area to be the responsibility of the national government” (Giraldo and Preciado, 2015, p.7). Effectively, local level political elites passed the buck. Thus, despite a clear OCG security threat, national and local political elites did not mount a coordinated response. The task fell squarely on the shoulders of the overwhelmed and underequipped national authorities.

The relative absence of Medellín’s economic elites from security policy deliberations during this time is also noteworthy. This is especially so given the prominent role that these actors would later play in the city’s multifaceted response to urban insecurity, as well as their extraordinary instrumental power, and their long-standing involvement in local politics. Beginning in the late 19th century, Medellín’s business elite have— with varying degrees of intensity— sought to advance local development projects to ensure competitiveness both nationally and internationally, working hand-in-hand with the local government towards achieving these ends.⁶⁸ In the 1970s, Medellín’s regionalist clique of economic elites faced an existential threat when several major local businesses were seized through hostile takeovers. They responded by buying up shares in each other’s companies, safeguarding against further takeovers. This close-knit economic elite class became known as the *GEA (Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño)*. In the 1970s they founded a think tank, *ProAntioquia*, which since its inception has worked closely with local governments on policy to enhance competitiveness, development, and growth.⁶⁹ It is also widely recognised as being directly tied to the GEA and the promotion of its interests. On the national stage, Antioquia’s cohesive business community has also long exercised a great deal of economic and political power through its dominance of organisations including the ANDI.^{70 71} Thus,

⁶⁸ Interview with Rodrigo García, historian, Universidad de Antioquia, 19/01/2022, 9y4w8

⁶⁹ Interview with Andrés Mariño, historian, 29/11/2021, y3guu; Interview with Víctor Álvarez, historian and expert on Medellín business community, 20/01/2022, 2sli0

⁷⁰ *Asociación Nacional de Empresarios de Colombia*.

⁷¹ Interview with Víctor Álvarez, historian and expert on Medellín business community, 20/01/2022, 2sli0; Interview with Tatiana Muñoz, economic historian, 09/2012/2021, vwk06; Interview with Carlos Rodríguez historian Universidad Nacional, 14/01/2022, h4aai

while the GEA has never been formally constituted, it has exercised an outsized influence over local and national politics for decades.

Despite this, during the 1980s the GEA had retreated politically: having backed several failed presidential candidates in succession, they decided to prioritise business over politics.⁷² Indeed, in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, these economic elites were preoccupied with leveraging their influence on the national stage to try and cushion themselves from the effects of structural adjustment and an ongoing economic crisis.⁷³ Urban insecurity at the time *did* directly affect both the security and profitability of Medellín's economic elite. Not only did Escobar's war affect Medellín's wealthy areas, but the arrival of urban guerrillas towards the end of the decade led to car bombs being armed in MUCs and then deployed across the city. Moreover, several economic elites and their families were targeted for extortion and kidnapping by both Escobar and guerrilla groups.⁷⁴ Faced with a direct threat, Medellín's economic elites turned to private protection, heavily fortifying their offices, travelling in armoured cars, carrying weapons, and investing in teams of armed escorts for themselves and their families (CNMH, 2017, pp.274, 454). Indeed, many elites across Medellín invested so heavily in private security because they *distrusted* the protection offered by *the State*, given the high levels of corruption at the time (ibid, p.455). Therefore, Medellín's enormously powerful economic elites did not initially move to strengthen the State's response to insecurity. Rather, they retreated and attempted to both fortify and "camouflage" themselves (ibid), safeguarding their private interests.

⁷² Interview with Mauricio de Jesus Cadavid, Assistant to Presidential Council for Medellín, 24/02/2022, kidu7

⁷³ The GEA did this remarkably effectively, allowing its members to thrive following market liberalization. Beyond the GEA's political connections, this was also due in large part to the diverse business portfolios of its inner circle. Interview with Tatiana Muñoz, economic historian, 09/2012/2021, vwk06

⁷⁴ Interview with Víctor Álvarez, historian and expert on Medellín business community, 20/01/2022, 2sli0; Interview with Sandra Ramírez Patiño, Economic Historian, Universidad de Antioquia. 15/12/2021, p0x55

2. Increasing Elite Coordination and Tentative Containment 1990-2002

The 1990s saw important reformulations of Medellín's criminal and political landscapes, changes that would shape territorial control in the city's MUCs for years to come, as well as lay the foundations for the subsequent process of *State Territorial Expansion*. However, we begin the discussion of the decade by describing the changing patterns of OCG control and governance in Medellín's MUCs.

2.1 OCG Territorial Control and Governance

The decapitation strategy pursued by the Colombian state led to the death of Pablo Escobar in 1993. This marked the breakdown of the Medellín Cartel's superstructure, which in turn provoked a reformulation of Medellín's criminal underworld. This saw the rise of OCGs who were more actively incentivised to exercise stricter forms of territorial control and, eventually, expansive systems of civilian governance. This was for several reasons.

Firstly, a fragmenting criminal landscape motivated greater inter-OCG competition, encouraging combos to more closely monitor their territories to prevent the incursion of rivals. Whereas rivalries had previously existed, and combos sometimes fought, the collapse of the monolithic, pyramid structure of the Medellín Cartel led to a multiplicity of bandas (mid-level OCGs) vying for control of the lucrative pieces of Escobar's empire, and recruiting distinct combos in turn. This logically forced these criminal groups to carve out clearly defined turfs. Towards the end of the 1990s, some combos had also become involved in drug retail (Blattmann et al., 2021), which had previously been all but non-existent when these groups worked as sicarios for the Medellín Cartel. This too made controlling territory increasingly important to these groups, as well as regulating activities that affected their new illicit economies. With these heightened incentives to control territory, Medellín's combos also

increasing sought to regulate the day-to-day lives of MUC residents. Indeed, *fronteras invisibles*⁷⁵—informal borders demarcating the divisions between distinct OCG territories— became more commonplace during this period (Durán-Martínez, 2018), suggesting that the bandas and combos began doubling down and attempting to consolidate their areas of influence in the face of a multipolar criminal landscape. Thus, with anarchic inter-OCG competition, and amid a context of continued State absence, OCGs consolidated enclaves of territorial control amid Medellín’s MUCs, supported by nascent systems of local governance.

Secondly, the collapse of the Medellín Cartel opened further space for other armed groups to expand across the city limits. This included urban militias (both independent groups and those affiliated with guerrillas) and paramilitary organisations. Both had strategic interests in controlling territory and governing civilian populations, and so their proliferation further restricted the ability of the State control the city’s MUCs.⁷⁶

During the first half of the 1990s, Militias engaged in violent conflict, both against each other and the city’s combos. Consolidating by the mid-1990s, the national government sought to reduce their influence in the urban territory by promoting a demobilisation process, which largely failed. What did curtail militia power, however, was the ascent of the paramilitaries. During the latter half of the decade, Medellín’s urban paramilitaries actively sought to secure territorial control across the city. Thanks to their anti-guerrilla posture, they were assisted by State officials, with whom many paramilitary groups maintained close ties.⁷⁷ In fact, the exponential growth of the paramilitaries at the midpoint of the

⁷⁵ These fronteras restrict civilian freedom of movement, and are closely monitored by criminals, who can prevent non-residents from entering the spaces they control. Deaths resulting from innocent civilians crossing fronteras have been widely reported, including by numerous MUC residents with whom I spoke. Fronteras are also imbued with a gendered dynamic. Young men, the demographic most likely to be gang members, are those whose freedom of movement is most severely curtailed and who are put at most risk by the presence of the fronteras. Unsurprisingly, I also found this to be the case in other contexts besides Medellín.

⁷⁶ Interview with leading crime reporter at El Colombiano, 16/02/2022, 6lbt

⁷⁷ Note that this was true across Colombia, not just in Medellín.

decade is associated by many with then-governor Álvaro Uribe's decision to legalise private defence groups in Antioquia, known as the *Convivir*.⁷⁸

With State collaboration, the paramilitaries ruthlessly imposed themselves on communities across the city, forcing bandas and combos to either join their ranks or be eliminated. Co-opted and integrated into the paramilitary structures, Medellín's OCGs now became their principal foot-soldiers (IPC, 2021, p.67). The two paramilitary factions which were dominant in the city by the early 2000s were the *Bloque Metro* and a group that became known as the *Bloque Cacique Nutibarra* (BCN). The latter of these organisations was led by Diego Fernando Murrillo, known by his alias "Don Berna", a former Medellín Cartel member who later turned against Escobar, founding the proto-paramilitary group *Los Pepes*. Murrillo did not abandon his narco-trafficking roots during the 1990s, and continued to exercise control over the *Oficina de Envigado*, a powerful remnant of Escobar's empire which acted as a criminal holding, mediating and coordinating illegal activities in Medellín. Thus, through Don Berna, the BCN was closely tied to narco-trafficking.⁷⁹

As paramilitary rule crystallised across the city, criminal governance of civilians became more commonplace in Medellín's MUCs. This was the logical corollary of the paramilitaries' desire to secure urban supremacy and eradicate the guerrillas. A former paramilitary commander⁸⁰ recounted to me that after working with State forces to (re)take guerrilla-controlled areas, his organisation imposed territorial order, governing civilian populations and providing them with basic services. He explained

⁷⁸ Note that these proto-paramilitary organizations are different to the criminal gangs that bear the same name and that today operate in Medellín's city centre (these gangs were briefly mentioned in Chapter 3).

⁷⁹ These ties to narco-trafficking distinguished the BCN from the more ideological orientation of the *Bloque Metro*. Allegedly, this distinction would eventually be a factor in provoking the violent schism between these groups (Interview with Ricardo Aricapa, journalist, 09/02/2022, 59rrp)

⁸⁰ Note that this commander had led part of the *Bloque Central Bolívar*, not an organisation that was present in Medellín. Nonetheless, his seniority in the ranks of the AUC and his experience of governing territories means that his explanation should be taken seriously.

that these measures were taken to secure community support, which was viewed as crucial in safeguarding against guerrilla incursions.⁸¹

Medellín's paramilitaries invested in training and disciplining the combos, integrating them into their structures. Thus, where paramilitary groups took root, so too did their means of waging war and their methods for governing territory. This included "taxing" business owners with extortion fees, restricting the freedoms of movement, speech, and association, and imposing behavioural norms on residents, backed with cruel punishments. These groups acted brazenly, openly brandishing firearms, with little concern for any repercussions. Numerous interviewees recalled how, during this period, "executions" were performed publicly.⁸² A journalist who worked in Medellín's MUCs during this time recounted that it was common to be reminded "here we have our own law".⁸³ Thus, Medellín's OCGS maintained their ties to illicit economies, but their subordination to paramilitary structures also integrated the logic of counterinsurgency into their behaviour (IPC, 2021, p. 98). This implied stepping-up their regulatory role in the territories they controlled, and governing civilian life.

2.2 A Template for Elite Coordination

In 1991, in response to Medellín's appalling levels of violence, Colombian President César Gaviria mandated the creation of a novel Presidential Council to work specifically on stabilising the city, the *Consejería Presidencial para Medellín*. The head of the Council, Emma María Mejía, was tasked with coordinating with local State and civil society actors in order to try and develop and implement solutions to Medellín's security crisis. As a close aide of hers recollected, the figurehead of the Council was hugely significant as she was endowed with the authority to directly represent the President in

⁸¹ Interview with former Paramilitary Commander, Bloque Central Bolívar 17/02/2022, fyexz

⁸² Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 3, 11/02/2022, nem3a; Interview, Teacher, Alta Vista, 03/03/2022, efw8n; Interview with Orlando García, community leader, Comuna 1, 23/02/2022, 0nolh;

⁸³ Interview with Journalist Reinaldo Spitaletta, 07/02/2022, 1yjfo

local affairs, and so would speak with his authority. Offering this “direct link” with the President encouraged a host of different actors to begin engaging in inter-sectoral dialogue,⁸⁴ allowing different (elite) actors to voice their concerns and interests to one another, and thus providing a template for elite coordination.

The Council and its representatives found willing partners in the GEA, particularly among prominent GEA members such as head of the insurance firm SURA, Nicanor Restrepo Santamaría. Several GEA representatives, including Restrepo, were involved in pushing for national peace negotiations with guerrilla groups including the FARC throughout the 1990s (Muñoz and Mariño, 2019). As such, they welcomed the opportunity to work closely with the presidential delegation to try and find solutions to the crisis unfolding on their own doorstep.⁸⁵ Their involvement in the council is significant as it represented the first major effort by Medellín’s economic elites to participate in local political processes intended to address urban insecurity. Of course, this was driven by the traumatic effects of the city-wide violence, but also out of concern for the region’s economic prosperity. In the long-term, Medellín’s business community understood that rampant violence would be detrimental to international investment in the city, as well as their regionalist interests.⁸⁶ Thus, they adopted a more assertive posture in local politics in order to shape State security policy,⁸⁷ which they now viewed as instrumental to securing long-term prosperity. Towards the end of the decade, the GEA’s interest in security was made evident when ProAntioquia ran a series of seminars, inviting international security experts to advise local policymakers (Moncada, 2016, pp.75). Nonetheless, even if Medellín’s

⁸⁴ Interview with Mauricio de Jesus Cadavid, Assistant to Presidential Council for Medellín, 24/02/2022, kidu7; Interview with Ricardo Aricapa, journalist, 09/02/2022, 59rrp 2

⁸⁵ Interview with Mauricio de Jesus Cadavid, Assistant to Presidential Council for Medellín, 24/02/2022, kidu7

⁸⁶ Interview, Interview with Mauricio de Jesus Cadavid, Assistant to Presidential Council for Medellín, 24/02/2022, kidu7; Interview with Alejandro Echeverri, academic and former director of the PUI, 20/01/2022, qv3pa (see Moncada, 2016).

⁸⁷ The GEA during this period employed various methods to try and pressure political authorities to adopt their prescriptions, including using Medellín’s Chamber of Commerce “as an indirect forum of influence to express concerns about the need for policies to facilitate Medellín’s insertion into global value and production chains” (Franz, 2018, p.94).

economic elite were now beginning to understand that they could only protect their long-term interests *through the State*, they continued to rely on private security for their immediate protection. Evidence suggests this may have included financing violent nonstate actors.⁸⁸

Still, the enthusiastic participation of the GEA in the work of the Council led to diverse multi-sectoral linkages being forged. Routine meetings were led by the Council which brought together MUC representatives, local government officials, private sector actors, and other civil society organisations to identify possible solutions to the challenges Medellín faced. Collaboration between the private sector and community organisations during this time period even resulted in some joint programmes to try and boost employment among the poor.⁸⁹ Thus, through repeated interactions, different tiers of government and different sectors of society began to connect and build trust in one another, learning to consider Medellín's challenges from a broader perspective.

By contrast, Medellín's mayors were disengaged,⁹⁰ and on occasion actively hostile to the Council's work (see Moncada, 2016). However, in general buck-passing by the local government appears to have still been the main impediment to coordination throughout the 1990s. Although Medellín's political leaders did assist the Council periodically, they still denied responsibility for addressing urban insecurity for much of 1990s and into the 2000s (Giraldo and Preciado, 2015, p.7).

Moreover, the Council did little to actually instigate change during its lifetime. Besides leading the failed militia demobilisation effort, the Council oversaw an important infrastructure investment

⁸⁸ Private sector actors in Medellín's funded local paramilitary activities at the time, helping the BCN consolidate its foothold in the city (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2007, p.153). This is alleged to have included members of the GEA (Semana, 2022; Verdad Abierta, 2019).

⁸⁹ Interview with Mauricio de Jesus Cadavid, Assistant to Presidential Council for Medellín, 24/02/2022, kidu7

⁹⁰ Interview with Juan David Valderrama, politician with experience working for GEA members, under Salazar, Gaviria and Gutiérrez. 25/02/2022, oh38a

programme, PRIMED,⁹¹ which extended basic services to several MUCs, though its impact was selective and not widespread.⁹²

The Council's work formally ended with President Gaviria's administration in 1994. However, subsequently, cross-sectoral collaboration *was* sustained, with representatives from the national government continuing to meet routinely with local authorities, as well as economic elites and other civil society organisations.⁹³

The council thus helped reactivate the involvement of Medellín's powerful economic elites in local politics,⁹⁴ providing them with State interlocutors with whom to discuss their growing concern with the city's security crisis and putting them into regular dialogue with MUC residents. The inclusion of community organisations in the Council's work was vital in helping awaken the city's elite classes to the importance of addressing security challenges holistically, and in a way that considered the interests of those that had long been neglected. The multi-sectoral linkages that were forged created a reservoir of trust and collaboration.⁹⁵ These would later be drawn upon to implement an ambitious political agenda in the city's MUCs.⁹⁶ Testament to the foundational role of the Council's work is the fact that many of the infrastructure and development projects implemented in Medellín's MUCs over the last two decades were conceived of and designed during this period.⁹⁷

⁹¹ *Programa Integral de Mejoramiento de Barrios Subnormales de Medellín.*

⁹² Interview with journalist Reinaldo Spitaletta, 07/02/2022, 1yjf0; Interview with Ricardo Aricapa, journalist, 09/02/2022, 59rrp

⁹³ While the Council's work wrapped-up in 1994, its structure remained operative until around-1999 (Interview with Mauricio de Jesus Cadavid, Assistant to Presidential Council for Medellín, 24/02/2022, kidu7).

⁹⁴ During this time, the GEA was also undertaking independent efforts to reaffirm ties with national and local politicians, inviting prominent politicians to a series of regular informal meetings—termed *El Costurero*—to discuss their priorities. (Semana 1993; Interview with Carlos Rodríguez historian Universidad Nacional, 14/01/2022, h4aai; Interview with Tatiana Muñoz, economic historian, 09/2012/2021, vwk06)

⁹⁵ Indeed, this formula of expansive collaboration was something that subsequent Mayors would try and revivify, with mixed results (Interview with former City Councillor Santiago Londoño, 08/02/2022, 0z6et)

⁹⁶ Interview with Alejandro Echeverri, academic and former director of the PUI, 20/01/2022, qv3pa

⁹⁷ These were either directly the product of Council-led processes, or the work of civil society groups inspired by the Council's model of cross-sectoral cooperation (Interview with Mauricio de Jesus Cadavid, Assistant to Presidential Council

II.III Increasing Police Capacity: Tentative Containment

During the 1990s, Medellín's security forces were unable to put a stop to OCG insecurity across the city, leading to the city being dubbed the world's most violent for the much of the decade (Durán-Martínez, 2018, p.111). Indeed, throughout the first half of the 1990s, Medellín had one of the lowest rates of police manpower for a major city in Colombia, far below the national average (Llorente, 1999, p.441). Thus, Medellín's police lacked the *resources* required to meet the city's persistent OCG security threat.

This situation did improve, however, towards the end of the 1990s, thanks to a hard-won police reform process. This expanded oversight of Colombia's police, increasing the mechanisms in place to assure accountability and adherence to the rule of law (González, 2021). Additionally, head of the National Police, General Rosso José Serrano (1994-2000), began the first major push to purge corruption within Colombia's policing institutions during this time.⁹⁸ There was also greater alignment over security policy between political elites at the local and national levels of government, as Mayors began more actively supporting the militarised posture of the central government towards the end of the 1990s and into the 2000s (Moncada, 2016). Additionally, important strides were taken during this period towards improving coordination across the different State security forces, as the success of joint operations undertaken in the early 2000s would demonstrate.

However, police institutions were still prone to high levels of corruption, and were increasingly collaborating with paramilitary units to combat guerrilla-affiliated militias. Local *police autonomy* therefore remained low throughout this period. Moreover, despite these collaborative ties with

for Medellín, 24/02/2022, kidu7; Interview with "AKA", social leader and activist, Comuna 13. 11/04/2022, uzrc7; Interview with former City Councillor Santiago Londoño, 08/02/2022, 0z6et).

⁹⁸ Interview with Óscar Naranjo, former Colombian Vice-President and General of the National Police, 17/06/2022, a1axa

criminal actors, police presence in Medellín’s comunas remained heavily circumscribed. Interviewees from across the city’s MUCs confirmed that police patrols were rare. As one interviewee who grew up in Comuna 13 during the 1990s stated, the police would only enter particular neighbourhoods, and they “came and left very quickly”, often abusing locals, and openly collaborating with BCN and Bloque Metro forces in the area.⁹⁹

Still, even if local police autonomy remained low, other facets of their capacity grew thanks to the national reform efforts. Indeed, OCG violence ceased to be as common *across* the entire urban landscape towards the end of the decade, and was increasingly (though not entirely) *contained* to the criminal-controlled, urban peripheries. Certainly, it would be simplistic to associate this purely with the increasing capacity of the local police; the change was also thanks to increasing police collaboration with other security forces, as well as the urban paramilitaries. However, towards the end of the 1990s, State security forces including the police *were* becoming much more effective at repressing armed nonstate actors.¹⁰⁰ Thus, increasingly capable police arguably helped deter OCG spill-over effects, playing their part in the of tentative process of OCG security threat *Containment*.

3. The “Historic Moment”: Elite Coordination and State Territorial Expansion (2002-2008)

Between 2002-2008, a confluence of factors led to from the tentative *Containment* outlined above, to *State Territorial Expansion* into Medellín’s MUCs. Alignment in the security priorities of the national and subnational governments led to more robust interventionism in OCG-controlled territories. With considerable backing from the city’s economic elites, local authorities also undertook ambitious investments in public goods and services in several MUCs, reinforcing the presence of State security

⁹⁹ Interview with “AKA”, social leader and activist, Comuna 13. 11/04/2022, uzrc7

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Ricardo Aricapa, journalist, 09/02/2022, 59rrp

forces in these spaces. As we shall see, while the State was able to increase its territorial control, governance in MUCs remained heavily mediated by OCGs.

3.1 National-Local Alignment: Territorial Control is Prioritized

With the new millennium Colombia's security forces saw their capacity increase significantly, with greater inter-agency cooperation, and a huge step-up in funding thanks to the US-sponsored *Plan Colombia*. This produced a "revolution in military affairs" in the following years, giving the State the upper hand against the various armed non-state actors it confronted (Rochlin, 2011). These national level changes had direct implications for security strategies at the local level in Medellín, producing knock-on effects for the dynamics of territorial control within the city's OCG-controlled territories.

While Colombia's security forces had long been influenced by the precepts of counter-insurgency strategy (COIN), this crystallised into a series of sustained efforts to reclaim territory in Medellín throughout 2001 and 2002. The first signs of this were evident in the use of the Fourth Brigade's (Army) deployment of tactical units to gather intelligence and launch offensives throughout the Aburrá Valley, as well as the implementation of a plan for "security and military control for Medellín and its Metropolitan Area" (IPC, 2021, p.79). Numerous joint military and police operations took place throughout Medellín in 2002, including major offensives in Comunas 1,3, 7, and 9 (ibid, pp. 78-82). However, the principal focus of State forces during this period was the guerrilla stronghold Comuna 13, which was the target of repeated interventions between February and October 2002 (Aricapa, 2015).

The robust uptick in counterinsurgency tactics became particularly evident following the implementation of *Seguridad Democrática*, the security strategy of the new President, Álvaro Uribe—inaugurated in August 2002. Uribe had previously served both as Mayor of Medellín (1982) and Governor of Antioquia (1995-1998). *Seguridad Democrática* sought to explicitly consolidate State

territorial control through expanding the presence of the security forces across the national territory (Ramírez, 2010). Uribe understood Medellín represented a test-case for the effectiveness of his security policy, and so escalated militarised incursions into the city's MUCs. In October 2002, *Operación Orión* eliminated the Guerrilla presence in Comuna 13, with State forces remaining in place for many months, and in January 2003 *Operación Estrella VI* drove guerrillas out of the heights of Comuna 3. Both operations produced appalling human rights violations.¹⁰¹ As with the preceding joint operations which took place throughout 2002, these were planned, coordinated, and executed with BCN assistance, as Don Berna later confirmed (CNMH, 2020).

Thus, while Medellín's OCGs had long presented a security threat to the national authorities, only following the turn of the century did national political elites adopt a strategy designed to *break the exclusive territorial hold* of these groups— or at least those affiliated with left-wing guerrillas. Indeed, Uribe's strategy, as implemented in Medellín and many other areas, was based around removing one set of violent nonstate actors and replacing them with another, the paramilitaries. This would shape the nature of territorial control and governance in the city's MUCs for years to come.

The increasing capacity of Colombia's security forces and the Uribe government's emphasis on retaking territory were central to the State augmenting its foothold in Medellín's MUCs. However, the local government also drove forward this effort. As Giraldo and Preciado succinctly put it: "Since 2002, the most important change in local management occurred when the municipal government expressly and directly assumed responsibility for local security governance" (2015, p.8).

Medellín's mayor, Luís Pérez Gutiérrez (2000-2004), actively pushed forward State efforts to reconquer territory during his tenure. Pérez supported militarised incursions into MUCs, and directly

¹⁰¹ The harrowing details of these incursions were shared with me by numerous MUC residents who bore witness to the operations. (Interview with MUC residents, Peripheral area of Comuna 13, 13/02/2022)

called on Uribe to stage a huge intervention in Comuna 13 (what would become *Orión*), getting guarantees from the military that forces would stay in the area “for as long as was required” until it was pacified. Pérez even claims to have threatened resignation if these conditions were not met, decrying that he “did not wish to be mayor of a city in which there were areas he could not enter” (Aricapa, 2015, pp.251, 252).

Pérez’s resolute posture had crystallised thanks to several politically embarrassing events throughout 2002. Firstly, construction on a military base in Comuna 13 had not begun due to insecurity in the area. He had also been humiliated during an official visit to the comuna when he was recorded hiding from gunfire (Aricapa, 2015, p.190). Lastly, two students had been separately killed by stray bullets *outside of MUCs* in quick succession, one of whom was the daughter of the mayor’s friend (ibid, pp.249, 250). Thus, renewed spillover effects from MUCs, alongside salient OCG insecurity, would galvanize Pérez’s support for more aggressive *Territorial Expansion* over *Containment*.

Despite political elite coordination between Pérez and Uribe, Pérez’s relations with the GEA, were not amicable.¹⁰² This would prompt the GEA to reach out to civil society organisations (Moncada, 2016, pp.81, 82), and reactivate the dense linkages forged during the tenure of the Presidential Council. They did so to reassert their interests in local politics, leading them to try and find a successor to Pérez. This would eventually be the political outsider Sergio Fajardo, with whom the GEA would have far closer relations. As we now see, with his arrival in office alignment between the local and national authorities was sustained, but now with strong backing from Medellín’s economic elites. This marked the emergence of Medellín’s elite coalition.

¹⁰² Interview with Ricardo Aricapa, journalist, 09/02/2022, 59rrp (note that besides being a journalist, Aricapa worked as Pérez’s communications director, and had privileged access to him).

3.2 High Elite Coordination: The Ascent of Medellín's Elite Coalition

Sergio Fajardo won a landslide election victory in 2003, representing an alternative (non-traditional) political movement, *Compromiso Ciudadano*, backed by business interests and civil society organisations alike (Gutiérrez-Sanin et al., 2013). While Fajardo and President Uribe were of diverging political orientations, the Fajardo administration sought to work closely with Uribe's government on local security matters. Indeed, though Fajardo openly expressed misgivings about paramilitary demobilisation, which had begun during Pérez's tenure, he nonetheless committed to making a success of the process, implementing a raft of social programmes focussed on reintegrating ex-combatants. Moreover, although joint operations in the city's MUCs had ended by the time Fajardo assumed office, he oversaw a considerable stepping up of investment in security throughout these OCG-occupied areas, as well as a generalised expansion of State services and institutional presence. Consequently, local-national political elite collaboration was sustained during this period, as the priorities of the Fajardo administration coalesced with those of the Uribe government¹⁰³ despite their ideological and partisan differences.

Coordination between these otherwise divergent political elites was reinforced by Medellín's powerful *economic* elites. The GEA united around Uribe's *Seguridad Democrática* strategy, after having previously been split over his predecessor, Andrés Pastrana's, failed attempt to broker peace with the FARC. Ties between the GEA and Uribe were longstanding,¹⁰⁴ given Uribe's previous mandates as Mayor of Medellín and Governor of Antioquia. Indeed, the linkages between his government and Colombia's economic elite were made evident by the large number of business officials he appointed to his cabinet (Flores-Macías, 2012, pp.15, 16). Moreover, the GEA were highly supportive of Fajardo's local

¹⁰³ Interview with Juan David Valderrama, politician with experience working for GEA members, under Salazar, Gaviria and Gutiérrez. 25/02/2022, oh38a

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Ricardo Aricapa, journalist, 09/02/2022, 59rrp; Interview with Tatiana Muñoz, economic historian, 09/2012/2021, vw06; Interview with Andrés Mariño, historian, 29/11/2021, y3guu

project, pledging considerable financial resources to his campaign and then working closely with his administration. Fajardo then appointed several leading GEA affiliates to *his* cabinet once in office (Franz, 2018, p.95). Like Uribe, Fajardo was also familiar to Medellín's economic elites, having previously headed ProAntioquia. He was also well respected among the upper echelons of Medellín society given that he hailed from an elite Antioquian family. Whilst characterisations of Fajardo as a “tool” of the GEA are exaggerated,¹⁰⁵ it is undeniable that his government collaborated closely with these economic elites, who saw in Fajardo's administration the opportunity to reinvent Medellín's image, and make it a safe haven for international capital investments.¹⁰⁶ Economic elites were therefore turning to, *and acting through*, the State to help address insecurity and protect their long-term interests.

An elite coalition had therefore emerged in Medellín, uniting both the national and subnational tiers of government with a highly engaged and supportive network of powerful economic elites. This coalition worked with NGOs as well as MUC-based civil society organisations, revivifying the synergetic model of elite-community engagement that had been forged during the period of the Presidential Council.¹⁰⁷

With these high levels of elite coordination, unprecedented financial and technical resources could be marshalled to address Medellín's persistent OCG security threat. Not only did the national government allocate significant funds and materiel to security forces in Medellín, but Fajardo was able to acquire extensive local financing for his agenda. Firstly, Medellín's economic elites, both directly and through intermediaries such as ProAntioquia, took an active role in funding MUC development

¹⁰⁵ See for example, Ortega (2021).

¹⁰⁶ Indeed, it is important to recognise how his transformative agenda did not just include MUC intervention, but was also highly oriented towards improving Medellín's international reputation and attracting investment. Numerous highly publicised international events took place during his time in office, including a visit from the Spanish royal family, and several conferences and summits in an impressive new events hall built in the city centre. (Interview with Juan David Valderrama, politician with experience working for GEA members, under Salazar, Gaviria and Gutiérrez. 25/02/2022, oh38a).

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Juan David Valderrama, politician with experience working for GEA members, under Salazar, Gaviria and Gutiérrez. 25/02/2022, oh38a; Interview with former City Councillor Santiago Londoño, 08/02/2022, 0z6et

programmes (discussed further below).¹⁰⁸ Additionally, Fajardo was able to maintain high levels of municipal taxation, allowing for considerable public spending. Had he lacked support from Medellín's economic elites and middle classes, this likely would have not been feasible (Gutiérrez et al. 2013, p.11). Notably, between 2003-2007, industrial and commercial tax returns in Medellín increased by approximately forty-five percent, and Fajardo felt confident enough to undertake an otherwise unpopular land survey to augment property taxes (Devlin and Chaskel, 2010). Local economic elite support was thus vital to financing Fajardo's political project. All in all, Medellín's municipal budget doubled between 2004-2008 (Fukuyama and Colby, 2011).

3.3 State Territorial Expansion in Medellín's MUCs

With a vastly expanded budget, under Fajardo's administration (2004-2008) Medellín became the city with the highest levels of investment in security and justice in Colombia (Alcaldía, 2008, p.50), massively increasing the *resources* available to the police. Money was invested in improving accountability and oversight,¹⁰⁹ technology and equipment, but also the institution's territorial presence. Indeed, security investments at this time became concentrated in Medellín's MUCs, now considered to be "recovered zones". This included the installation of CCTV and the construction of rapid-response police stations, or CAIs.¹¹⁰ By the time Fajardo's term ended, thirteen CAIs had been completed, another four were projected for construction (ibid, p.60), and the local authorities had undertaken efforts to expand access to the legal system through building *Casas de Justicia* (p.64). New community policing units were also deployed to the city's MUCs.¹¹¹ Thus, under Fajardo's

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Sandra Ramírez Patiño, Economic Historian, Universidad de Antioquia. 15/12/2021, p0x55

¹⁰⁹ As exemplified by the creation of an independent human rights agency by city hall (Alcaldía, 2008, p.60).

¹¹⁰ *Centros de Atención Inmediata*.

¹¹¹ Interview with Óscar Naranjo, former Colombian Vice-President and General of the National Police, 17/06/2022, a1axa

administration, a permanent policing presence was established for the first time in many of Medellín's MUCs, a sign of increased State territorial control in these areas.

Additionally, Fajardo implemented an ambitious programme of public works in several of Medellín's MUCs, entrenching a more expansive State institutional presence in these spaces than could be achieved through policing alone. Most famously, these included the PUI (*Proyectos Urbanos Integrales*), large-scale infrastructure projects which sought to remodel MUCs to free-up public space, ease mobility, and boost quality of life. Three PUI were developed under Fajardo: one in the barrios of the north-eastern zone, which crosses Comunas 1 and 2, another in the neighbourhood of Moravia (the former municipal rubbish dump) in Comuna 4, and one in Comuna 13. These areas were targeted for intervention following an extensive diagnosis process, which determined that they were especially in need of State assistance, given their high levels of deprivation and violence.¹¹² However, opportunity also played into these calculations. In the north-eastern zone, Fajardo's team took advantage of the ongoing construction of the city's first *Metrocable* (a cable car public transport system),¹¹³ to implement a more expansive set of projects in the area. Thus, they redeveloped the areas around the Metrocable stations and built the first of Medellín's famous 'library-parks'. Though impressive, the PUI were geographically limited in their application.¹¹⁴

Alejandro Echeverri, director of the PUIs under Fajardo, explained to me that many different institutions needed to work together effectively to implement Fajardo's ambitious agenda.¹¹⁵ This

¹¹² Interview with Alejandro Echeverri, academic and former director of the PUI, 20/01/2022, qv3pa

¹¹³ This project was initiated under Luís Pérez's administration.

¹¹⁴ Other initiatives such as a participatory budget were also implemented, which allocated five percent of the city budget to be spent on projects chosen by the community, another example of the administration's emphasis on including MUC-based organisations in local governance. Moreover, contemporaneously many other investments were made in housing, extending formal services, and in social programmes in MUCs. Education was also prioritised, with new schools constructed across the city, including ten *Colegios de Calidad* which received sponsorship from the private sector, especially from prominent GEA companies (Alcaldía, 2008, p.82, 83)

¹¹⁵ This was also noted by community leader Orlando García in Comuna 1, who remarked on the impressive number of institutions which made themselves present in the community at this time and whose representatives coordinated and were engaged in dialogue with the community. (02/03/2022, 0nolh.2)

coordination was facilitated by what he described as a “historic moment”, which saw the ascent into public office of a generation strongly influenced by the consultative processes of the 1990s and the work of the Presidential Council. Many people came to work for the government who had been focussing on Medellín’s MUCs since the 1990s, who had maintained ties to community organisations, who knew the necessities of these communities, and who had long been designing solutions to address them.¹¹⁶ Thus, the rise to political power not just of Fajardo, but of a broader network of actors with a shared vision and understanding of Medellín’s MUCs, led to an unusual degree of unity and coordination *within* local government during this period. This was crucial to effectively extending the State’s multifaceted institutional presence across the city’s MUCs.

3.4 Territorial Control and Governance in Medellín’s MUCs

Although State territorial control increased in marginalised spaces in which police were installed and development programmes initiated, these were limited in number. Moreover, low police autonomy meant that OCGs retained *de facto* power over community life, continuing to govern civilian populations in many MUCs.

After 2002, the BCN’s (State-assisted) victory over the urban guerrillas ensured that paramilitary rule over the city’s MUCs was all but unchallenged. Despite their long-standing alliance, the BCN quickly dismantled the Bloque Metro, absorbing or murdering its members to quickly secure urban supremacy. As such, by 2003 levels of violence in the city were in sharp decline. Paramilitary demobilisation then followed. However, as seen elsewhere in Colombia, this did little to reduce the power of the paramilitary structures;¹¹⁷ the number of demobilised combatants was inflated, and the territorial

¹¹⁶ Interview with Alejandro Echeverri, academic and former director of the PUI, 20/01/2022, qv3pa

¹¹⁷ Interview with Ricardo Aricapa, journalist, 09/02/2022, 59rrp

control these groups exercised remained intact.¹¹⁸ As such, although the BCN formally disbanded, Don Berna retained control over the city; his narco-trafficking structure, the *Oficina*, now coordinated the city's OCGs.

Under the *Oficina*, the patterns of OCG territorial control that had been established during paramilitary ascendancy persisted, though certain changes also occurred in the city's MUCs. Firstly, the strict territorial demarcations which had previously limited civilian freedom of movement—*fronteras invisibles*—were largely lifted, given the decline in urban conflict that accompanied the *Oficina*'s hegemony.

Secondly, micro-trafficking in Medellín's MUCs reached new heights, with designated points for the sale of drugs—*plazas de vicio*—becoming indelible features of the city's comunas.¹¹⁹ Similarly, extortion of MUC residents—known colloquially as the *vacuna* (vaccine)—became systematic under the BCN and then the *Oficina*, primarily targeting informal businesses.¹²⁰ Predatory loan-sharking also proliferated, nicknamed “drop-by-drop” (*gota a gota*) lending for its tendency to bleed debtors dry.

Additionally, norms and prohibitions throughout many of Medellín's MUCs continued to be enforced by local gangs, closely linked to extortion having become a key source of income for OCGs. For example, OCG fines (enforced through violence and forced displacement) became commonplace for disruptive behaviour, including excessive noise or drunken brawling, as well as for inter-personal conflicts. These practices had all occurred in MUCs in previous decades, however they became a

¹¹⁸ Illustrative of this is the fact that although Don Berna demobilised the BCN, he immediately then armed the *Bloque Heroés de Granada* for deployment in rural Antioquia. Furthermore, it is widely reported that paramilitaries paid MUC residents to claim to be combatants in order to the boost numbers of demobilising BCN fighters. This was confirmed to me by a community worker in Altavista, a corregimiento in southern Medellín, who described the 2003 demobilisation as a “pantomime”, revealing that several of his friends had been paid to pretend to be BCN combatants (MUC Resident and Community Leader, Alta Vista. 15/02/2022, k1iwj)

¹¹⁹ Interview with “AKA”, social leader and activist, Comuna 13. 11/04/2022, uzrc7

¹²⁰ Nonetheless, during this period it was still far more selective and less diversified in its application than it would become in the post-2008 period (see IPC, 2018).

widespread part of daily life in territories conquered by the BCN and then inherited by the Oficina (notably, they all continue today).

During this period, OCGs also sought to influence community politics in their territories, influencing— or outright directing— the JACs,¹²¹ community centres ubiquitous throughout Medellín’s MUCs.¹²² Indeed, involvement in these organisations provided channels through which Medellín’s combos could exercise their power, as well as access resources. In many instances, OCGs were able to appropriate funds distributed by City Hall for community development projects.¹²³ Acting on orders from their superiors, localised OCGs also exerted influence over elections at this time, restricting community access to certain candidates for office, and obliging residents to vote for favoured politicians, emblematic of the continuing ties between post-paramilitary structures and democratic politics.

Moreover, with Oficina hegemony, OCGs took measures to be more surreptitious. Indeed, OCG homicides not only declined, but were increasingly hidden, with bodies dumped in the Medellín river or in the countryside rather than left on the streets of the comunas (see Durán-Martínez, 2018). Don Berna recognised that visible conflict would negatively affect his business interests and prompt greater State repression. That is, recrudescing violence might increase the perception that Medellín’s OCGs represented a security threat, triggering political elite action. Thus, Don Berna sought to strictly discipline the OCGs within the Oficina’s umbrella structure and mediate conflicts between them to minimize violence.¹²⁴

¹²¹ *Junta de Acción Comunal*.

¹²² Interview with MUC Resident, Altavista, 15/02/2022, k1iwj

¹²³ Including Fajardo’s participatory budgeting programme.

¹²⁴ Nonetheless, Berna was also able to communicate directly with senior officials in the local government through the NGO he had founded during demobilisation, *Corporación Democrática*, as well as through the corrupt linkages he maintained with local politicians and security officials. This facilitated coordination between elite strata in the licit and illicit world.

The Oficina's rule thus prompted widespread changes *across Medellín's OCG-controlled MUCs*. However, those communities targeted with State interventions witnessed *further transformations* still. As MUC residents recollected, police expansion into Medellín's marginalised comunas incentivised OCGs to act less brazenly.¹²⁵ Indeed, by comparison, interviewees who inhabited areas which at this time had *not* yet witnessed the permanent installation of the police recollected that OCGs exercised *less* restraint and undertook fewer efforts to remain clandestine.¹²⁶

In neighbourhoods where the police were permanently installed, OCG drug dealing and extortion continued unabated, but with greater discretion. Police generally tolerated such activities, and often collaborated with OCGs. Thus, even as State territorial control increased, with police presence reaching historically unprecedented levels in several of Medellín's MUCs, low police autonomy ensured that OCGs retained enormous influence over civilian life. Moreover, in some OCG-dominated neighbourhoods, such as in parts of Comuna 13, interviewees revealed that police largely confined themselves to their CAIs, and soldiers to their bases, not straying far into the community.¹²⁷ This implies that even with their significantly increased resources, the deployment of policing institutions to the city's MUCs did not produce uniform increases in State territorial control in these areas, with security forces still unable (or unwilling) to uphold their mandates. Therefore, *State Territorial Expansion* led to heterogenous real-world outcomes, and low police autonomy from OCGs ensured that MUC residents remained largely governed by criminal groups.

While social spending under Fajardo's administration did little in isolation to alter the balance of territorial control in Medellín's MUCs, these investments nonetheless played an important role in shaping the provision of *governance* in these spaces. The extension of formal services increased the

¹²⁵ Interview with MUC Residents, La Escombrera, Comuna 13, 13/02/2022, tbjgc; Interview with MUC resident, Alta Vista, 03/03/2022, 4yrzm; Interview with Municipal Worker and MUC Resident, Comuna 13, 03/02/2022, fx7q3

¹²⁶ Interview with Community Leader, La Sierra 22/02/2022, uq4v7

¹²⁷ Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 13, 20/02/2022, msbza

regulatory presence of the local authorities in many MUCs, but simultaneously *decreased* MUC residents' reliance on informal services "taxed" by OCGs, cutting-off an important criminal revenue stream.¹²⁸ Moreover, in some cases, the PUI developments created public spaces in which combos felt too exposed to conduct business, forcing them to migrate to less developed areas that offered greater cover.¹²⁹ Indeed, architectural features of Medellín's development programme had been specifically devised to disrupt criminal movements and activities (Fukuyama and Colby, 2011). One (unforeseen) effect of increased State investment was the relaxation of territorial monitoring by OCGs. Increased State presence and public transport projects in MUCs (e.g., the Metrocable) brought an increasing flow of outsiders to these previously isolated residential neighbourhoods. OCGs were then obliged to adapt to a more fluid transit of people, incentivising them to loosen strict restrictions on civilian movement. Many interviewees also emphasised that a medium-term effect of the Fajardo-era social spending has been a diminished pool of recruits for the neighbourhood combos.¹³⁰ Thanks to these investments, marginalised youths were provided with alternatives to, and paths out of, crime.¹³¹

4. Renewed State Territorial Expansion (2008-2012)

Between 2008-2012, many of Medellín's MUCs once again saw spiking violence, as the Oficina disintegrated. During this period, the local government continued to augment its regulatory presence in these territories, and a sustained effort to improve oversight and accountability across the security forces increased police autonomy from OCGs. Political and economic elite collaboration continued,

¹²⁸ Interview with leading crime reporter at El Colombiano, 16/02/2022, 6lbtF

¹²⁹ Interview with Municipal Worker and MUC Resident, Comuna 13, 03/02/2022, fx7q3

¹³⁰ Interview with Community Leader, La Sierra 22/02/2022, uq4v7

¹³¹ Attention to the vulnerable youth demographic through social programmes and increasing access to education has of course been unable to fully address the dynamics of gang socialisation. Enormous deficits remain. However, increasing the availability of these opportunities, and taking efforts to decrease the segregation of Medellín's MUCs from the city at large, began to have positive effects beginning at this time.

securing financing for sustained *State Territorial Expansion*. During this time, then, OCGs were weakened while State territorial control and governance in the Medellín's MUCs further consolidated.

4.1 Continued Elite Coordination and State Territorial Expansion

By the end of Fajardo's term, disenchantment from grass-roots civil society actors (who decried his pro-business orientation) and a popular campaign supported by traditional political interests— spearheaded by Luís Pérez— meant the continuity of his agenda was not guaranteed. Fajardo's successor, Alonso Salazar, was elected only by a thin margin. Salazar had served as Fajardo's deputy, but had made his name in the 1980s and 1990s after carrying out pioneering studies of Medellín's combos. His election thus allowed for continuity in the Fajardo-era approach to local security and development, with continued investment in *State Territorial Expansion* into the city's MUCs. Indeed, during Salazar's tenure, Medellín's elite coalition held strong, his election having been strongly supported by Medellín's economic elites (Moncada, 2016, p.84). Close ties between City Hall and Medellín's business community therefore persisted. Indeed, this relationship had been fruitful for the city's economic elites, as Medellín's international reputation had dramatically improved, and the city was viewed as an increasingly safe bet for international investors. Local economic elites thus stood to benefit from continuity, and from consolidating and enhancing the Fajardo-era agenda.¹³²

Moreover, during Salazar's administration, the national government continued to coordinate closely with the local authorities on security matters, pledging further men, materiel, and resources to help quell rising violence in Medellín. Police manpower in Medellín was reinforced considerably, with a

¹³² This is not to say that all practices from the Fajardo era simply continued under Salazar. Testimony from NGO workers, employees of City Hall, and MUC residents indicates that there was an increasing gulf between the “elite” spheres (the government and private sector) and “non-elites” (MUC groups and other civil society organisations). Inter-sectoral dialogue was sustained during this period, but significant cracks emerged, with a resulting deterioration in linkages between MUCs and the government. The results of this became evident under subsequent administrations, with investments increasingly focused outside of MUCs.

further 1500 officers deployed (Tiempo, 2010a), and intelligence gathering was prioritised,¹³³ leading to significant increases in arrests. Under Salazar, the security forces adopted a more militarised role in Medellín's MUCs than under Fajardo. Even so, this did not come close to the joint operations of Pérez's administration in the early 2000s. Indeed, Police General Gustavo Franco, who at the time coordinated operations in Comuna 13, recounted to me that there was an explicit recognition that repeating the heavily militaristic, counterinsurgency operations of the past would be folly, and not provide long-term solutions to the OCG security threat. Indeed, given that less than a decade on from Orión, the police could still only enter parts of the Comuna "carrying rifles and wearing helmets— it was war", it was evident to the police that a different strategy was required to produce lasting change. As such, far greater emphasis was placed on community assistance, ingraining police in day-to-day life to foster trust, and promoting the rule-of-law. All of this was undertaken explicitly to "create [State] authority" in MUCs.¹³⁴ The local government also sought to further consolidate police presence in Medellín's MUCs by creating "*CAIs Perifericos*" in peripheral communities most affected by violence and where policing presence had remained limited. These police bases, unlike their regular CAI counterparts, are heavily fortified. They were also built in strategic positions in the peripheries, on hilltops or by transit routes, providing police with vantage points over the surrounding areas.

Contemporaneously, Colombia's police were being subjected to an ongoing reform process. This included a transition towards community-focussed hot-spot policing, with the introduction of '*Plan Cuadrantes*'. This was piloted in several major cities at this time, including Medellín, and embedded officers in communities for a minimum of two years to facilitate prolonged community engagement and develop public trust (FIP, 2012, p.11; *Cómo Vamos*, 2012, p.2).¹³⁵ Additionally,

¹³³ Interview with Police Generals Gustavo Franco Gómez and Javier Josué Martín Gamez, 02/03/2022, u826n

¹³⁴ Interview with Police Generals Gustavo Franco Gómez and Javier Josué Martín Gamez, 02/03/2022, u826n

¹³⁵ Plan Cuadrantes was later rolled out nationally, and continues to this day.

counterintelligence measures were a key part of reform efforts, designed to minimise criminal co-optation of police officers.¹³⁶ Greater investments were also made in technology and oversight to improve the effectiveness of police operations and patrols.¹³⁷ Thus, during this period, police were not only installed across an increasing number of Medellín's MUCs, but their supply of resources continued to grow. Additionally, greater oversight and anti-corruption measures were introduced, increasing police autonomy from OCGs. This would allow the State to not only exercise territorial control in Medellín's MUCs, but also govern with increasing independence from criminal influence.

Infrastructural and public goods investments continued in Medellín's MUCs during Salazar's tenure. This included further extensions of public services, including drinking water, as well as the maintenance of the PUI development agenda, leading to the construction of PUIs across Comunas 8 and 9, as well as in Comunas 5 and 6. Additionally, Salazar's administration created other eye-catching public works in MUCs, such as a set of electric stairs to ease mobility in one of the steepest parts of Comuna 13. Thus, alongside continuing to boost police presence in the city's MUCs, the government sustained its efforts to develop these communities, augmenting State regulatory functions in these historically neglected areas.

4.2 Fragmentation and Repression: Punishing Medellín's OCGs

The extradition of Don Berna in 2008 signalled the end of criminal hegemony in Medellín, though his federalised structure had shown signs of weakening and of growing internal rifts throughout 2007, with the murders of senior Oficina members.¹³⁸ In the subsequent years, several mid-ranking members of the Oficina structure sought to assume Don Berna's mantle, but with little success, as they were

¹³⁶Interview with Óscar Naranjo, former Colombian Vice-President and General of the National Police, 17/06/2022, a1axa

¹³⁷ Interview with Police Generals Gustavo Franco Gómez and Javier Josué Martín Gamez, 02/03/2022, u826n

¹³⁸ Interview with Max Yuri Gil, expert on Human Rights and Organised Crime in Medellín, 05/04/2022, 3bze1

either killed as a result of the internal power struggle or detained by the authorities. The fraying of the Oficina's supremacy provoked greater violence across Medellín's MUCs. This escalated by 2010 due to the emergence of two factions, led respectively by Erick Vargas, alias "*Sebastián*" and Maximiliano Bonilla, alias "*Valenciano*". Violence was also fuelled by the arrival of another post-paramilitary organisation in Medellín, the *Urabeños*,¹³⁹ who are alleged to have entered the city at the behest of Valenciano (InSight Crime, 2020). Following his arrest in 2011, the Urabeños sought to take advantage of the Oficina's debilitation and establish a foothold in the city. Therefore, between 2008-2012, different organisations armed and financed combos to try and control the city's MUCs, a means to then access Medellín's lucrative market opportunities. In 2012 Sebastián was arrested by the authorities, and shortly thereafter a much-weakened Oficina brokered a truce with the Urabeños, dividing the city into distinct spheres of influence.

Besides incentivising increased violence across the city's MUCs, the Oficina's fragmentation provoked other changes in these territories between 2008-2012. The newfound competition and lack of hierarchical mediation saw a revival of *fronteras invisibles*, and the rupturing of stable ties between localised OCGs and larger criminal structures forced the combos to diversify their rent-seeking activities.¹⁴⁰ As such, during this period, extortion became far more widespread and indiscriminate (IPC, 2018). Whereas previously OCGs were more selective in extorting MUC inhabitants, previously unaffected groups of people were now victimised, as the combos scrambled to accrue resources. Other rent-seeking practices also became more commonplace, such as the monopolisation of basic

¹³⁹ The *Urabeños* are also known as the *Clan del Golfo* or AGC (the *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia*).

¹⁴⁰ Whereas elements of the Oficina had been involved in highly lucrative illicit economies such as narcotrafficking, some of the dividends of which would trickle downwards, after its collapse access to such revenue streams was cut off for many *bandas* and their constituent combos.

household goods in Medellín's MUCs, with OCGs allowing only particular vendors to sell staple products such as eggs, meat, *arepas*, and fuel.¹⁴¹

Heightened tension thus provoked greater territorial defensiveness from Medellín's OCGs, and dislocations in the illicit economy incentivised diversification. Nonetheless, while these were proximally triggered by the Oficina's fragmentation, the territorial expansion and more confrontational posture of the police cannot be overlooked. Increases in OCG violence were met with a police crackdown. With their improved intelligence gathering capabilities, the police took advantage of the divisions in Medellín's criminal structures, developing OCG sources who could inform on their former-allies turned-rivals.¹⁴² Equipped with valuable intelligence, high resources, and increasing autonomy, Medellín's police were able to respond effectively to the spike in violence, and so began dismantling numerous criminal networks across the city.

Tacit police toleration of illicit economic activities, such as micro-trafficking, persisted. However, more flagrant exercises of OCG power (particularly violent ones) were now met with heavy State repression. Whereas previously OCGs in certain areas were emboldened enough to patrol while openly brandishing weapons, this behaviour was now met with swift arrests.¹⁴³ As a community leader in *La Sierra*, a notorious peripheral neighbourhood in Comuna 8, recounted to me, the installation of a CAI Periférico in the area immediately affected the behaviour of local combos, who stopped patrolling openly armed as they had done for years.¹⁴⁴

Thus, with high resources and increasing autonomy, Medellín's police demonstrated that they had a viable "stick" with which to punish criminal actors, one which they would use in response to OCG

¹⁴¹ Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 3, 11/02/2022, nem3a; Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 3, 26/02/2022, ug69x; Focus Group, Peripheral area of Comuna 13, 13/02/2022

¹⁴² Interview with Oscar Naranjo, former Colombian Vice-President and General of the National Police, 17/06/2022, a1axa

¹⁴³ Interview with academic and organised crime expert, 14/12/2021, 1bz9d

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Community Leader, La Sierra 22/02/2022, uq4v7

security threats, such as escalating violence. State repression arguably helped force Medellín's bandas to negotiate with one another: inter-OCG warfare was not only bad for business, but now also incurred the punitive attention of State authorities.

In summary, the collapse of Don Berna's empire fuelled violence and, in turn, a step-up in the State's involvement in a growing number of MUCs. With close collaboration on security matters continuing between the local and national governments, police presence throughout the city's MUCs continued to augment, whilst investments were made in improving police capacity. This included significant anti-corruption measures. A high-resource police force, with increasing autonomy, was thus able to respond effectively to Medellín's recrudescing security threat. State territorial control increased, and absent the hierarchy of the Oficina, State repression provided incentives for OCG restraint. Consequently, criminals across the city adopted a lower profile, and State actors assumed a greater role in MUC governance. Economic elite support was crucial to ensuring continuity in the local agenda, meaning that Medellín's elite coalition remained intact.

5. Durable State Territorial Control in Medellín's MUCs (2012-2020)

Following the events of 2008-2012, State territorial control and governance has continued to steadily increase in Medellín's marginalised urban communities. Nonetheless, the State's territorial control is far from uniform across the city, and criminal authority remains an indelible feature of day-to-day life for many MUC residents. Indeed, while weakened, the city's OCGs have become more organised than in preceding decades, exercising considerable restraint to avoid State repression. Though certainly imperfect, the State is in a stronger position vis-à-vis OCGs than it was circa 2010, and the situation in many MUCs is unrecognisable when compared to two decades ago.

5.1 Enduring Elite Coordination, Sustained Territorial Expansion

After Salazar, the administrations of Mayors Aníbal Gaviria (2012-2016) and Federico Gutiérrez (2016-2020) retained the support of Medellín's powerful economic elites, the GEA, who remained influential in local politics (Lewin, 2015; Builes, 2022). Indeed, the city's economy went from strength-to-strength, attracting international investment as well as a tourism boom. This auspicious business climate had long been sought by the GEA, and was partly the product of their active political engagement and investment in improving urban security *through the State*. Indeed, with continued GEA support, the model of multifaceted *State Territorial Expansion* into MUCs that had been developed under Fajardo and Salazar continued under their successors, Gaviria and Gutiérrez. Social housing projects were implemented, alongside new community centres and schools—including Gaviria's widely renowned UVAs (*Unidades de Vida Articulada*)—as well as new Metrocable lines to integrate Medellín's peripheries. Gaviria's election represented a partisan shift in the mayor's office, as unlike his two immediate predecessors, he was not an independent “outsider”, but rather a “traditional” Liberal Party politician. Nonetheless, with close ties to Fajardo and the GEA, he sought to maintain the extant security and development agenda (Ruíz, 2019). As Gaviria himself admitted “what is being done here has to be committed to by successive administrations [...] none of this can be achieved in a single term” (Vulliamy, 2013), indicating that the importance of policy continuity had become internalised by Medellín's political elites.

With the diminishing of Medellín's OCG security threat, the involvement of the national authorities in local security management has been less visible, though local authorities have continued to coordinate closely with the national government on security matters.¹⁴⁵ This sustained coordination was exemplified when Federico Gutiérrez launched a crackdown on Medellín's OCGs, shortly after

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Police Generals Gustavo Franco Gómez and Javier Josué Martín Gamez, 02/03/2022, u826n

taking office. This was seemingly driven by a desire to appear tough on crime,¹⁴⁶ given Gutiérrez's ambition to run in the 2022 presidential election, as well as the embarrassment caused after his security secretary was arrested for holding private talks with senior OCG figures.¹⁴⁷ During this time, the national authorities supported Gutiérrez's more repressive turn, with President Iván Duque meeting repeatedly with the mayor, publicly supporting his policies, and holding joint security council meetings in Medellín (Meléndez, 2018; Tiempo, 2018). Despite partisan changes at both levels of government, collaborative ties between the local and national authorities on addressing OCG security threats in Medellín have remained strong, even while political disagreements have surfaced regarding other issues (Espectador, 2016). Consequently, efforts to continue expanding State territorial control and regulatory functions into the city's MUCs have persisted, largely thanks to the maintenance of Medellín's elite coalition.

While there has been significant continuity in Fajardo-era social interventionist policies, signs of deterioration have also emerged. The rate of investment in Medellín's MUCs has slowed, with many new projects instead being developed in wealthier areas and the urban centre.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, development projects in MUCs appear to have had less community involvement¹⁴⁹ and be less impactful than under previous administrations.¹⁵⁰ With Gaviria's election, positional payoffs to Liberal Party allies throughout City Hall are said to have increased. As a senior member of Gaviria's team recounted to me, this placed numerous people in "positions of power who didn't have the capabilities

¹⁴⁶ Interview with "AKA", social leader and activist, Comuna 13, 11/04/2022, uzrc7

¹⁴⁷ Interview with María Victoria Llorente, Fundación Ideas para La Paz, 07/04/2022, vv2r7

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Alejandro Echeverri, academic and former director of the PUI, 20/01/2022, qv3pa

¹⁴⁹ Numerous NGO workers, community activists, and government officials related to me that following Salazar's administration, the local authorities have much less disposed towards fostering community dialogue and participation. (Interview with Lukas Jaramillo, NGO Worker and Activist, Comuna 13, 11/02/2022, wekqr; Interview with Municipal Worker and MUC Resident, Comuna 13, 01/03/2022, fx7q3.2; Interview with Orlando García, community leader, Comuna 1, 02/03/2022, 0nolh.2)

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Orlando García, community leader Comuna 1, 02/03/2022, 0nolh.2

to carry out their jobs adequately”.¹⁵¹ Consequently, development interventions in MUCs became “a mess. They were very poorly managed”,¹⁵² to quote a municipal worker at the time. Federico Gutiérrez fared little better. According to his campaign manager turned-minister, Gutiérrez’s administration was staffed with a generation of young, enthusiastic, but ultimately inexperienced, appointees.¹⁵³ Thus, MUC development projects during his tenure suffered from poor planning and implementation.

Efforts to build a multifaceted State institutional presence in MUCs through development spending have therefore slowed and faced setbacks. Nonetheless, coordination between political elite actors at both the national and local levels of government, alongside economic elite actors, has continued, exemplifying the persistence of Medellín’s elite coalition. This has led to the continued growth of a permanent policing presence across the city’s MUCs over the last decade. *State Territorial Expansion* has therefore persisted, even though Medellín’s OCG security threat subsided considerably after 2012. OCG security threats may therefore have played an important role in initially spurring (and then renewing) *State Territorial Expansion* in Medellín, however policy continuity was achieved over successive administrations, and thus the State’s territorial control in MUCs has continued to grow *despite* a declining OCG threat. I return to consider the theoretical implications of this in Chapter 8.

5.2 Medellín’s MUCs after 2012: OCG Adaptation, Coproduced Governance

How, then, has the provision of governance altered in the city’s MUCs amid durable *State Territorial Expansion*? After 2012, OCGs in Medellín became more organised, and have since exercised far greater restraint, intervening in the lives of MUC residents and impeding State functions far less than in the

¹⁵¹ Interview with Juan David Valderrama, politician with experience working for GEA members, under Salazar, Gaviria and Gutiérrez. 25/02/2022, oh38a

¹⁵² Interview with Municipal Worker and MUC Resident, Comuna 13, 01/03/2022, fx7q3.2

¹⁵³ Interview with Juan David Valderrama, politician with experience working for GEA members, under Salazar, Gaviria and Gutiérrez. 25/02/2022, oh38a

recent past. This is a process described by analysts as the ‘domestication’ of organised crime. Its symptoms are manifold.

Firstly, Homicides in Medellín have continued on a long-term downward trajectory despite the fragmented criminal underworld, which is now constituted of between ten and twenty *razones* (the successors of the *bandas*). These groups now coordinate closely to avoid conflict, which is guaranteed to attract State repression, dialoguing through a reconstituted *Oficina* structure, though without a singular figurehead. A former-combo member from Comuna 1 recounted to me how OCGs now stayed their hands like never before, requiring explicit approval from their superiors before killing.¹⁵⁴ Discipline and coordination within these groups is now evidently extremely high,¹⁵⁵ so much so that a Police Captain in Comuna 13 claimed that OCG-related homicides in the area were now *chiefly* related to internal disciplining processes.¹⁵⁶

Secondly, OCG leaders also now seek to maintain extremely low profiles. As two Police Generals explained, a sustained emphasis on intelligence gathering and repression in the last decade has made leadership positions in Medellín’s criminal organisations unattractive: “Now in Medellín no one wants to lead [an OCG] because we come after them. We made this costly”.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, following the collapse of Don Berna’s empire, the armed *razones* (and the *combos* who operate beneath them) appear to have decoupled from narcotrafficking DTOs. Traffickers use Medellín for money laundering, but do not seek to control urban territory (as did their paramilitarised forebears). OCGs therefore have access to fewer resources, further debilitating them in a context in which they face State security institutions with ever increasing capacity.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with JAC President, El Popular, Comuna 1, 18/02/2022, 3ryfb

¹⁵⁵ Interview with MUC resident and JAC leader, Comuna 1, 12/02/2022, jogb6; Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 7, 10/02/2022, 52pss; Interview with Social Leader, Comuna 3. 21/02/2022, s0gpn

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Police Captain and Patrol Officer, Comuna 13, 02/04/2022, fb52d

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Police Generals Gustavo Franco Gómez and Javier Josué Martín Gamez, 02/03/2022, u826n

Thirdly, interference by OCGs in community organisations, such as the JACs, has lessened in recent years.¹⁵⁸ A senior leader within Medellín’s JACs confirmed that although certain organisations remain controlled of these groups, criminal capture of JACs more generally had declined,¹⁵⁹ as OCGs sought to maintain lower profiles.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, the involvement of OCGs in elections appears to have diminished considerably. This is not to say that it has entirely vanished.¹⁶¹ As a prominent community leader in Comuna 3 revealed, local OCGs still maintain clientelist networks with political parties and attempt to influence voting among community residents.¹⁶² Still, this is far less concerted than in years prior. Under Don Berna’s rule, the local post-paramilitary group established a stall with a laptop near a voting station, recording the identity numbers of locals before obliging them to vote. Now, things were far more surreptitious.¹⁶³

OCGs continue to be involved in community mediation and settling local disputes, with fines issued for “disruptive” behaviours.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, MUC residents divulged that they had far more confidence in OCGs to resolve certain matters swiftly and effectively than they did in law enforcement.¹⁶⁵ However, allowing for variation, interviewees in several different comunas confirmed that this was less common (and punishments less severe) than in the past, with combos fearful of attracting unwanted State attention.¹⁶⁶ Fronteras invisibles still exist in areas of the city, though reportedly more so in

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Municipal Worker and MUC Resident, Comuna 13, 01/03/2022, fx7q3.2

¹⁵⁹ Still, considerable spatial variation exists across the city, as community leaders in Comuna 1 spoke of a sustained influence of OCG interests in several local JACs. (Interview with Social Leader, Comuna 3. 21/02/2022, s0gpn; Interview with Orlando García, community leader, Comuna 1, 23/02/2022, 0nolh).

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Senior JAC Confederation leader, Comuna 13 01/03/2022, iqnr

¹⁶¹ Interview with former City Councillor Santiago Londoño, 08/02/2022, 0z6et

¹⁶² Interview with Social Leader, Comuna 3, 02/04/2022, s0gpn.2

¹⁶³ Interview with Social Leader, Comuna 3. 21/02/2022, s0gpn

¹⁶⁴ Interview MUC Resident, Comuna 3, 26/02/2022, yr5fy

¹⁶⁵ Interview with JAC President, El Popular, Comuna 1, 18/02/2022 3ryfb; Interview, MUC resident, Comuna 1, 18/02/2022, d1y1e; Interview with MUC Resident, Altavista, 15/02/2022, k1iwj; Interview with a Priest and MUC resident, Comuna 13, 12/02/2022, laco2; Focus Group, Peripheral area of Comuna 13, 13/02/2022; Interview with Social Leader, Comuna 3. 21/02/2022, s0gpn

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Community Leader, La Sierra (Comuna 8), 22/02/2022, uq4v7; Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 13, 20/02/2022, msbza; Interview, Teacher, Alta Vista, 03/03/2022, efw8n; Interview MUC; Community worker, Altavista, 03/03/2022, nck2s; Interview with Municipal Worker and MUC Resident, Comuna 13, 03/02/2022, fx7q3

neighbourhoods where police presence remains low.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, OCGs in general are no longer openly armed¹⁶⁸; only in more peripheral areas did MUC residents recollect OCG members carrying weapons in public in the recent past. Indeed, in very peripheral areas, where the urban and rural zones begin to meet, more open expressions of OCG power persist.¹⁶⁹

Summarising these changes, an expert on violence in Medellín explained to me that OCGs now exercised: “a less fierce control, less absolute in people’s lives. Life was previously highly controlled by armed groups in these barrios, that has gone down.”¹⁷⁰ Still, despite this, it is too simplistic to characterise OCG governance as having simply *declined* thanks to *State Territorial Expansion*. Instead, OCGs have *adapted* to increasing State presence and MUC development to diversify their illicit economic activities and expand their governance over new areas of community life.

For example, in Comuna 13, Salazar’s electric stairs have become an extremely popular tourist destination, and a ‘graffiti tour’ has emerged around them offered by hundreds of local guides. Consequently numerous (formal and informal) businesses have emerged in the immediate vicinity. Sources revealed to me that with this injection of tourist money, the area became highly attractive for OCG extortionists.¹⁷¹ However, the stairs themselves lie on the intersection of three, historically rivalrous, combos’ territories. Nonetheless, rather than fight, and in so doing attract state repression and drive away tourism, the combos formed a pact, working together to ensure peace and profitability.¹⁷² Thus, both businesses and graffiti artists now pay the local OCGs for the right to work in the area. Transportation is another example of how OCGs have exploited the economic

¹⁶⁷ During Gutiérrez’ crackdown on crime, fronteras did increase in number, though this was short-lived.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 3, 11/02/2022, nem3a; Interview with former City Councillor Santiago Londoño, 08/02/2022, 0z6et

¹⁶⁹ Interview, Teacher, Alta Vista, 03/03/2022, efw8n; Interview with Social Leader, Comuna 3. 21/02/2022, s0gpn; Interview with Municipal Worker and MUC Resident, Comuna 13, 03/02/2022, fx7q3

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Max Yuri Gil, expert on Human Rights and Organised Crime in Medellín, 05/04/2022, 3bze1

¹⁷¹ Interview with Senior JAC Confederation leader, Comuna 13 01/03/2022, iqnr; Interview with “AKA”, social leader and activist, Comuna 13. 11/04/2022, uzrc7; Informal conversation, Comuna 13 NGO worker, 16/02/2022

¹⁷² Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 13, 20/02/2022, msbza

opportunities that have come with increasing State presence and governance.¹⁷³ Again, in Comuna 13, OCGs now also manage (informal) taxi services. As a community leader explained to me, drug dealers risked arrest after police were permanently installed in the Comuna. However, the Transport Police only came twice a year to check driver's papers. Transportation therefore provides stable, low-risk, and lucrative income for local OCGs.¹⁷⁴

Thus, in developing areas of Medellín's MUCs, OCGs have taken advantage of emerging market opportunities, expanding their governance over new aspects of community life.¹⁷⁵ Nonetheless, in more peripheral areas, in which police presence remains very low and State investment all but nonexistent, OCGs continue to accrue illicit revenues as they have in decades past, including by charging community residents for the right to access basic informal services, such as water or sewerage.¹⁷⁶

Governance therefore remains coproduced by State and OCG actors across many MUCs. Police undeniably persecute OCGs who commit salient acts of violence, such as those that kill or provoke mass displacements, but they also tolerate groups that exercise discretion, indicative of persistently low levels of autonomy. Exemplifying this reality, one interviewee in a peripheral part of Comuna 3 informed me that the police stationed there had openly advocated that residents appeal to the neighbourhood combo to settle minor issues; residents should only come to them when serious problems arose.¹⁷⁷ Elsewhere in Comuna 3, I spoke to a community leader in contact with the local

¹⁷³ OCGs have long extorted transport services, particularly in more deprived and peripheral areas of Medellín, which remain less accessible and lack lots of basic infrastructure. This was related to me in peripheral areas of Comunas 1, 2 and 3 in the poor north-eastern zone, as well as in the Corregimiento Altavista— though it doubtlessly occurs elsewhere also (Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 3, 11/02/2022, nem3a; Interview with MUC Resident, Altavista, 15/02/2022, kliwj).

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Senior JAC Confederation leader, Comuna 13 01/03/2022, iqnre

¹⁷⁵ Interview MUC Resident, Comuna 3, 26/02/2022, yr5fy

¹⁷⁶ Interview, MUC Resident, peripheral area of Comuna 1, 18/02/2022, dhy1e; Interview with JAC Leader, peripheral area of Comuna 1, 18/02/2022, qv8f2

¹⁷⁷ Interview with MUC resident, with links to Combo. Comuna 3. 26/02/2022, agal1

OCGs. Similarly, he told me that the police would ask combos to resolve minor matters in the neighbourhood.¹⁷⁸ Again, a third interviewee, this time from Comuna 8, told me that the local combos tell residents to go to the police for issues which *they* feel lie beyond their purview.¹⁷⁹ Evidently, the coproduction of governance by police and OCGs is widespread across the city.

Tacit agreements and corrupt linkages sustain this equilibrium.¹⁸⁰ Still, while bribery and heightened discipline ensure stability and thus allow OCGs to retain power in their communities, this is not equivalent to the power these groups exercised in previous decades. To compare the OCGs today with those that existed under Escobar or Berna is “like comparing a cat to a tiger”, an expert on Colombian organised crime explained to me. Indeed, some OCGs still pay-off the police, but this offers far less protection from State repression than in the past: “you pay and that doesn’t guarantee that [the police] won’t come and get you, but if you *don’t pay* then they *will* come and arrest you”.¹⁸¹

This equilibrium will likely endure for the foreseeable future, as incentives for any hard-line shifts towards repression are generally lacking; whenever the State upsets the balance of territorial control in MUCs by persecuting OCGs, inter-OCG violence ensues (as demonstrated by Federico Gutiérrez’s crackdown on the combos). As a police general explained to me, “sometimes it’s better to let them be [...] if you cut off one head, another five appear, like a hydra”.¹⁸² Given this, as State territorial control continues to expand, we can expect governance in the city’s MUCs to remain coproduced by organised criminal groups.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Social Leader, Comuna 3, 02/04/2022, s0gpn.2

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Community Leader, La Sierra 22/02/2022, uq4v7

¹⁸⁰ Interview with MUC Resident, Comuna 2, 10/12/2021, Ic1ub; Interview MUC Community worker, Altavista, 03/03/2022, nck2s

¹⁸¹ Interview with academic and organised crime expert, 14/12/2021, 1bz9d

¹⁸² Interview with Police Generals Gustavo Franco Gómez and Javier Josué Martín Gamez, 02/03/2022, u826n

Conclusion

Analysing a timespan of roughly forty years, this chapter traced the processes which produced shifting patterns of territorial control in Medellín's MUCs.

To recapitulate, during the 1980s and 1990s, *Unchecked OCG Competition* spread thanks to the low coordination between Medellín's political and economic elites, and the city's low police capacity. Towards the end of the 1990s, reforms in Colombia's National Police allowed for increasing *Containment* by the State security forces of OCG threats. Then, in the early 2000s, the national and local governments aligned in their desire to bring State order to the city's MUCs. With the backing of the extremely powerful GEA, an elite coalition formed. This allowed for *State Territorial Expansion*. Gains in territorial control have not only been sustained, but continued to increase since. Still, to this day, enduring low levels of police autonomy from OCGs ensures that while State territorial control has increased, governance in many MUCs remains coproduced by both State and criminal actors.

This case study underscores clearly the importance of elite coalitions, and thus the importance of elite coordination as the main driving force behind processes of *State Territorial Expansion*. While political and economic elite groups were clearly threatened by OCG activities throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the OCG threat failed to produce any unified response from these sectors. Economic elites did not leverage their power to influence public security, and instead retreated from public affairs and sought private protection. Local political elites did not conceive of security as their political responsibility, and national political elites largely focussed on a decapitation strategy, with limited interventions into Medellín's MUCs. Decisive efforts to expand State institutional presence in these spaces occurred following the strategic coalescence of the local and national governments, whose shared interests overcame partisan differences. A truly multi-sectoral elite coalition was only formed with the ascent of Fajardo's administration, which continued to collaborate with the national government closely on

security matters, and received support from the GEA. The reservoir of trust established between the public sector, business, and civil society organisations during the 1990s was crucial in this regard. The private sector, acting to protect its long-term economic interests, has continued to support and finance MUC interventionism over the last 20 years.

During my time in the field, Medellín's model of intimate public-private sector collaboration showed signs of deterioration. Mayor Daniel Quintero publicly fought with the GEA, who were threatened by a hostile takeover from the powerful Gilinski Group. While Medellín's elite coalition may be fraying, it is unlikely that this will have knock-on effects in the city's MUCs. Medellín's weakened OCGs will continue to share their turfs with an ever-increasing regulatory presence of the State, as well as an increasingly effective police force; one with the capabilities to severely damage them if provoked. Indeed, despite a breakdown in the territorial monopoly of organised crime in the city, the capacity of the police has ensured that since 2012, OCGs maintain unprecedented degrees of restraint. Stability in Medellín's MUCs will therefore persist. While the high levels of elite coordination seen in Medellín were therefore the main driving force behind *State Territorial Expansion*, police institutional capacity therefore has also played a key, necessary, role in ensuring this outcome and its longevity.

In the next chapter, we turn to Monterrey. This case study also showcases *State Territorial Expansion*, though to a more limited extent than in Medellín. Indeed, unlike in Medellín, Monterrey's elite coalition did *not* prove to be durable in the long-term. As such, while both *Security Reform* and *State Territorial Expansion* occurred in Monterrey, efforts to build State territorial control in MUCs— *though effective*— were ultimately short-lived. This underscores clearly how the independent variables in my theory can change through time, producing different outcomes from my theoretical framework (that is, moving between the quadrants of **Table 2.1**, as shown in Chapter 2). As Monterrey now shows— and then Rio de Janeiro demonstrates far more dramatically— the path towards *State Territorial*

Expansion is not unidirectional, and achieving this outcome does not guarantee its sustainability over time, as in the case of Medellín. Changes in OCG threats, elite coordination, and police capacity can all affect the durability of State efforts to augment territorial control in MUCs.

5. Monterrey: Elite Coordination and Security Reform in

Response to Crisis

Over the course of this chapter, we will see how elite coordination in response to a severe OCG Security Threat spurred a process of *Security Reform*, which then enabled *State Territorial Expansion*.

Monterrey is an industrial centre in north-eastern Mexico, and the capital of the State of Nuevo León. The Monterrey metropolitan area is one of the largest in the country, and is comprised of 13 municipalities,¹⁸³ which vary considerably in terms of their demography and development. Whereas San Pedro Garza García is often cited as the richest municipality in Mexico, or indeed all Latin America (Cota, 2021), there still remain areas of (extreme) poverty and underdevelopment throughout the metropolitan landscape. Within the metropolitan area, some of the most violent, poor, and historically stigmatized *colonias* (neighbourhoods) are located in the municipality of Monterrey,¹⁸⁴ including San Bernabé, La Independencia, and La Campana. These latter two colonias are particularly important to this chapter. Both are located in close proximity to one another, on the foothills of a mountain chain, and both are immediately adjacent to more prosperous areas. La Independencia, known colloquially as *La Indepe*, is located just across the Santa Catarina River from Monterrey's historic centre. It is also next to San Pedro Garza García, though separated from this municipality by the steep mountain on which the colonia is built. Meanwhile, La Campana is just a short walk from the prestigious TEC de Monterrey University. As will become apparent in due course, this geographical context is relevant as it ensured that some of the most violent areas in the city were situated very near to some of the most

¹⁸³ These 13 municipalities are: Apodaca, Cadereyta Jiménez, El Carmen, García, San Pedro Garza García, General Escobedo, Guadalupe, Juárez, Monterrey, Salinas Victoria, San Nicolás de los Garza, Santa Catarina and Santiago.

¹⁸⁴ Much, though not all, of my fieldwork was concentrated within the municipality of Monterrey, and many of my interviews focused on the MUCs that fall within its administrative boundaries. Going forward I use the name Monterrey to refer to the metropolitan area as a whole, and specify clearly when referring to the municipality of the same name.

developed and historically secure. Thus, when violence spilled over from the Monterrey's MUCs, it quickly impacted the city's elites.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first recounts how *Unchecked OCG Competition* emerged across metropolitan Monterrey. Then, we see how an elite coalition formed in response to the OCG security threat that had arisen. Subsequently, with high levels of elite coordination, *Security Reform* was instigated, including efforts to overhaul the deeply corrupt and ineffective local police institutions, as well as investments in urban development, primarily targeting violent MUCs. This enabled successful *State Territorial Expansion*. The final section of the chapter details important changes that have occurred since violence began to drop sharply in 2013. Alongside falling homicides, OCG territorial control retrenched significantly across the city, and the imposition of OCG order on civilian populations in MUCs diminished. As I discuss, the State has increased its control over previously OCG-dominated spaces, but State institutional presence remains very limited across many others. Indeed, with a declining security threat, the momentum that had allowed for decisive security reform and intervention began to fade, and with changes in leadership at different tiers of government, elite unity frayed. Monterrey therefore exemplifies a successful example of *State Territorial Expansion*, albeit in a quite limited form, particularly when considered alongside Medellín or Rio de Janeiro.

1. Unchecked OCG Competition: The Ascent of the Zetas

Los Zetas emerged in the late 1990s, when Osiel Cárdenas took charge of the Gulf Cartel, and sought to create a paramilitary armed wing to consolidate his control over the organisation and attack its rivals. Original members of the Zetas are widely known to have been former special forces, who defected from the elite GAFES¹⁸⁵ unit of the Mexican army. The GAFES were formed in response to

¹⁸⁵ *Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales*.

the Zapatista rebellion of 1994 and had received special weapons training as well as instruction in counterinsurgency strategy in the United States (Sánchez and Pérez, 2017, p.9). With time, hundreds of police officers and military special forces were recruited to the ranks of the Zetas, including veterans from elite units that had fought in the Guatemalan civil war (Grillo, 2011a, p.105). After Cárdenas' arrest in 2003, the organisation became increasingly autonomous, though still maintained collaborative relations with the Gulf Cartel (Sánchez and Pérez, 2017, pp. 11-16). Whereas the Gulf Cartel was heavily involved in drug trafficking, the Zetas were not primarily traffickers, and instead, given their origins, were specialists in coercion. As such, the Zetas were an inherently territorial organisation, that extracted rents and developed illicit economies within the areas under its control.

By 2008, the trafficking group the *Beltrán Leyva Organisation* (BLO) had made inroads into metropolitan Monterrey,¹⁸⁶ with several of its senior figures settling in San Pedro Garza García (Dudley, 2012, p.5). At around this time, they also split with their former allies, the Sinaloa Cartel. As such, in what may have been a move to secure protection given their newfound vulnerability, the BLO came to an arrangement with the Zetas, with whom they had recently partnered, inviting them into Metropolitan Monterrey by 2008 (ibid, p.8). The Zetas then used their coercive force to quickly install themselves in the metropolitan area, in all municipalities save San Pedro Garza García. This affluent jurisdiction was to be the exclusive dominion of the BLO.

1.1 Zeta Control in Monterrey's MUCs (2008-2010)

Monterrey's MUCs proved to be ideal havens for the Zetas, who could use them as bases for illicit economic activities— drug dealing, extortion, and, later, people trafficking. Thus, they quickly imposed a system of nonstate territorial control and order within these spaces.

¹⁸⁶ Senior figures from the Gulf Cartel had resided in Monterrey in decades prior (Trejo and Ley, 2020, p.125), but it is unclear if they still did by the time the War on Drugs began and the BLO entered the city. Dudley (2012) suggests that the Gulf Cartel and Zetas kept their distance from the city under Osiel Cárdenas' leadership (p.5).

Upon arriving in a given neighbourhood, Zeta cells would identify local drug retail points.¹⁸⁷ Micro-trafficking (street retail of drugs) was by now fairly common across many of Monterrey's MUCs, but dealers were generally independent, low-level, and not coordinated with any broader organised criminal structures. The Zetas took over distribution points, either forcing existing dealers to work for them (selling only their products) or killing them (Dudley, 2012, p.7). Drug consumers were also coerced and beaten if they were caught taking drugs not purchased from Zeta controlled retail points (ibid, p.12). Moreover, drug consumption was promoted and even imposed through force by the Zetas; one interviewee, a social worker in La Independencia, recalled how she met a child who had been beaten severely for refusing to buy and consume drugs.¹⁸⁸ MUC residents recollected how narcotics consumption skyrocketed at this time, as many new drug retail points emerged across their neighbourhoods.¹⁸⁹ However, this phenomenon was not confined to MUCs. Indeed, the Zetas used marginalised communities not just as their bases, but also as staging areas to spread into the rest of the city. Immediately adjacent to Monterrey's City Hall and the Statehouse of Nuevo León lies the Barrio Antiguo, an area primarily known for its nightlife, and which is populated with restaurants, nightclubs, and bars. The Zetas offered "protection" to many of these establishments (Dudley, 2012, p.14), collecting rents off them but also using them as channels through which to sell to more affluent consumers.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, the Zetas drug distribution network spread far and wide across the city, with one interviewee from a middle-class neighbourhood even recounting how a restaurant in his local shopping mall began selling illicit substances to its clientele.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Interview with José Juan Olvera, Journalist and Academic, 22/07/2022, jcy1f; Interview with activist and rapper, La Pesquería, 26/07/2022, blkxh; Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 06/08/2022, 09f56

¹⁸⁸ Interview with social worker, Monterrey, 30/08/2024, xi14h

¹⁸⁹ Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 06/08/2022, 09f56

¹⁹⁰ Interview with MUC resident, La Indepe, 11/09/2022, gik6p

¹⁹¹ Interview with academic, resident of Guadalupe. 09/06/2022, rexdm

The Zetas (and later other OCGs) also extorted heavily across the city, systematically charging fees to both formal and informal businesses. The lucrative leisure industry was targeted heavily, which did not just include the aforementioned Barrio Antiguo, but also the city's many casinos. At first, the Zeta's protection racket may have been a welcome change for these businesses, offering respite from the mix of extortion and restrictions that moneygrubbing local police had already imposed for years. This soon changed, as the Zetas' "*cobro de piso*" (protection fee) rose and many establishments were driven out of business (Dudley, 2012, p.14). In the city's MUCs, informal vendors were targeted by the Zetas. Retailers who sold pirated CDs and DVDs—formerly a staple of many markets across Latin America—were forced to only sell products which bore the Zetas' seal: either a "Z", a small map, or the image of a stallion.¹⁹² Still, as with the bars and casinos, for many of these retailers there were benefits to this new arrangement: whereas previously they would have had to bribe many different individual police officers to stay in business, they now paid only a single extortion fee to the Zetas.¹⁹³ Zeta cells found other ways of skimming rents from within the MUCs they controlled. In some neighbourhoods, only certain corner shops were allowed to sell beer (these were then charged by the Zetas). Predatory loan sharking was also practiced by the group.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, in the colonia of La Independencia, teachers working in the local State-run schools— which, as interviewees made clear, were among the only examples of State presence in the area at the time— were charged to enter the neighbourhood to teach their classes.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Interview with MUC resident, La Indepe, 11/09/2022, gik6p; Interview with sonidero, La Indepe, 04/08/2022, kaqu2; Interview with activist and rapper, La Pesquería, 26/07/2022, blkxh; Interview with sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. 03/08/2022, k4nce.2

¹⁹³ Interview with sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. 03/08/2022, k4nce.2

¹⁹⁴ Interview with activist and rapper, La Pesquería, 26/07/2022, blkxh

¹⁹⁵ One interviewee, a social worker, recounted how at one school in La Independencia, this went further still. The entire school roof was appropriated by the Zetas to grow cannabis. They also spread fear by throwing severed heads onto the school grounds (Interview with social worker, 30/08/2024, xi14h)

Within their territories, the Zetas imposed order through brutality. Harsh corporal punishments were inflicted on their own members, including beatings (“*tablazos*”) with a flat paddle (Dudley, 2012, p.7) which resembled the Aztec *macabuiltl*.¹⁹⁶ Punishments for residents could be more severe still. Interviewees spoke of residents being beaten on the head with the butt of a rifle (“*chiricuazos*”), youths caught graffitiing having their fingers snapped,¹⁹⁷ and alleged thieves having their hands severed from their arms.¹⁹⁸ Torture and “executions” were widespread in Monterrey’s MUCs at the time.

As referenced in Chapter 3, Monterrey’s youth *pandillas* were forced off the streets with the arrival of the Zetas. The OCG did not want any disturbances in their territories, and so threatened and killed many of the existing youth gangs.¹⁹⁹ With time, though, they began to recruit them. Many *pandilleros* served as lookouts, colloquially termed *halcones*, (literally “hawks”), conducting surveillance over their communities and warning the Zetas of any suspicious activities. While not full-fledged Zetas, these local *Zetillas* (little Zetas) soon numbered in the thousands (Dudley, 2012, p.10). As a social worker who ran projects in La Independencia and La Campana during this period stated: “it was in vogue [...] everyone wanted to be a Zeta. Everyone wanted to drink Buchanan’s whisky, the drink of the Zetas. This [popularity] helped them expand throughout the city. The cancer spread and there was no medicine”.²⁰⁰ Nonetheless, youth *halcones* did not always join willingly; forced recruitment of minors was rife across Monterrey’s poor colonias.²⁰¹ An interviewee recalled how the Zetas even forced their way into the school in which she was working at the time, located in La Independencia, with the purpose of taking away schoolboys to join their ranks.²⁰² Whereas young men were forced to work for

¹⁹⁶ Interview with activist and rapper, La Pesquería, 26/07/2022, blkxh

¹⁹⁷ Interview with activist and rapper, La Pesquería, 26/07/2022, blkxh

¹⁹⁸ Interview with sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. 03/08/2022, k4nce.2

¹⁹⁹ Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 06/08/2022, 09f56; Interview with sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. 03/08/2022, k4nce.2

²⁰⁰ Interview with former government worker focused in La Indepe and La Campana, 10/09/2022, rdmxj.2

²⁰¹ Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 06/08/2022, 09f56; Interview with former government worker focused in La Indepe and La Campana, 10/09/2022, rdmxj.2

²⁰² Interview with social worker, 30/08/2024, xi14h

the Zetas, many young women at the time were also kidnapped, some to be extorted for ransom money, others to be trafficked for sex.²⁰³ Indeed, safe houses for kidnapping victims were located throughout several of Monterrey's MUCs, such as La Independencia and La Campana. Many victims were never to be seen again.

In keeping with their (para)military background, the Zetas had a clear organisational structure, with units of between 50-60 trained men²⁰⁴ answering to a sub-commander or commander within a demarcated territory, or *plaza* (Dudley, 2012, p.9). Plazas would roughly align with municipalities, which facilitated coordination between an individual Zeta unit and the local police (ibid, p.10). Nonetheless, these were not precise one-to-one fits.²⁰⁵ A rapper who at the time lived in numerous MUCs across Monterrey, and who was in contact with several OCG cells,²⁰⁶ recalled the division of labour within the plazas: *Halcones* were placed on different street corners and vantage points throughout a given colonia. These recruits would often carry pistols and used radios to communicate with their superiors. Meanwhile, *faroles* were recruits who were unarmed and provided with no equipment but were tasked with spying on community residents. Patrolling a given plaza in pickup trucks with tinted windows were *estacas*, groups of around 5 to 6 Zetas armed with assault rifles.²⁰⁷ Interviewees stated that these armed vehicular patrols would also often wait at the entrances to neighbourhoods, checking the cars that entered the colonia and interrogating their passengers.²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Interview with activist and rapper, La Pesquería, 26/07/2022, blkxh

²⁰⁴ Full-fledged Zetas, not local *Zetilla* recruits (these were far greater in number).

²⁰⁵ Plazas had nicknames that distinguished them from the municipalities with which they overlapped. The plaza which primarily covered Monterrey was known as "La Silla", the plaza primarily based in Guadalupe and that crossed into Juárez was known as "La Lupe". The Plaza that subsumed the rest of Juárez and Apodaca was known as "El Tamal" (Interview with activist and rapper, La Pesquería, 26/07/2022, blkxh).

²⁰⁶ This was in part because he was repeatedly kidnapped and made to compose "narco-raps" for the local leaders of particular MUCs. As such, he would constantly move and stay with friends to avoid detection.

²⁰⁷ Interview with activist and rapper, La Pesquería, 26/07/2022, blkxh

²⁰⁸ Interview with MUC Resident, La Indepe, 11/09/2022, gik6p; Interview with academic, resident of Guadalupe, 09/06/2022, rexdm

When the conflict with the Gulf Cartel began, the Zetas' *estacas* would form convoys of *soldados* and attack enemy territories.

Thus, the Zetas established a very fierce form of territorial control in Monterrey's marginalised urban communities, and sought to dominate numerous licit and illicit industries (both within the city's MUCs and beyond). However, their role in governing civilian populations was more circumscribed. While they imposed a brutal order on their territories, and preyed on the population, they did not invest in establishing expansive systems of civilian governance with clearly defined rules, restrictions, and services as did OCGs in other of my case studies, such as Medellín, Rio de Janeiro, or Buenaventura. This can be related theoretically to their short time horizons and status as outsiders in the communities they appropriated. While the Zetas did punish activities they viewed as disruptive, their direct involvement in the lives of civilians was otherwise fairly circumscribed. Nighttime curfews were widely adopted by MUC residents in response to the fear they felt, but these were not often explicitly enforced by the Zetas.²⁰⁹ The Zetas are known to have handed out basic household goods in some neighbourhoods,²¹⁰ but this seemingly charitable behaviour departed from their general modus operandi, which was predicated around sowing terror, maintaining territorial order, and, from this position, extracting as much revenue as possible from a plaza.

1.2 Narco-war in Monterrey (2010-2013)

As the Zetas captured Monterrey, homicides rose sharply. This rise was also fuelled by increasing attacks by the Sinaloa Cartel, directed against their former allies the BLO (Conger, 2014, p.191). The escalating homicides, alongside other manifestations of insecurity, did not go unnoticed. A security

²⁰⁹ Interview with former government worker focused in La Indepe and La Campana, 10/09/2022, rdmxj;2; Interview with MUC resident and Sonidero, La Independencia, 04/08/2022

²¹⁰ Interview with Social worker in MUCs, 08/08/2022, n9suv; Interview with activist and rapper, La Pesquería, 26/07/2022, blkxh; Interview with Social worker in the Distrito TEC, working in the Campana area, 09/08/2022, 4yuu3

threat had therefore emerged which was no longer constrained to the city's long neglected MUCs. Insecurity was increasingly affecting Monterrey's elite strata in a direct manner, as Zeta extortions, violence, and kidnappings spilled out onto the city's highways and into its urban centres. Only San Pedro Garza García remained relatively untroubled. San Pedro's mayor, Mauricio Fernández, claimed this was due to his formation of a paramilitary self-defence group, the *Grupo Rudo*, that drew on insider intelligence from OCG informants to protect the municipality (Steinberg, 2011). He later backtracked, publicly disbanded this supposed "intelligence network", and recently claimed it had never existed at all (Martínez, 2024). However, given a leaked recording of Fernández from 2009, which revealed his willingness to work with the BLO (America Economía, 2014), as well as the arrest of a BLO member who claimed to be part of the *Grupo Rudo* (Steinberg, 2011), it seems highly likely that the relative peace that San Pedro experienced at this time was based on collaboration between the local government and this OCG (Cedillo, 2016). It should be noted that Fernández was a prominent local businessman, and many other wealthy local businessmen are alleged to have funded his paramilitary unit (Correa-Cabrera, 2017, p.115). As such, it appears that at least in San Pedro, the political and economic elite class may have been willing to work with OCGs to acquire private protection.

In 2010, violence would reach new heights, rising further still the subsequent year when homicide rates doubled "from 30 per 100,000 to 69 per 100,000" (Ley and Guzman, 2019, p.155). This was due to the arrival of the Gulf Cartel in Monterrey, from which the Zetas had by now formally split, following an internal dispute. Vicious territorial competition ensued. Mutilated corpses were hung in public, often carrying *narcomantas* (OCG messages). Roadblocks formed from stolen cars caused chaos on the city's highways, preventing the transit of State security forces (and OCG rivals).²¹¹ Kidnappings became more widespread and indiscriminate as competing OCGs sought to finance their war efforts.

²¹¹ Interview with MUC resident and sonidero, La Independencia, 04/08/2022; Interview with academic, resident of Guadalupe. 09/06/2022, rexdm

Shootouts between convoys of Zetas and Gulf Cartel members took place across metropolitan Monterrey, including in the very centre of the city. Given that the Zetas had by now widely penetrated the local police forces— both municipal and state— many police were targeted by the Gulf Cartel (which at the time had struck a temporary alliance with the Familia Michoacana and the Sinaloa Cartel to seize control of Monterrey (Steinberg, 2011)). Thus, in the first half of 2011, close to 80 security officials had been murdered across the city (Dudley, 2012, p.18). Monterrey’s municipal mayor was even kidnapped and tortured (Steinberg, 2011). Business leaders were attacked, kidnapped, and threatened with extortion (Ley and Guzman, 2019, p.155). Perhaps the most notorious single event from this time period, and certainly the deadliest, was the attack on the Casino Royale. As retribution for failing to pay an extortion quota, the casino was set alight on the afternoon of August 25th, 2011, by Zetas carrying assault rifles and gasoline. A total of 52 people died (Grillo, 2011b). One of the perpetrators was a state policeman (Dudley, 2012, p.9).

The explosion of violence in 2010 and 2011 represented an unambiguous security threat, not just to Monterrey’s political and economic elites, but to its population at large. The preeminent industrial centre of Mexico, which had for years been a peaceful business hub, had become a warzone for competing OCGs. These groups used the city’s MUCs as safe havens, which they controlled fiercely. However, the rest of the city was now their battleground. In the next section, we will see how the State responded to this security threat.

2. The Emergence of an Elite Coalition: Contending with Crisis

The response to Monterrey’s security crisis is broken down here into two subsections. Firstly, I discuss the initial State strategy to confront the Zetas, which was chiefly orchestrated by Mexico’s federal government. While not entirely ineffective or counterproductive (as federal intervention proved to be in another case study, Ciudad Juárez), alone this ultimately did little to quell violence or develop State

territorial control in the city's MUCs. I then consider the role of the private sector, who in Monterrey emerged as a key actor in facilitating relations between different tiers of government, galvanizing the formation of an elite coalition. The actions undertaken by this elite coalition, and the effects these had on territorial control in the city's MUCs, are discussed later. The present section is designed primarily to show how different actors— political elites at both the federal and state level, and Monterrey's economic elites— came to work together in coalition.

2.1 The State Response: Bringing the Fight to Los Zetas?

As we have seen, Monterrey's security crisis had been directly triggered by the arrival of competing OCGs within the metropolitan area, but more distal factors lay at its roots, including the deprivation of its MUCs, and the high levels of corruption among its police forces. Municipal and state police across the metropolitan area had been heavily infiltrated by the Zetas by the time the Gulf Cartel arrived to wage war (Ley and Guzman, 2019, pp.157, 158; Conger, 2014, p.191). Interviewees put it bluntly: "The narcos paid them off— that meant there were no police!"²¹²; "Police here have always been corrupt. Taking bribes, abusing people [...] Well, the *narcos* came and they paid some, killed others. And just like that, the *narcos* could move around freely and do as they pleased".²¹³ To add to this, the police had also been all but absent from many of the city's MUCs for years. In an attempt to break with the legacy of police abuse towards the city's youth pandillas, some municipal level pilot schemes had sought to promote community policing in vulnerable MUCs in the late 1990s and early 2000s.²¹⁴ Nonetheless, while promising, these initiatives quickly fell through. Thus, by the time that the Zetas arrived in the city, police presence in many poor colonias was severely limited. Indeed, in La

²¹² Interview with social worker and academic. 17/06/2022, m1t2r

²¹³ Interview with sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. 03/08/2022, k4nce.2

²¹⁴ Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 06/08/2022, 09f56; Interview with sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. 19/07/2022, k4nce; Interview with social worker and academic. 17/06/2022, m1t2r; Interview with activist and rapper, La Pesquería, 26/07/2022, blkxh

Independencia, many residents informed me that they had rarely seen the police enter their colonia prior to Monterrey's "war".²¹⁵ Moreover, police generally stuck to the lower reaches of the neighbourhood, never venturing very far up the hillside: "even before the drug war [they] didn't go there".²¹⁶ Compounding this, reportedly only around half of the 2400 state police officers on the payroll reported for work, and half of this force's patrol cars were missing (Signoret, 2018, p.1). Thus, as a security crisis struck the city, Monterrey's police forces were ill-prepared to offer much resistance to OCGs— in fact, many now actively collaborated with them. Corrupt, abusive, and distrusted, local police lacked the capacity to control violence in the city's urban centre, let alone control its MUCs.

Monterrey's police were not, however, the only security forces operating in the urban territory at the time. In 2007, a few months after beginning his ill-judged campaign against Mexico's drug cartels, President Felipe Calderón of the PAN party²¹⁷ ordered *Operativo Nuevo León*, deploying the military to the state (above all to Monterrey) in response to increasing OCG-related violence (Robles, 2007). This meant that the federal government had assumed de facto responsibility for addressing growing insecurity in the state (Mendoza and Montero, 2015, p.110). Federal forces were no doubt better equipped (higher resources) and less tied to local OCGs (higher autonomy) than were the local state and municipal policing institutions. Nonetheless, they were also overstretched, not least because contemporaneously federal troops were undertaking other operations across the Mexican territory. As the subsequent years would show, federal forces were unable to halt the bloodshed throughout the city, nor were they able to prevent the entrenchment of the Zetas in the metropolis' MUCs. Faced with an enormous task, the military went onto assume policing functions for which its members were untrained and ill-prepared, effectively serving as a "shadow police force" that patrolled, manned

²¹⁵ In years prior, a police post had been installed in the colonia, but by 2010 this had been abandoned (Steinberg, 2011).

²¹⁶ Interview with social worker, Monterrey, 15/06/2022, ir3s5

²¹⁷ *Partido Acción Nacional*.

checkpoints, and responded to shootouts (Steinberg, 2011). As time passed, federal forces were assigned to try and restore the State's claim to the urban territory, with "sniper towers and small bunkers [built] at strategic points the army identified" (Signoret, 2018, p.7). However, this "emergency system of territorial control" chiefly focused on non-marginalised spaces, creating "safe corridors" (ibid) around the city, but not within the marginalised enclaves of OCG control themselves.

Although Nuevo León's Governor at the time, José Natividad González (2003-2009), did publicly express his support for the Federal intervention (García, 2007), having initially called for federal assistance the year prior (Mendoza and Montero, 2015, p.110), relations between the state and federal governments were not exactly close-knit. Indeed, González, of the opposition PRI party,²¹⁸ pointed to low levels of coordination early on in the implementation of *Operativo Nuevo León* (García, 2008), and even went on to blame rising violence during the course of his administration on the federal intervention (Mendoza and Montero, 2015, p.111). Federal forces profoundly distrusted local police, considering them to be 'halcones' and bodyguards for the OCGs. This conflict reached boiling point when in 2008 eight soldiers were killed, and the army accused municipal police of having been behind the executions: 150 municipal police were arrested as a result (ibid, p.112). In the years that followed, it seems that despite efforts to harmonize a joint security response locally, federal forces still acted with a great deal of autonomy and independence, frequently cutting civilian authorities out of their plans and operations (Steinberg, 2011).

By 2010 important changes had occurred that would prove to be consequential. Firstly, in 2009, in recognition of the chaos it had helped unleash by cracking down on the nation's cartels, the federal government began to shift its strategy towards explicitly targeting only the most violent OCGs (Aguayo, 2024). This would soon put the Zetas at the centre of its crosshairs (Lessing, 2018). Secondly,

²¹⁸ *Partido Revolucionario Institucional.*

in late 2009, Nuevo León's new Governor, Rodrigo Medina, took office. Like his predecessor, Medina represented the opposition PRI, rather than the ruling PAN party of the President. As such, it is unsurprising that a lack of close coordination between both the gubernatorial and federal tiers of government persisted into the first year of Medina's administration (Trejo and Ley, 2020, p.203). Moreover, it seems that although Medina won office promising to "restore order and public safety" (Signoret, 2018, p.1), at first he failed to understand the gravity of the situation Monterrey was facing. Consequently, Medina arrived in office without a serious strategy for addressing insecurity (Mendoza and Montero, 2015, p.113). In time, though, this would change, and Medina would become arguably one of the few governors in Mexico committed to "seriously [taking] on the fight against organised crime" (Aguayo and Dayan, 2021, p.44). This would help ensure coordination in the elite coalition that ultimately formed in 2010. However, to understand the emergence of this coalition, we need to first consider the role of Monterrey's economic elite.

2.2 The Economic Elite Response: "Fight, Demand, Act."

Monterrey's business community is uniquely close-knit, due in large part to its deep historical roots. Since Monterrey's emergence as an economic centre in the late 19th century, its economic elites have adopted a regionalist posture, focusing on developing the state of Nuevo León, investing in its capital, and resisting interference by 'outsiders' in regional affairs. Following the Mexican Revolution, and with the consolidation of the PRI regime, Nuevo León's economic elite were known to unite and negotiate with the federal government in order to try and achieve policy outcomes, as well as defend their regionalist business interests.²¹⁹ Their relations with the federal government were therefore not always amicable, and conflicts often arose,²²⁰ but throughout much of the 20th century Monterrey's

²¹⁹ Interview with José Juan Olvera, Journalist and Academic, 22/07/2022, jcy1f; Interview with academic who participated in the creation of the Fuerza Civil. 17/06/2022. 7zvtx

²²⁰ Interview with academic who participated in the creation of the Fuerza Civil. 17/06/2022. 7zvtx

economic elite were able to project their power nationally and maintain good working relations with the ruling PRI (Nuncio, 2012), presenting a united front to maximize their bargaining power.²²¹ That said, they also remained heavily influential in subnational politics, supporting the rise of the opposition, the business-friendly PAN, during the early period of democratisation in the late 1990s (Nuncio, 2012). Indeed, to this day, their political support is considered to be key in determining elections at the State and municipal level in Nuevo León (Soto, 2024).

Moving in the same social circles, cementing their bonds through marriage, and working together to protect their shared interests in Nuevo León, a high level of cohesion was thus forged among the region's economic elite over decades (Ley and Guzman, 2019, p.165). At some point in the 20th century, the most powerful business actors in Monterrey came to be known as the "Group of 10" (Nuncio, 2012). An informal yet influential organisation, in the 21st century this group has included the heads of construction materials giant CEMEX, petrochemicals and refrigerated foods producer, ALFA, and FEMSA, a bottling and beverage company. All three are enormously lucrative multinationals, whose headquarters are located in metropolitan Monterrey. The Group of 10 meets regularly to discuss their concerns, plan together, and decide which "policies and activities to support" (Conger, 2014, p.190). Indeed, representing a significant stake of the national economy, their economic and political influence is considerable, and it is no surprise that they have been able to maintain close connections with politicians, including presidents, throughout much of recent history (Nuncio, 2012). The regionalist cohesion, political ties, and financial clout wielded by Monterrey's Group of 10 has therefore endowed these economic elites with high levels of instrumental power. As we now see, this would be key to facilitating elite coordination in response to violence.

²²¹ Interview with José Juan Olvera, Journalist and Academic, 22/07/2022, jcy1f

“We don’t doubt that decisions to invest in business in Nuevo León have already been affected”. So said the head of CAINTRA, a business organisation representing Nuevo Leon’s industrialists, in 2007 (Martinez, 2007). Thus, even before the Zetas had a firm foothold in the city, and prior to the massive spike in violence that accompanied their urban war with the Gulf Cartel, Monterrey’s business community was already concerned by the city’s declining security and its effects on profitability. And yet, this group of economic elites was arguably slow to respond to the escalating violence, FEMSA CEO José Antonio Fernández himself admitting that the business community “woke up late” to the OCG threat (Malkin, 2012). Indeed, as the frequency of kidnappings, shootouts, robberies, and narco-blockades continued to rise unabated, many private sector actors simply withdrew from the city, not just divesting, but physically relocating (many to the United States).²²² Those that stayed invested heavily in private security, attempting to safeguard their families and businesses with armed guards, as did private sector actors from across Mexico at the time (Fisher and Taub, 2017; Ley and Guzman, 2019). Nonetheless, as Monterrey’s status as a safe haven for capital investments continued to deteriorate, and as businessmen came to be directly affected by OCG violence, the economic elites who had remained began to act with greater resolve. In early 2010, the private sector reconstituted the Civic Council (*Consejo Cívico*), an organisation which brought together the “business chambers of bankers, employers, and manufacturers”, alongside NGOs, neighbourhood organisations, and human rights groups, in order to push for the restoration of public security. The Council thus served as a bridge between business, civil society organisations and local government (Conger, 2014, p.193).

The Civic Council was an important forum for deliberation, and narrowed the focus of the private sector on finding solutions to the crisis Monterrey faced.²²³ It also served as a vehicle through which to publicly lobby government officials to change security strategy (Ramos, 2011). However, it did

²²² Interview with academic who participated in the creation of the Fuerza Civil. 17/06/2022. 7zvtx

²²³ Interview with academic who participated in the creation of the Fuerza Civil. 17/06/2022. 7zvtx

nothing to immediately ease the insecurity crisis. In March 2010, two students at the TEC de Monterrey— an institution with close ties to the city’s elite²²⁴— were killed in a shootout. Then in August, two private security guards were shot dead while accompanying FEMSA employees’ children to their exclusive American school, in what appears to have been a kidnapping gone wrong (Malkin, 2012; Fisher et al., 2018). Economic elite investments in private security were clearly insufficient to mitigate threats of the scale Monterrey now faced. Later that month, the head of CEMEX Lorenzo Zambrano took to Twitter, responding to the bloodshed by posting the following messages:

“He who leaves Monterrey is a coward. We have to fight for what we believe in. We must restore out great city!”²²⁵

“It’s shameful that those who have received the most from Monterrey are the first to flee”²²⁶

“*Regio*, stay and defend what your ancestors took so much effort to build. Fight, demand, act. (Milenio, 2014)²²⁷

Targeted at his fellow businessmen, this rallying call signalled the start of a new, more assertive posture by Monterrey’s economic elite. That same month, the main newspapers in Monterrey all featured an open letter, signed by the city’s business leaders, and directed at President Calderón and Governor Medina. It called for four more military battalions to be dispatched to Nuevo León in order to restore order (Steinberg, 2011). While Monterrey’s economic elite had previously “urged authorities across all levels of government to cooperate with each other and coordinate their actions” (Trejo and Ley, 2020,

²²⁴ El TEC was founded by the industrialist Eugenio Garza Sada. His descendent, Armando Garza Sada, is currently the head of ALFA. Two companies also included in the Group of 10, VITRO and CYDSA are also run by his descendants.

²²⁵ Original: “Quien se va de Monterrey es un cobarde. Hay que luchar por lo que creemos. Tenemos que restaurar nuestra gran ciudad!”.

²²⁶ Original: “Qué vergüenza que quienes más han recibido de Monterrey son los primeros en huir”

²²⁷ Original: “Regio, quédate a defender lo que con tanto esfuerzo construyeron tus ancestros. Lucha, exige, actúa.” Note: “Regio” is a term used in reference to a person from Monterrey.

pp.203, 204), they had not resorted to such public forms of lobbying, with such concrete complaints and demands. These would not be ignored.

Thus, a few months later, President Calderón dispatched his top security adviser, Jorge Tello Peón, to work with the subnational governments in metropolitan Monterrey (García, 2010). This was a key step towards facilitating coordination between the federal, state, and municipal authorities,²²⁸ with Tello thus helping “[catalyse] communication between the army and federal and local police forces” (Conger, 2014, p.202). However, he also served as the ideal bridge to unite disparate elite actors. Given Tello’s prior work as a lead intelligence expert for Group of 10 giant CEMEX, he already had close ties to the city’s economic elite (Signoret, 2018, p.2). Moreover, thanks to this private sector work, Tello was very familiar with the city and many other of its elite stakeholders. This meant that besides being well respected in the *federal government* as Calderón’s close advisor, he was also already well known among the *political elite* in Nuevo León, with Governor Medina considering him a “personal friend” (García, 2010). Tello was therefore uniquely well-placed to serve as a mediator on local security matters, and help coordinate between different political and economic elite stakeholders. Conditions were therefore ripe for the development of an ambitious and expansive security strategy. Given the debilities of local security institutions, police reform was a top priority.

In late 2010, Governor Medina called upon Monterrey’s economic elites to assist in helping build the capacity of the metropolitan police force— a process to which we turn in the next section (Fisher and Taub, 2018). The governor had not initially wanted to include the private sector. Nonetheless, after the city’s economic elites leveraged their links with President Calderón to push for greater involvement, the governor relented and reached out to the business community.²²⁹ As Ley and

²²⁸ Indeed, disagreements between the PRI governor, Medina, and the PAN mayor of municipal Monterrey were also frustrating collaboration at the local level (Trejo and Ley, 2020, p.203)

²²⁹ Interview with sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. 03/08/2022, k4nce.2

Guzman put it: “Connections between business executives and the national government were thus critical in facilitating dialogue and cooperation between the private sector and the state government” (2019, p.159). Indeed, these connections may also have *attracted* Medina to cooperate, given that Monterrey’s business leaders were PAN voters, and could thus offer a “direct line” to the President (Angelo, 2024, p.185).

Monterrey’s economic elites were not the only civil society actors that proactively mobilized against violence and sought to pressure government action, and they were certainly not the first. Indeed, between 2006 and 2012, Nuevo León experienced 66 protests against crime and violence (Ley and Guzman, 2019, p.166), including a march of 25,000 people in 2008. This immediately preceded a new “civic intervention”, the creation of a crime monitoring platform designed to ensure government accountability (Conger, 2014, pp.192, 193). Protestors were extremely vocal critics of the state government, some even demanding Governor Medina’s renunciation (Mendoza and Montero, 2015, p.114). However, Monterrey’s economic elites were uniquely important in shaping outcomes in the city, given their enormous instrumental power; exemplified by their vast resources, their high levels cohesion as a regionalist interest group, and their close connections to both national and subnational political elites. As such, though certainly not the *only* civil society actors to mobilize in response to the city’s security crisis, there is good reason to believe that Monterrey’s economic elite were *crucial* to galvanizing action, given their clout and connections.

In sum, while neither immediate nor straightforward, by the end of 2010 an elite coalition had formed to address insecurity in Monterrey. President Calderón’s pivot towards targeting the Zetas, and his decision to enlist Tello as a coordinator in Monterrey, were key in this regard. Similarly, Governor Medina’s proactive desire to confront violence, and the mobilisation and cohesion of the city’s powerful economic elite ensured that, at the local level, the most important elite actors were aligned

in their interests. Thus, political elites at both tiers of government, alongside subnational economic elites, recognised the OCG security threat that had emerged in Monterrey; all were incentivized to combat it, and all had now begun to coordinate towards this end.

3. Security Reform and State Territorial Expansion

Below I discuss the actions taken by this elite coalition to try and confront Monterrey's security crisis. This section chiefly focuses on the *Security Reform* process that elite actors drove forward, and the creation of the much-lauded *Fuerza Civil*. I then discuss other programmes that Monterrey's elite coalition implemented to restore order to the urban territory, which included ambitious (if limited) development interventions in the city's MUCs. What culminated from this period was increased State territorial control in the city's MUCs, and a heavy decline in the territorial control and associated civilian governance exercised by the city's OCGs.

3.1 Building Police Capacity: *Fuerza Civil*

With the police having been deeply infiltrated by OCGs, and with Governor Medina and the private sector committed to overhauling local security institutions, police forces across the metropolis began to be purged *en masse*. The Monterrey municipal police dismissed 410 of its 752 police officers in 2010, and the Santa Caterina municipal force fired 261 of its members in 2011. Over the subsequent years, hundreds more municipal police were stripped of their jobs across metropolitan Monterrey (Dudley, 2012, p.18). Governor Medina is cited as having put the total number of police who were either "fired or jailed after failing lie-detector and other tests" at 4200 (Economist, 2013). Still, while these purges did help increase the autonomy of Monterrey's police forces from local OCGs, minimizing corruption in the existing rank and file was not enough to bring order to the city. Moreover, it was widely recognised that the military's deployment to Nuevo León would be time limited, having been adopted

as an emergency measure, but never as a long-term solution (Signoret, 2018, p.5). Local police capacity would need to improve to ensure lasting change.

To devise a more robust strategy, the Group of 10 funded the formation of a working group, the *Alliance for Security*.²³⁰ This coordinated with the local and national authorities, consulted with international security experts, and involved local universities and other civil society organisations in its deliberations (Ley and Guzman, 2019, p.158). As a forum, the alliance was crucial in smoothing over divisions and conflicts that had emerged among relevant stakeholders. Indeed, it not only helped further facilitate federal-state dialogue, but through presenting a united front, and including a diverse set of actors, it ensured that the calls for Medina's resignation died down (Mendoza and Montero, 2015, p.115). Thus, the governor benefitted politically through his involvement, providing an incentive to maintain cross-sectoral collaboration on security matters.

At first, Medina had sought to galvanize police *reform*. However, through the alliance's deliberations it was decided that an entirely new force was needed to replace the broken state police. The federal government backed this initiative, transferring money to the state to help with hiring and training.²³¹ After consultation with the marketing and human resource departments of different businesses from the Group of 10 (Malkin, 2012), a name for the new force was agreed upon: *Fuerza Civil*.

The core idea behind *Fuerza Civil* was to rapidly train an entirely new state police force that could react to and effectively repress violent OCGs across Nuevo León, with obvious priority given to those active in Metropolitan Monterrey. The purged municipal police bodies would be tasked with handling minor crimes and traffic, but the new state police would be a "quasi-military unit" (Signoret, 2018, p.5). This new force would have more stringent selection criteria, undergo special training, be supplied

²³⁰ *Alianza por la Seguridad*.

²³¹ Interview with academic who participated in the creation of *Fuerza Civil*. 17/06/2022, 7zvtx

with new equipment and technology, have a new institutional design and culture (down to the name and uniform), and face both incentives and restrictions to prevent corruption. These included higher wages (roughly double those of regular police), as well as a host of benefits for recruits and their families (from health, to schooling, to discounts on basic goods). However, Fuerza Civil officers were also required to renew their certification every two years (Ley and Guzman, 2019, p.159), and were obliged to live in designated barracks for weeks at a time in order to segregate them from other policing units.

Following its conception in late 2010, there was an expansive nation-wide recruitment drive. Initially, the city's economic elites were key to this effort, offering up their human resources departments to help in the hiring and screening process, and organizing meetings at the TEC de Monterrey.²³² They would soon, however, go onto directly fund the expansion of the Fuerza Civil– not least through a 50 percent increase in the payroll-tax from two to three percent (Conger, 2014, p.195; Ley and Guzman, 2019, p.159). All the while, they continued to supply the new force with services and equipment. Following 3-months of training (increased to 6-months for subsequent generations of recruits), Fuerza Civil's first units were deployed to Monterrey's streets in September 2011 (Ramírez and Ruiz, 2016, p.25), numbering 422 officers in total. By the end of the year, this had reached 900 (Conger, 2014, p.195). By 2013, Fuerza Civil's ranks had increased to 3000, with the government seeking to raise this to 7000 strong by 2015 (Economist, 2013).²³³ As the ranks of this new force grew, Nuevo León's existing State police was phased out, mass purges and an end to recruitment securing its replacement by Fuerza Civil.²³⁴

²³² Interview with academic who participated in the creation of Fuerza Civil. 17/06/2022, 7zvtx

²³³ Though some put this figure higher, at 14,000 (Malkin, 2012).

²³⁴ Interview with sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. 03/08/2022, k4nce.2

Recruits were trained at a quickly formed policing college, the University of Security Sciences (Ramirez and Ruíz, 2016, p.27), with a heavy emphasis on “direct confrontation”. As an individual who had previously worked in the Fuerza Civil training process recounted to me: “They are highly militarized. [at the time] they trained with a much heavier emphasis on firearms than the traditional police, and they were taught military tactics. Their final training module [...] was specifically about undertaking armed interventions [...] They were well armed, well trained, and sent out to fight *narcos*”.²³⁵ Fuerza Civil were also provided with special training in intelligence and crime analysis by the federal government, which came at no cost to the Nuevo León Government (Ramirez and Ruíz, 2016 p.31). Thus, this was neither an investigative nor a preventative police force, but a reactive one, with an unequivocal guiding mission: confronting Monterrey’s OCGs head-on. As such, while they were deployed across the urban territory, it was in Monterrey’s MUCs where the presence of the newly formed Fuerza Civil was to be most concentrated.²³⁶ Tasked to “reclaim the streets” from OCGs, they worked closely with military convoys in their first few months in operation (Signoret, 2018, p.11).

Monterrey’s coalition of elite actors therefore built the police force they needed to confront a serious OCG security threat, by-passing and then replacing the existing state police through an ambitious reform process that relied on articulation across different tiers of government and which was heavily supported by the city’s economic elites. This new force received considerable investment from these different political and economic elites,²³⁷ endowing it with the resources to act against OCGs. Moreover, significant measures were taken to insulate Fuerza Civil recruits from corruption, helping ensure their autonomy from criminal actors. When deployed to the city’s OCG-dominated MUCs,

²³⁵ Interview with sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. 03/08/2022, k4nce.2

²³⁶ Interview with academic who participated in the creation of Fuerza Civil. 17/06/2022, 7zvtx

²³⁷ To be clear, Monterrey’s economic elites at the time remained proactive in improving security beyond their involvement in Fuerza Civil. For example, CEMEX created an online platform for citizens to report crimes without exposing themselves to the potential vulnerability of contacting the authorities. (Conger, 2014; Ley and Guzman, 2009)

they were therefore well equipped to increase State territorial control. We will return to discuss the effects of Fuerza Civil's interventions in these areas shortly. First, I briefly discuss other contemporaneous interventions in Monterrey's MUCs.

3.2 Social Interventions in Monterrey's MUCs

At the same time the Fuerza Civil was being created, Monterrey's elite coalition sought to complement their security strategy by reconstituting the "social fabric" in the city's most vulnerable and neglected colonias.²³⁸ Echoing similar processes afoot in Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana, the idea was to extend basic services and amenities (healthcare, education, public space, and infrastructure, etc.) to MUCs in order to address some of the root-causes of criminality (Steinberg, 2011). Inspired explicitly by the processes of MUC intervention that had previously occurred in Medellín (see Chapter 4),²³⁹ these social interventions served as another way of fortifying the State's foothold in OCG-dominated territories across the city. Having sent a team to Medellín,²⁴⁰ and consulted with experts from Medellín, Bogotá, and cities in Brazil,²⁴¹ the state government (backed by the elite coalition and other civil society organisations) decided to fund the creation of large community centres in the colonias of La Independencia and San Bernabe— emulating the library parks that Fajardo and Salazar developed in Medellín's comunas.²⁴² Although other smaller infrastructure development projects (including, paving, sewerage, schools and health centres), training initiatives, and social programmes were implemented

²³⁸ Interview with former senior official, Secretariat for Social Development, Nuevo León government. 09/08/2022, grxyf

²³⁹ Interview with social worker and academic. 17/06/2022, m1t2r; Interview with senior Distrito TEC official, and ex-official in Monterrey municipal government, 30/08/2022, 6q3ti; also Malkin, 2012

²⁴⁰ Interview with Ana Villareal Montemayor academic researcher, Monterrey. 15/05/2023, uyxp67

²⁴¹ Interview with former senior official, Secretariat for Social Development, Nuevo León government 09/08/2022, grxyf

²⁴² Sergio Fajardo later visited Monterrey. Moreover, it is clear that Monterrey's business leaders, researchers, civil society organisations and local government officials maintain close ties to many key figures who orchestrated the comuna interventions that occurred in Medellín between 2004-2012.

in Monterrey's MUCs under Medina's administration, these community centres were by far the most ambitious.

While, as in Medellín, their importance should not be overstated, the community centres do appear to have had a positive effect on community life, and in La Indepe may have played a role in breaking down the "fronteras invisibles" that impeded civilian mobility between the territories of competing OCGs.²⁴³ The government and NGO workers involved in orchestrating these programmes faced difficulties, with restrictions on their mobility enforced by the Zetas, obliging them to negotiate access and acquire permission for their activities.²⁴⁴ Bodies were even left on the construction site of the Independencia community centre.²⁴⁵ Still, it appears that some Zetilla recruits welcomed the investment in the area, providing construction workers with an ice-cooler full of Gatorade on at least one occasion,²⁴⁶ and then later enjoying the services of the community centre (all whilst holstering their pistols in their jeans).²⁴⁷

In sum, these interventions were limited, with the greatest investments and most ambitious projects targeted at only a small fraction of Monterrey's MUCs (both of which lay in the Monterrey municipality). Nonetheless, these projects demonstrate that Monterrey's elite coalition, even if primarily concerned with confronting OCGs through repression, was cognizant of the need for a more multifaceted approach to addressing insecurity in the city's MUCs. Thus, the state government—backed by the federal government and the city's economic elite—sought to develop a more holistic and multidimensional variety of State presence in these areas, extending institutions and services that went beyond the deployment of Fuerza Civil.

²⁴³ Interview with former government worker focused in La Indepe and La Campana, 10/09/2022, rdmxj.2

²⁴⁴ Interview with former senior official, Secretariat for Social Development, Nuevo León government. 09/08/2022, grxyf

²⁴⁵ Interview with former government worker focused in La Indepe and La Campana, 11/08/2022, rdmxj

²⁴⁶ Interview with former government worker focused in La Indepe and La Campana, 11/08/2022, rdmxj

²⁴⁷ Interview with former senior official, Secretariat for Social Development, Nuevo León government. 09/08/2022, grxyf

3.3 State Territorial Control Increases in Monterrey's MUCs

After 2011, violence began to decline, and then dropped dramatically. From over 2000 homicides in Nuevo León in 2011, this went down to a total of 719 in 2013, and then 490 in 2014, according to statistics from the state attorney general's office (Morales, 2023). Kidnappings and extortion fell sharply after this period, and drug retail became far less brazen than in years prior. The Zetas also suffered heavy losses, being targeted by the different State security forces operating in the metropolitan area, who now coordinated far more closely than before. Thus, in a roughly two-year period, the Zeta leadership in Monterrey were "either liquidated or arrested",²⁴⁸ leading to the OCG being effectively dismantled within the metropolitan area (Aguayo, 2024).

The Fuerza Civil appear to have played a key role in this process, replacing a low capacity and heavily infiltrated set of local policing institutions with a high-resource, high-autonomy reactive force. Nonetheless, as Ley and Guzman note, it is impossible to demonstrate the extent to which the Fuerza Civil directly reduced violence, as data that might help with this analysis (such as their deployment strategies) is not released publicly (2019, p.160). What is more clear is that State territorial control in the city's MUCs increased as a result of the coordinated State actions during this period, which included a heavy emphasis on Fuerza Civil interventions into OCG-controlled communities. Indeed, numerous MUC residents with whom I spoke attested to the fact that whereas police presence in their colonias had previously been heavily limited, this increased considerably with the introduction of the Fuerza Civil, who conducted regular patrols in these neighbourhoods alongside their operations against OCGs. Complemented with contemporaneous development initiatives, Monterrey's security

²⁴⁸ Interview with Alejandro Hope, analyst and former senior official at CISEN. 01/09/2022, 58gf4

forces were thus able to augment the State's foothold in many MUCs across the metropolitan area, regaining territorial control in previously OCG-dominated areas.

The extension of State territorial presence in Monterrey was certainly more limited than in Medellín, and, as we will see in the next chapter, Rio. Fixed police bases were not installed across the city's marginalised communities, as in these other cases, nor were the city's elites as ambitious in investing in MUC development as was their lodestar, Medellín (a grievance which civil society organisations in the city vented at the time). That said, there is no denying that the territorial and social control that Monterrey's OCGs had exercised for years in the city's marginalised colonias diminished significantly. With the collapse of the Zetas, smaller remnant groups remained, but were unable to control territory with the paramilitary discipline, organisational capacity, and coercive might of the Zetas. Thus, with the Zeta's disintegration, State actors gained a far greater ability to access the city's MUCs, move throughout them unimpeded, fulfil their mandates, and implement decisions (with some important exceptions, as discussed in the last section of this chapter). Naturally, with its rival gone, the Gulf Cartel expanded its presence in the city, but did not seek to exercise the form of exclusive territorial control and fierce social control of the Zetas. Thus, by 2015, there were clear signs of retrenchment in OCG territorial control and influence over civilian life across many of the city's MUCs. While drugs were still sold, retail points were no longer ubiquitous; armed OCGs did not patrol the streets and alleys of the colonias anymore; neighbourhood access points were no longer monitored, and curfews not adhered to. In many marginalised communities, the fear that had emerged under the Zetas had lifted— a stark change from five years prior.

While Medina's administration publicly took a lot of the credit for both the creation of Fuerza Civil and the cessation of the security crisis, Monterrey's achievements were the result of no single actor, but rather sustained coordination from across the city's elite coalition. Indeed, federal assistance

remained crucial during this time period. Guillermo Valdés (former director of CISEN),²⁴⁹ was tasked by Calderón to assist in Monterrey, and so organised a special joint command (Centro de Fusión y Operatividad) in the city that drew on intelligence from across all security agencies. This was used as part of the decapitation strategy against the Zetas, and brought together insight from across all security institutions operating in the State (Aguayo and Dayan 2021; Aguayo, 2024). Additionally, Calderón remained committed to extending *Operativo Nuevo León*, guaranteeing the presence of the military in Monterrey at least until the end of his administration (García, 2011). Indeed, in 2010 he boosted the number of federal forces in the city by 2000, and then again after the Casino Royale fire with another 3000 men (Signoret, 2018, pp. 7, 11). His successor in office, the PRI's Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), sustained the military presence until Medina requested its removal in 2013 (Campos, 2013). Peña Nieto had good reason to be supportive of the local security strategy, which given its perceived success under the stewardship of Medina, reflected well on the PRI. Indeed, there was much talk of replicating the Fuerza Civil model nationally, across other states. Peña Nieto's administration also launched a flagship program, focused on combatting insecurity with social spending and development (PRONAPRED),²⁵⁰ which helped ensure the continuation of existing social interventions in the city, and even galvanized others. Continuity was also ensured by the fact that the Group of 10, given their instrumental power, had close ties to the new president, having met with him shortly after his election (Nuncio, 2012). Therefore, changes at the top of government in 2012 did not detrimentally affect inter-governmental coordination or derail Monterrey's elite coalition.

²⁴⁹ *Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional*, Mexico's security intelligence agency at the time.

²⁵⁰ *Programa Nacional de Prevención del Delito*.

4. Elite Disunity, Stalled Reform, and an end to Territorial Expansion

The final part of this chapter discusses the changes that have transpired in the years following the coordinated response to Monterrey's OCG security threat. While there is no denying that OCG territorial control and overt forms of criminal governance have declined considerably across metropolitan Monterrey, they have certainly not been eradicated. For years after the breakdown of the Zetas, certain colonias remained under the grip of violent and oppressive OCGs. Some neighbourhoods remain enclaves of OCG power to this day. This can in part be attributed to the breakdown of Monterrey's elite coalition, and the declining momentum behind the local security strategy that followed the successes of 2012 and 2013. Indeed, this underscores the inherent challenges of securing high levels of elite coordination in the long-term. Gains in coalition-building between elite actors are *easily reversible*, and as such the final section of this case study helps evidence why processes of (sustained) *State Territorial Expansion* are ultimately rare outcomes.

4.1 A Changed Criminal Landscape

In the years since the decisive State response to Monterrey's OCG security threat, organised criminal violence has become far more selective across the city. Dealers are still killed, and OCG conflicts over territory are still seemingly being perpetrated at a low intensity, but open conflict on the city's streets has disappeared. Instead, selective murders are far more common, exemplified by drive-by shootings, as well as individuals being murdered in their homes, or disappeared.²⁵¹ While armed territorial groups with links to larger drug trafficking organisations remain active in the city's MUCs, in general most

²⁵¹ Interview with MUC resident (FOMERREY 35) and former-government employee, 05/08/2022, hoh74; Interview with academic, resident of Guadalupe. 04/08/2022, rexdm.2

groups appear to not serve as the urban proxies of more sophisticated structures; many are instead atomized, drug retail gangs.

This is not to minimize the power that these groups exercise in the communities they control. For instance, higher up the hillside of La Independencia, above the point at which the community centre is located, residents still adhere to certain behavioural codes imposed by the local OCG. For example, any cars that access the area are forbidden from using their headlights, as these are used by OCGs to signal messages to their members.²⁵² Moreover, at the time of my fieldwork in 2022, there were still halcones monitoring the area, though they were no longer armed. In the very highest reaches of the colonia, however, where only a single access road allows for the passage of vehicles (the rest of the area is formed by narrow alleys, given its unregulated development), interviewees attested to a far stronger form of OCG territorial and social control.²⁵³ Police do not enter, and residents of La Indepe with whom I spoke agreed that the area was still under armed control, and used for executions and drug storage.²⁵⁴ Indeed, one interviewee, who visited this area for work in 2021, reported having been stopped and interrogated by an individual wielding a shotgun,²⁵⁵ evidencing the fact that OCGs still openly patrol the area brandishing firearms. Similarly, a short distance to the east, situated between La Indepe and La Campana, lies the neighbourhood La Risca. This is notorious for still being closely controlled by an OCG cell and is considered inaccessible to outsiders without the blessing and protection of the resident criminal gang. Important geographical variation thus exists within and across Monterrey's colonias with respect to criminal territorial control and governance.

²⁵² Interview with MUC resident and sonidero, La Indepe, 04/08/2022, t83cm; Interview with academic, resident of Guadalupe. 04/08/2022, rexdm.2

²⁵³ Interview with sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. 19/07/2022, k4nce

²⁵⁴ Interview with MUC resident, La Indepe, 11/09/2022, gik6p; Interview with MUC resident and Social worker, 12/08/2022, dlz43; Interview with Social worker in MUCs, 08/08/2022, n9suv; Interview with former resident of La Indepe, 14/09/2022, i3gur

²⁵⁵ Interview with Monterrey resident with experience working in La Indepe, 10/09/2022, su7zq

La Campana endured as a holdout for competing Zeta and Gulf Cartel cells years after the former group had been decimated in other MUCs.²⁵⁶ Here, the Zetas simply became known as “*La Letra*” (“The Letter”).²⁵⁷ Criminal governance in La Campana had been extremely harsh since the Zetas’ appropriation of the area in the late 2000s. Whereas in other neighbourhoods, such as La Indepe, they recruited local Zetillas, in La Campana interviewees attested to the fact that outsiders retained a lot of control in the area.²⁵⁸ These were individuals who thus had little incentive to exercise restraint on the community.²⁵⁹ As recently as 2019, a social worker who routinely visited La Campana found his access to the upper reaches of the hill to be heavily circumscribed.²⁶⁰ Nonetheless, post-Zeta structures did go on to lose significant ground in the area, as the result of targeted assassinations. These were undertaken by a local vigilante group, whose members had personal grievances against the Zetas and sought to retake control of the community from them. When I undertook my fieldwork, it was made clear to me that security had improved significantly in La Campana over the course of the preceding three years. This was in large part attributable to the development interventions of State and civil society actors in the area, which had in turn encouraged more routinised Fuerza Civil patrols.²⁶¹

Additionally, many peripheral areas of metropolitan Monterrey remain vulnerable and have extremely low State presence, including police.²⁶² While Fuerza Civil patrols particular areas (generally colonias with histories of violence), they divide their responsibilities with Monterrey’s many municipal police forces. Municipal police across the metropolis remain low capacity and overstretched, despite having

²⁵⁶ Interview with Social worker in the Distrito TEC, working in the Campana area, 15/08/2022, 4yuu3.2

²⁵⁷ Interview with MUC resident and Social worker, 12/08/2022, dlz43

²⁵⁸ Interview with former government worker focused in La Indepe and La Campana, 11/08/2022, rdmxj; Interview with Social worker in the Distrito TEC, working in the Campana area, 15/08/2022, 4yuu3.2

²⁵⁹ Interview with MUC resident and Social worker, 12/08/2022, dlz43

²⁶⁰ Interview with Social worker in the Distrito TEC, working in the Campana area, 15/08/2022, 4yuu3.2

²⁶¹ Interview with senior Distrito TEC official, and ex-official in Monterrey municipal government, 30/08/2022, 6q3ti

²⁶² Interview with academic who participated in the creation of the Fuerza Civil. 11/08/2022. 7zvtx.2; Interview with academic at UANL, 22/06/2022, 8tx47; Interview with social worker and academic. 17/06/2022, m1t2r; Interview with Social worker in MUCs, 08/08/2022, n9suv

being purged and subjected to ongoing reform efforts (some of which are, admittedly, promising and quite innovative).²⁶³ That said, as a local politician admitted, articulation between the Fuerza Civil and municipal police forces is still frequently a problem.²⁶⁴ Moreover, while OCG violence appears to have died down in many of the areas in which it was particularly acute a decade ago, it has spread outwards. Indeed, previously peripheral municipalities are now reportedly more dangerous than before, with more overt signs of OCG control, violence, and power.²⁶⁵ We will return to discuss this displacement effect, one seen in other cases also, in Chapter 8.

4.2 The Elite Coalition Breaks Apart

In 2015, Jaime Rodríguez Calderón was elected as the new governor of Nuevo León. Colloquially known as “*El Bronco*”, his campaign was supported by Monterrey’s Group of 10. These economic elites anticipated he would be more pliant than his predecessor, perhaps due to his status as an independent (Fisher and Taub, 2018). Nonetheless, his election proved to be decisive in ending the collaborative relations that had emerged between political and economic elites in the preceding years.

Having defected from the PRI in 2014 after denouncing the party’s corruption, El Bronco’s relations with some senior PRI figures were frosty during his tenure. This included President Peña Nieto. Though federal support for Nuevo León on security matters was not undermined by this cooling in relations (Política, 2017), the active involvement of federal government actors in coordinating with the gubernatorial administration does appear to have diminished during this time. Indeed, El Bronco would depart significantly from the security strategy of his predecessor, both in terms of the objectives he pursued and the actors he involved. Monterrey’s economic elites also saw their role in gubernatorial

²⁶³ Interview with Alejandro Hope, analyst and former senior official at CISEN. 01/09/2022, 58gf4

²⁶⁴ Interview with a *regidora* in Monterrey, 10/08/2022, us7ws

²⁶⁵ Interview with activist and rapper, La Pesquería, 26/07/2022, blkxh

affairs diminish, including in security matters (Fisher and Taub, 2018; Fisher et al, 2018). The elite coalition that had emerged to meet Monterrey's security crisis thus broke apart.

Once in office, El Bronco is widely considered to have seriously compromised the Fuerza Civil. Monterrey residents and security analysts with whom I spoke unanimously agreed that El Bronco was opposed to the organisation—perhaps due to its affiliation with his predecessor, Medina, and his desire to leave his own stamp on security policy. El Bronco considered the force to be too costly (Vlex, 2020), leading to budget cuts. Efforts by the state government to improve Fuerza Civil thus subsided.²⁶⁶ Perhaps most concerningly, under the new governor Fuerza Civil units were taken off the streets and assigned to Nuevo León's prisons. This not only decreased morale among the force, but placed Fuerza Civil officers into close contact with incarcerated OCG actors, creating opportunities for corruption in a force which had been specifically designed to be insulated from criminal influence.²⁶⁷ During this same period, the conduct of the Fuerza Civil also came into question, with numerous reports of human rights abuses (Budreath and Heath, 2020, p.175). Under El Bronco's tenure, violence rose once again. Though it did not reach the heights of the “wartime” period, increases were significant nonetheless, escalating from 451 homicides in 2015, to 644 in 2016, and rising to just under 1000 in 2019 (Morales, 2023). As with the previous drops in violence, it is difficult to demonstrate direct causality in this regard, and there is no doubt that various factors influenced Monterrey's homicide rates at the time. Nonetheless, many blame the worsening security situation on the new governor's treatment of the Fuerza Civil, an institution which he is characterized as having “dismantled and destroyed” (Bárceñas and Rivera, 2021; Chantaka, 2019).

²⁶⁶ Interview with Alejandro Hope, analyst and former senior official at CISEN. 01/09/2022, 58gf4

²⁶⁷ Interview with sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. 19/07/2022, k4nce

Be that as it may, while El Bronco's election may have been the proximate trigger that broke Monterrey's elite coalition, this should not occlude the fact that momentum behind the city's coordinated security strategy was beginning to dissipate late in Medina's tenure, following the dismantling of the Zetas. As senior security analyst Alejandro Hope put it to me when we spoke in 2022, Monterrey's economic elites wanted enough security to get back to business. Nonetheless, they, like the local government, grew complacent after violence began to subside.²⁶⁸ Fisher and Taub (2017) summarize the situation even more bluntly: "when crime fell in wealthy areas, so did pressure for continuing the reforms". Indeed, it was not just the pressure, but also the *resources* to continue police reforms that dissipated. Much of the initial financing for Fuerza Civil had come from the payroll tax on the private sector. This however, was an emergency tax, and as such was only temporary. With the declining security threat to economic elite interests, their willingness to invest resources in Fuerza Civil diminished (Castañeda, 2018).²⁶⁹ The federal government, in turn, had many other crises to attend to across Mexico, so diminishing urban violence in Monterrey meant that it became less of a priority for the national authorities. In other words, Monterrey's elite coalition held strong while an OCG security threat was present; that is, while OCG violence spiked, and insecurity spilled out from the city's MUCs. However, momentum behind deepening reforms, reinforcing the gains that had been made, and expanding State presence in the city's marginalised colonias dwindled once this threat subsided.

Indeed, in detailing the reform process that produced Fuerza Civil, this chapter thus far has emphasized how elite unity led to effective action against insecurity in Monterrey. This is not inaccurate, but nor is it the full story. That is to say, many of the challenges to ensuring elite coordination, and many of the deficiencies in Fuerza Civil that became evident during El Bronco's

²⁶⁸ Interview with Alejandro Hope, analyst and former senior official at CISEN. 01/09/2022, 58gf4

²⁶⁹ Moreover, note that when the tax was first introduced, it was not well received, with some business leaders suspending their involvement in the Alliance for Security for several months in protest against the measure (Signroet, 2018, p.14).

tenure, were arguably already present. Insiders involved in the creation of Fuerza Civil reflected on these complexities during our conversations.

On the side of Monterrey's elites, and their efforts to respond to the city's security crisis, corruption in governor Medina's office meant that the business community's ambitions were often undermined. For example, members of the Group of 10 approached Medina with ideas for Fuerza Civil's new uniform, but the governor's office rejected them. Later it transpired that he had already contracted the production of uniforms to an associate. Medina also allegedly suggested a contractor for the procurement of armoured vehicles, but when tested these offered no protection to passengers, and were thus entirely unfit for purpose.²⁷⁰ Corruption and graft blighted Medina's administration, and upon stepping down he left Nuevo León heavily indebted. Soon thereafter, he was charged with embezzlement (Fisher and Taub, 2018). Private sector oversight may have helped insulate the nascent Fuerza Civil from the worst effects of this corruption, but the venality of senior actors inside the Nuevo León government undoubtedly frustrated the reform process.

As for the Fuerza Civil officers themselves, these too were not what some in the elite coalition had initially envisioned.²⁷¹ Despite their screening and training, Fuerza Civil officers appear to have broken the law, stolen, and committed human rights abuses against civilians well before El Bronco took office. As a progenitor of Fuerza Civil informed me, the problems that later "emerged" with Fuerza Civil were there from the very start.²⁷² At the time of Fuerza Civil's creation and initial rollout, however, there was a massive effort to promote and "sell" the force, with a glowing media campaign, financial and mediatic support from Monterrey's economic elites, and efforts at the state and federal level to

²⁷⁰ Interview with academic who participated in the creation of the Fuerza Civil. 17/06/2022. 7zvtx

²⁷¹ At the time of its formation, working as a police officer in Monterrey was not an appealing prospect. As such, Fuerza Civil was forced to recruit nationwide, and its first generations often came from poor backgrounds (though they were required to meet the force's education requirements).

²⁷² Interview with academic who participated in the creation of the Fuerza Civil. 17/06/2022. 7zvtx

underscore its novelty and achievements. The institution may therefore have been “a victim of its own good publicity”.²⁷³ Perhaps, the greater scrutiny to which Fuerza Civil (and its shortcomings as an institution) would eventually be subjected is also emblematic of the decline in the elite coalition that had supported its formation: while coordinated elites acted in unison to sell the force and underscore its merits, with El Bronco’s ascent and the breakdown of this coalition, there was far less coordination to shield Fuerza Civil and mask its deficiencies, meaning that its institutional flaws garnered far greater attention.

In sum, while Monterrey’s elite coalition would decisively be broken apart during the tenure of El Bronco, this is not to say that it always functioned smoothly prior to this point. Moreover, the commitment of the city’s elite coalition to further improving the state’s security forces after violence began to drop is questionable, as is their willingness to expand the institutional presence of the police into the city’s MUCs. Nonetheless, while it lasted, Monterrey’s elite coalition was able to coordinate in order to overcome (or occlude) the conflicts among its constituent actors and the shortcomings of its crowning achievement, Fuerza Civil. While it is widely agreed that El Bronco’s mismanaged Fuerza Civil, here I have also sought to underscore that the force also had longstanding flaws which may have only come to light during his administration.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how elites with aligned interests coordinated to create the security institutions they required, in order to respond to a rampant OCG security threat. As rapidly as the Zetas had imposed their fierce model of territorial control across Monterrey, they were dismantled by decisive, coordinated State actions. The OCG’s hold over Monterrey’s MUCs thus retrenched significantly.

²⁷³ Interview with academic who participated in the creation of the Fuerza Civil. 17/06/2022. 7zvtx

Although, following this period, efforts at expanding State institutional presence across the city's MUCs slowed, there has been a limited *but still notable* increase in State territorial control and governance across the city's marginalised urban communities since around 2012. This is when police reform processes began to bear fruit. Monterrey's reformed police, chiefly the Fuerza Civil, are both higher capacity (with greater resources and greater autonomy from OCGs) and more active across Monterrey's MUCs, than forces in the preceding years and decades.

Monterrey's successes in this regard are due in large part to its elite coalition. Once again, then, elite coordination helped drive forward the processes which ultimately determined the State's ability to build territorial control in the city's MUCs. Local economic elites in Monterrey were uniquely cohesive, coordinating informally as the Group of 10. With high instrumental power, they used their connections to political elites (both federal and gubernatorial) and leverage to not only demand action, but actively involve themselves in a wide-reaching police reform process. They also pledged significant resources to this, as well as other initiatives to increase urban security. Federal government support was also central to Monterrey's security achievements. This support was undergirded by a pivot towards targeting only the most violent OCGs— chiefly the Zetas— as well as Felipe Calderón's appointment of trusted aides to Monterrey, which helped ensure close coordination between the different tiers of government. Personal connections thus helped facilitate collaboration where partisan differences might have impeded it. While there is much to criticize about Governor Medina's administration, his support for Fuerza Civil (from which he reaped significant political dividends) stood in stark contrast to that of his successor. Thus, even if only short-lived, Monterrey's elite coalition galvanized the reforms that then helped turn the tide on the city's security crisis. Of course, the police force that emerged from Monterrey's *Security Reform* process, with its high levels of institutional capacity, played an important role in this regard, and as such was integral to ultimately achieving *State Territorial Expansion*.

Although Monterrey's elite coalition would dissipate, proving to be unsustainable in the long-term (unlike in Medellín), the period of high elite coordination produced *increases* in State territorial control in the city's MUCs that *have remained* in the years since. That is, while efforts at *State Territorial Expansion* have not continued, neither have the State's *gains* in territorial control collapsed. A declining OCG threat and the reduced elite coordination that accompanied this have therefore not led to State territorial control in Monterrey's MUCs being *rolled-back*. The same cannot be said of Rio de Janeiro, to which we now turn. Rio showcases a far more dramatic form of *State Territorial Expansion* than that seen in Monterrey. Nonetheless, as this case study shows, Rio's impressive process of *State Territorial Expansion* would ultimately precede an equally spectacular failure, with the State unable to retain territorial control in the OCG-dominated favelas to which it laid claim.

6. Rio de Janeiro: From State Territorial Expansion to

Collapse

In this chapter, we turn to Rio de Janeiro. This city has in recent decades witnessed multiple interventions that have (at least ostensibly) sought to install a permanent policing presence in the city's marginalised urban communities, or *favelas*, in response to OCG threats. All have failed to durably build State territorial control in these spaces, which remain under the de facto control of various armed criminal groups. This chapter focuses on three such interventions in recent decades: The “*Mutirão Pela Paz*” (MPP), a short-lived program in the late 1990s, The “*Grupamento de Policiamento de Áreas Especiais*” (GPAE), a project which was developed in select favelas in the early 2000s, and then the “*Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora*” (UPP), which lasted from roughly 2008-2016.²⁷⁴ The UPP is by far the most famous of these interventions, and also the most impressive in terms of its results, dramatically expanding police presence to dozens of favelas.

It is worth underscoring that the UPP has attracted an enormous amount of academic and policy research. This has shone light chiefly onto the program's effects on violence (Barnes, 2021; Magaloni et al, 2020; Lessing, 2018), its impacts on other facets of crime, security and governance more broadly (Cano et al., 2012; Oosterbaan and van Wijk, 2014; Burgos et al., 2011; Wolff, 2019), the process of its implementation and the extent of accompanying reforms (Denyer Willis and Mota Prado, 2014; Pinto and do Carmo, 2016; Machado, 2020), and how urban ‘pacification’ aligned with other contemporaneous political and economic interests (Freeman, 2012; Valente, 2016; Rocha and de Carvalho, 2018; Ost and Fleury, 2013). This is just a very small sample of the available literature on

²⁷⁴ These stand for the “Mobilisation for Peace” (MPP), “Special Area Policing Groups” (GPAE), and “Police Pacifying Units” (UPP) respectively.

the UPPs. Needless to say, beyond studies on the UPPs, the wider scholarship on organised crime, policing, security and favelas in Rio de Janeiro is considerable. Thus, this chapter has the great advantage of being able to draw on a wealth of existing research, but also faces the challenge of going over very well-trodden ground. This chapter does not therefore provide a great deal of novel empirical insight into security in Rio de Janeiro, and indeed it purposefully does not engage with a great many of the nuances and micro-level heterogeneity that extant research has shown exists *between* favelas, and indeed *within* them (Barnes, 2021; Magaloni et al., 2021). What this chapter does, however, is underscore the explanatory relevance of my theoretical framework, demonstrating once more the importance of elite coordination and police capacity for explaining variation in territorial control.

This chapter begins by outlining Rio de Janeiro's unique ecology of violence, discussing the persistent security threats that have characterized the city's recent history, as well as the relations between OCGs and the police. The chapter then discusses short-lived examples of *Containment and Experimentation*, the MPP and GPAE, programs which arose as innovative pilot schemes, but which quickly deteriorated amid a lack of institutional support. We then turn to the UPP, a project which achieved dramatic *State Territorial Expansion* thanks to intergovernmental alignment, with political and economic elites supporting what might have otherwise been—like the MPP and GPAE— a limited and momentary example of security policy experimentation. Lastly, the chapter discusses the deterioration and collapse of the UPP.

1. Contested Territorial Control in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro

Since even prior to Brazil's democratisation, highly conflictual relations between the police and OCGs have shaped (in)security in Rio's favelas. As outlined in Chapter 3, much of this conflict derives from the relations between State coercive forces and a particular OCG, the *Comando Vermelho*— or CV— with whom the local police have a longstanding relationship of corrupt and violent engagement. A variety

of distinct State security strategies have emerged in response to OCGs in Rio, swinging back and forth like a pendulum— to invoke former-National Security Secretary Luiz Eduardo Soares’ characterisation— from heavily militarized and violent crackdowns, to abandonment, with periodic attempts at community policing and augmenting citizen security in favelas (De Negreiros, 2014). That said, throughout the last several decades, the former approach has prevailed, with brutal short-term crackdowns predominating.

This is largely due to two factors. Firstly, hardline approaches to OCG insecurity, have been popular with both politicians and voters. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly in the particular case of Rio, is the nexus of corruption and violence that links police and organised crime. Understanding Rio’s police is key to revealing why. Policing duties across Brazil are divided among the Military Police (*Polícia Militar*), who are charged with upholding day-to-day order as well as undertaking reactive functions, and the Civil Police (*Polícia Civil*), who focus on investigation. Given Brazil’s federal system, police institutions are under the control of state governments. Crucially, despite democratisation, police across Brazil have largely remained intact as institutional vestiges from the military dictatorship. Nowhere is this more evident than in Rio, where the police are sometimes cited as being among the most violent in world (Muggah, 2016). This persistence of effectively unreformed law enforcement institutions into the democratic period has endowed Rio’s Military Police²⁷⁵— PMERJ— with a high degree of autonomy from other State institutions, ensuring that over the last several decades there have been few effective oversight mechanisms to hold officers accountable, that police units have been afforded substantial discretion in conducting operations, and that the institution as a whole has been vested with considerable political power, making it an important interest group in local politics.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ *Polícia Militar do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.*

²⁷⁶ Interview with Luiz Eduardo Soares, former Subsecretary of Security (Rio) and National Secretary for Public Security. 26/04/2023. 2e9xn; Interview with Robson Rodrigues, former UPP Commander and researcher. 09/04/2023. k63dp

Given this institutional leeway, as well as the substantial coercive capacity that the PMERJ commands, it is well known that across the city, military police units use repression as a tool to extort the favelas' OCGs. Effectively, a system of corrupt arrangements— or *arregos*—shapes the dynamics of violence and territorial contestation between police and criminals. OCGs pay-off the police to avoid repression; police in turn repress OCGs to “renegotiate” agreements and extract higher bribes from criminals. State violence is thus employed instrumentally to fuel the exchange of “political merchandise”, to utilize Misse’s terminology (1998). This is not to say that *all* military police in Rio are corrupt and “on the take”.²⁷⁷ However, this system of widespread corruption is crucial to understanding how and why violence often erupts in the city’s favelas. While different police units undertake violent interventions into these marginalised urban communities for different operational reasons (the BOPE²⁷⁸ special forces, for example, may intervene to seize drugs), many PMERJ battalions routinely employ repression against favela-based OCGs for their own private enrichment. Put simply “they can act like businessmen, choosing which favelas to make alliances with, and which to attack” (Platt, 2020, p.57).

Rio’s OCGs share many features in common (to overlook a great deal of heterogeneity), imposing rules and routinely offering “services” to the populations residing in their turfs. Restrictions are often imposed on mobility; outsiders may face difficulties entering a given favela, and “invisible borders” which divide rivalrous OCGs can prevent circulation within these communities.²⁷⁹ Moreover, services are often “controlled” and taxed by OCGs²⁸⁰ (such as internet and electricity).²⁸¹ Local goods are also sometimes monopolized by OCGs,²⁸² and Rio’s criminal groups are also regularly involved in dispute

²⁷⁷ Though a police informer under deposition did allege that all PMERJ battalions pay monthly cash-payments worth thousands of dollars upwards to the state police command (Costa, 2014)

²⁷⁸ *Batalhão de Operações Especiais*.

²⁷⁹ Interview with Pedro Strozenberg, Lawyer and Senior figure in Viva Rio. 07/04/2023. 7owdp

²⁸⁰ Though this is more extreme in *milícia* territories, where extortion is systematic.

²⁸¹ Interview with community activist and organizer, Complexo da Maré. 04/04/2023. 9vtyp; Interview with two community leaders from the “AP” and “Quinza” areas of Cidade de Deus. 06/05/2023, rgu5v

²⁸² Interview with Daniel Misse, former coordinator of UPP Social. 08/05/2023, 9ej52

resolution in their territories.²⁸³ However, Rio's different OCGs (again, generally speaking) have distinct relations with PMERJ battalions. When Rio de Janeiro's *milicias* emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, these para-militarised groups were often comprised of off-duty cops, though this is less the case now. As such, their ties to law enforcement were (are) close. Similarly, PMERJ relations with other OCGs, such as the *Terceiro Comando Puro* (TCP) or *Amigos dos Amigos* (ADA) have tended to be less confrontational, these group seemingly favouring bribery or evasion and eliding violent resistance. The CV, meanwhile, no doubt due to its idiosyncratic history with Rio's law enforcement agencies, is notorious for violently resisting police, as well as using very public displays of violence and disorder to bargain with the State (e.g., burning vehicles on city highways).

Throughout much of Rio de Janeiro's recent history, then, the city's police– the PMERJ– have occupied a unique space within my theoretical framework in comparison to law enforcement agencies of other cities. Firstly, the PMERJ can be considered to be an institution with high *resources*. The force has access to military-grade weaponry and numerous specialized vehicles; it regularly employs the notorious *caveirão* (armoured vehicles) to force entry into the city's favelas, and it even commands its own fleet of helicopters. Moreover, statewide, the PMERJ has over 40,000 registered police officers (FBSP, 2022, p.456), which even allowing for the fact that not all are based in the city of Rio itself, is still a massive amount of manpower.²⁸⁴ While low police salaries arguably still serve as an incentive for police to arrive at *arregos* with OCGs, the force on balance is able to draw on far more resources than most other urban police forces considered in this thesis. Consequently, the PMERJ wields extraordinary coercive force.

²⁸³ Interview with MUC resident and NGO worker, Complexo da Maré. 03/05/2023, a1stt

²⁸⁴ By contrast, recall the size of the rebuilt state police, Fuerza Civil, in Monterrey, or note how in the next chapter, we will see how in Ciudad Juárez the State police force has hovered at around 1500 men strong.

However, the *autonomy* of many PMERJ battalions is clearly highly compromised. Police have worked hand-in-hand with militias, having been crucial to the emergence of these groups to begin with. While their relations with Rio's other OCGs vary— as outlined above— it is clear that police have corrupt linkages with *all* such groups, extracting bribes from them in exchange for limiting repression. That said, these corrupt linkages in conjunction with the PMERJ's high resources also produce a situation in which police are regularly incentivized to use their significant coercive capacity to extract higher financial payoffs from OCGs. This regularly leads to direct, violent confrontations in the favelas, especially in those controlled by the CV. Therefore, low-autonomy high-resource police are key drivers of conflict in Rio's marginalised spaces. Forming part of an ecosystem of corruption, illicit markets, and intense violence in the city's urban margins, police actions—and the responses they provoke from criminal groups— frequently trigger many of the “OCG security threats” that have emerged in the last several decades.

2. Containment and Experimentation in the 1990s and early 2000s

During the late 1980s and then throughout the 1990s, the fragmentation of the CV, and the emergence of new groups such as the *Terreiro Comando*— an antecedent of the TCP— and ADA (whose formation began circa-1994), provoked a wave of OCG-related insecurity in Rio de Janeiro's favelas. Proto-milicias also emerged during this time period, effectively police-affiliated death squads, that sought to push back against the myriad drug retail gangs and carry out “social cleansing” across the favelas. Numerous murders and massacres ensued, including of children in poor communities (Amnesty, 1992; HRW, 1991). Formal police repression at the time was also shocking, exemplified by numerous massacres throughout the decade of the 1990s, and vicious confrontations with the city's *fações* (OCGs) (Amnesty, 1997; Torres and Noronha, 1994). Indeed, during the 1990s police abuse was routinely encouraged by the city's political elites. Under the governorship right-wing security-

hardliner, Marcello Alencar (1995-1998), police brutality was exacerbated by the rollout of the notorious “wild-west” bonus, whereby individual officers had their salaries raised for displaying bravery in the line of duty (effectively incentivizing cops to kill any supposed criminals).

This interminable violence, widespread across many favelas, became highly salient at this time for several reasons. Not only was its intensity difficult to ignore, but unlike in some of the other cities studied in this thesis, many favelas in Rio de Janeiro are immediately adjacent to, or indeed dotted in amongst, far more prosperous and developed areas. Local media naturally paid close attention to the violence, routinely projecting images of “urban war” to the population, heightening the sense of insecurity, and adding credence to a repressive policy discourse that favoured authoritarian and extrajudicial action (Lopes and Moulin, 2013). However, insecurity in Rio was also covered in international media (Brooke, 1990a; 1993; Schemo, 1997) and received heavy public criticism from prominent NGOs including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (1996; 1997).

A clear OCG security threat had therefore emerged in many favelas, one that was both simultaneously *fuelled by and fuelling* extremely brutal police interventions in these areas (as well as informal police violence in the form of death squads). Several attempts at security policy experimentation were pioneered during the 1990s, both inside and outside of the favelas, in an attempt to break from this pattern. Indeed, there was precedent for this. Rio’s governor from 1983-1987, Leonel Brizola, had placed restrictions on police interventions into favelas. However, failing to halt the escalating violence in these spaces, he lost re-election to the hardliner, Wellington Morreira Franco. When Brizola was then re-elected (1990-1994), he re-appointed as Chief of Police the reform-minded Nazareth Cerqueira. Under Cerqueira, several new initiatives, including community policing programs were actioned. One noteworthy example was the GAPE (*Grupamento de Aplicação Prático-Escolar*), which involved installing recently-graduated PMERJ officers into several favelas on a fixed basis. Cerqueira’s

approach would ultimately be undermined by rising crime rates, and considerable internal resistance from among the PMERJ (Marques Silva, 2013, p.14). Brizola would be replaced by Alencar in 1995, and Cerqueira would be murdered in 1999, in what is suspected to have been a reprisal from among the PMERJ for his attempts to reform the force (Front Line, 2002). Still, favela community policing programmes such as the GAPE provided a reference point to guide future reformers.

2.1 The Mutirão Pela Paz (1999)

One such reformer was Luiz Eduardo Soares, a sub-secretary of security under Governor Anthony Garotinho (1999-2002), a politician who had run on a progressive platform as the successor to Brizola (before then pivoting to a far more reactionary brand of politics). In 1999, Soares began implementing a pilot program— the MPP (or “Mobilisation for Peace”). Working alongside local community organisations as well as other State institutions beyond simply the PMERJ, Soares’ pilot programme was designed to bring a permanent policing presence to the favelas. The MPP’s first (and ultimately only) targeted favela was Pereirão, which although small, had been the site of numerous violent “tragedies” and was also a “centre of criminality that irradiated [outwards]” towards Laranjeiras, a wealthy middle-class neighbourhood in Rio’s south zone (Soares, 2000, p.278). Indeed, following the murder of a Pereirão resident by corrupt police seeking to extract higher bribes from the favela’s drug-dealers, the local OCG sent out threats to restaurants and bakeries in Laranjeiras, dictating that should not open their doors on a given date, or else face reprisals. They obliged, attracting media attention (Soares, 2000, p.67). It is evident therefore, in-line with my theory, that the favela was chosen as OCG activities in Pereirão had come to represent a localized security threat, spilling out of the favela, affecting non-marginalised areas, and becoming highly salient in the process. These circumstances therefore directly prompted the MPP (Rocha, 2013, pp.57,58).

The MPP was entirely experimental, and relied upon constant adjustment and trial-and-error, benefitting from Soares very hands-on approach, as well as that of his deputy, Major Antonio Carballo Blanco of the PMERJ (Soares, 2000, p.277). As Soares put it: “it was a case of building the ship whilst already at sea” (De Negreiros, 2014). Soares recalls that the program showed a lot of promise, and instigated meaningful community engagement with the police and community residents. He also restricted PMERJ operations in the favelas in which MPP was implemented, reducing conflict with OCGs in these spaces. Soares himself spent “nearly every day” conducting visits to MPP-targeted areas, and during these visits he was regularly accompanied by Rio’s vice-governor, Benedita da Silva, of the left-wing PT (Workers Party).^{285 286} The emphasis on community policing and social engagement that lay at the heart of the program, the fact it targeted only quite small and (relatively) less violent areas, and the fact that it benefitted from constant oversight from senior State officials and political elites such as Soares and Da Silva are all factors that likely contributed to its initial success.

However, before the MPP had any chance to deliver substantive results over the long-term, it was shut down by Garotinho. Soares recalls how only months after the MPP had begun, Garotinho met with him, congratulated him on his progress, and then said that the initiative could not be developed further given that it needed to undergo evaluation and formalisation.²⁸⁷ Shortly after, Garotinho proposed a new more expansive program to replace the MPP (*Vida Nova*), which would drop extending a permanent policing presence to favelas and instead simply prioritize social spending. To Soares, the new proposal resembled the “most primitive” form of clientelism (De Negreiros, 2014). When we spoke, Soares repeated a claim he has made before: the MPP was also shut-down due to the

²⁸⁵ *Partido dos Trabalhadores*.

²⁸⁶ Interview with Luiz Eduardo Soares, former Subsecretary of Security (Rio) and National Secretary for Public Security. 26/04/2023. 2e9xn

²⁸⁷ Interview with Luiz Eduardo Soares, former Subsecretary of Security (Rio) and National Secretary for Public Security. 26/04/2023. 2e9xn

extremely positive publicity it was garnering for Benedita da Silva, now a growing progressive figure in Rio politics. Garotinho did not want the spotlight drawn away from him, nor could he allow his PT deputy to be associated with a novel security strategy that was showing positive early results. Indeed, despite being Garotinho's deputy, da Silva had "almost no power", was kept away from State resources, and "never, in practice, received the authority promised to her by the governor" (Soares, 2000, p.281). Her support, while important in garnering attention and momentum, did not afford the MPP with the resources or institutional backing it needed to stay afloat. Garotinho would soon thereafter terminate his governorship prematurely in order to compete in the presidential elections, pitting himself against PT frontrunner Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva.²⁸⁸ Soares' claim that partisanship and personal interest motivated Garotinho's decision to stop the MPP should therefore be understood within this broader context. Amid ongoing attempts to reform the PMERJ, Soares would then be fired by Garotinho in 2000 and would shortly thereafter flee the country after receiving death threats from within the military police.

The MPP thus only lasted between four to five months before stalling and only 10 months in total before being effectively aborted by Garotinho (World Bank, 2012, p.36). This short-lived attempt at building State institutional presence in the favelas therefore serves as a prime example of the political challenges that face security programs implemented without (broad) political elite support. While Garotinho initially gave Soares leeway to undertake the experiment, and Benedita da Silva actively supported it, the initiative did not have real buy-in from the governor or any wider set of political elites. Certainly, this small pilot scheme did not receive any attention or backing from the national government. What might have been a viable program for expanding State territorial control to some

²⁸⁸ Garotinho would later go on to support Lula in the presidential run-off, after engaging in back-room negotiations with Lula (Soares, 2016, pp.146-148).

of the city's OCG-controlled favelas was never really tested at any scale, and quickly fell apart. However, the core ideas of the MPP would be resuscitated under the GPAE.

2.2 The GPAE (2000-2005)

Throughout the 1990s, successive periods of violent confrontation had occurred between OCGs, and between criminals and the police, in the favela complex comprised by Cantagalo and Pavão-Pavãozinho (Oosterbaan, 2006, p.59). While, lamentably, favela violence was not unusual at the time, these MUCs are located on a hill that rests between the wealthy southern neighbourhoods of Ipanema and Copacabana— both iconic tourist hotspots with beach access, high levels of commercial activity, and many middle- and upper-class residences. In 2000, a police raid into the favela complex resulted in a shootout which left five dead. The PMERJ claimed that the victims were all criminal actors, locals argued they were simply workers. In response, residents descended down into Ipanema and Copacabana and protested by vandalizing businesses,²⁸⁹ and throwing rocks and other refuse at cars and buses (Oosterbaan, 2006, p.61). Though the police, rather than OCGs, appear to have been immediately responsible for provoking this course of action by residents, it is still plausible to consider these events as being symptomatic of an OCG security threat, of the sort outlined in Chapter 2. Violence in Cantagalo/ Pavão-Pavãozinho had now become highly salient, with ongoing conflict between the PMERJ and OCGs having triggered aggressive mobilisation by favela residents. Indeed, the riots that resulted were televised (Ungar and Arias, 2009, p.418), heightening public awareness. Unsurprisingly, following the logic of my theory, Rio's political elites would seek to counter this threat. Perhaps due to Cantagalo/ Pavão-Pavãozinho's high-visibility, its location near Ipanema and Copacabana, and the circumstances under which residents had mobilized, another militarized

²⁸⁹ Interview with Antonio Carballo Blanco, GPAE director and former security official. 27/04/2023. 255u4.2

crackdown was ruled out. Instead, Garotinho's government called upon Soares' MPP collaborator, Major Carballo Blanco, to take charge of the situation. With Soares's help, he began developing a new strategy for the favelas: this would become the GPAE, or "Special Area Policing Groups".

The GPAE adopted many of the same principles from the MPP, including a focus on more community-oriented policing, as well as a ban on interventions by other police units into GPAE areas. Carballo Blanco was extremely hands-on in his approach, convening community meetings, dispensing his personal contact details among residents (to report crime and police corruption), and then firing for infractions many of the police sent to work for him. Thus, under his close guidance, the autonomy of the GPAE units from OCGs was gradually ensured. Indeed, as part of Carballo Blanco's strategy, he made it clear to residents that certain rules would be upheld, imposing zero-tolerance for firearms, children using drugs (or carrying weapons), and police corruption.²⁹⁰ Given that police were no longer persecuting a hardline crackdown on organised crime in these spaces, nor predated from the favela criminals, conflict between police and OCGs diminished. Thus, under Caballo Blanco's leadership, violence dropped dramatically, with zero homicides registered after one year in the GPAE areas of operation.

Crucially, under the GPAE, fixed bases were installed around the favelas, bringing a permanent policing presence to the area for the first time. With this newfound presence in the favelas, and increasing autonomy from OCGs, State access to these spaces and mobility within them began to increase. This was a gradual process, which was arrived at through day-to-day adjustments. As Carballo Blanco recalled: "The GPAE was completely artisanal [...] it wasn't an institutional project, but rather something very personal [it] was built day-by-day, that is invented and reinvented every day."²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Interview with Antonio Carballo Blanco, GPAE director and former security official. 10/04/2023. 255u4

²⁹¹ Interview with Antonio Carballo Blanco, GPAE director and former security official. 27/04/2023. 255u4.2

Nonetheless, by experimenting, and gradually “testing the waters”, State mobility within the favelas began to increase, with Carballo Blanco explaining that there came a point where he “could walk around alone” without hindrance, despite being aware that OCGs remained (hidden) in the area. Indeed, for Carballo Blanco, it was a matter of [creating] visible police presence”, which ultimately meant that “[The OCGs] stopped controlling who could enter and leave the favela”.²⁹² The NGO *Viva Rio* was also key to the GPAE effort. Carballo Blanco and Soares had chosen to work with this organisation to complement their policing strategy, bringing services and social spending to the favelas. NGO support was necessary as other State institutions were entirely absent, providing no input. Evidently, then, within Cantagalo and Pavão-Pavãozinho, the GPAE was for a time able to increase the State’s territorial control; OCGs moderated their behaviour, and State access and mobility increased significantly.

After a year running the programme, Carballo Blanco was transferred out of GPAE. He would later work in Brasilia with Luiz Eduardo Soares, when the latter was appointed President Lula’s National Security Secretary. His replacement was a more traditional PMERJ major, favouring far more hardline approaches to policing (Ungar and Arias, 2009, p.418). The initial success of the GPAE meant that attempts at replicating the programme then occurred in four more favelas between 2002-2005, each in response to a localized security crisis (Lessing, 2018, p.190). Indeed, the death of a journalist in Vila Cruzeiro– a highly salient act of violence– led to a GPAE police base being installed in that favela (World Bank, 2012, p.36). These new efforts to increase policing presence would not, however, succeed. Indeed, under new leadership, and amid expansion, the GPAE began to fray, exemplified by increasing confrontations between criminals and GPAE officers, and a diminishing presence of police throughout targeted favelas. Indeed, police corruption had set in, and in favelas such as Vila Cruzeiro,

²⁹² Interview with Antonio Carballo Blanco, GPAE director and former security official. 10/04/2023. 255u4

police activities were severely hampered by OCG violence, with GPAE officers engaging in regular shoot-outs with criminals (Ungar and Arias, 2009, p.419). Similarly, in Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavãozinho, the situation began to deteriorate. Ethnographic observations by Oosterbaan (2006) from mid-2002 onwards indicate that there were large parts of these MUCs, particularly deep within them, which were untouched by police and dominated by OCGs; illicit markets remained unhidden, and heavily armed OCGs openly conducted patrols (p.63). By 2004, the programme was showing severe signs of deterioration. In March that year, GPAE police shot dead three boys in Pavão-Pavãozinho, provoking a protest of more than 200 residents on the streets of Copacabana (Oosterbaan, 2006, p.64). While GPAE remained alive “on paper” afterwards, funding to the initiative was cut. Any of its initial success in building State territorial control in the favelas had disappeared.

To what can we associate the GPAE’s failure? Certainly, over-extension and the removal of Carballo Blanco were key factors in this regard, allowing regular PMERJ officers to be deployed to favelas without effective oversight or accountability. Thus, in its dwindling years, the GPAE simply served to bring low-autonomy police into close proximity with criminal groups, enabling predation, abuse, and violent conflict to return. That said, it is worth underscoring that much like the MPP, the GPAE simply lacked any concerted political support.²⁹³ While Carballo Blanco had freedom to experiment as he pleased, Governor Garotinho was not actively involved in the program, and left soon after its initiation to pursue his presidential bid. Indeed, the lack of political– or, indeed, police– interest in the GPAE was made evident by Carballo Blanco: “The GPAE was created without any real political support, without any structure. The officers they sent to me were the *worst*, just the worst they had from different battalions [...] it was *designed to fail*.”²⁹⁴ In a later conversation, he elaborated: “it wasn’t

²⁹³ Interview with Pedro Strozenberg, Lawyer and Senior figure in Viva Rio. 07/04/2023. 7owdp

²⁹⁴ Interview with Antonio Carballo Blanco, GPAE director and former security official. 10/04/2023. 255u4

very serious [...] I think they put me there to be tested— I say that to avoid using the word *screwed* [...] there really wasn't much political will [behind GPAE].”²⁹⁵

However, under the Major's oversight and with significant purges, GPAE of course did initially yield positive results: “It was created to fail, but it succeeded, incredibly [...] the ugly duckling turned into a swan, and the GPAE became a showcase, a model. That lasted until the political shift [then] it fell into oblivion.”²⁹⁶ Indeed, after Garotinho stepped down, Benedita da Silva legally took over as state governor. However, not only did she inherit a “financial and administrative mess” from her predecessor (Soares, 2016, p.146), but her lack of experience also meant that she faced difficulties in picking up where Garotinho left off (Lessing, 2018, p.182). Thus, she was unable to shift the dial on security policy— an especially arduous challenge given the institutional power of the police and persistent violence across the city. Resistance to the GPAE also came from the right-wing municipal mayor, who accused the programme of protecting drug retailers, even disparaging *Viva Rio*'s work by calling it “Viva Droga” (Albernaz et al., 2007, p.50). Benedita was then replaced by the former-governor's wife, Rosinha Garotinho, in 2003. While Rosinha initially oversaw the GPAE's expansion, under her administration funding to the programme would be cut (Ungar and Arias, 2009, pp.419, 420). To put it bluntly: “Under a different political administration and with little political support, the GPAE ended up a high-profile public disaster.” (Denyer-Willis and Mota Prado, 2014, p.237).

The unfulfilled promise of the MPP was therefore allowed to manifest more fully under the GPAE, but both instances of security policy *experimentation* ultimately collapsed. Indeed, while it might be presumptuous to claim that the MPP increased State territorial control given how short-lived it was, this does not apply to the GPAE, which *did* succeed in developing a fixed territorial foothold in a

²⁹⁵ Interview with Antonio Carballo Blanco, GPAE director and former security official. 27/04/2023. 255u4.2

²⁹⁶ Interview with Antonio Carballo Blanco, GPAE director and former security official. 10/04/2023. 255u4

favela complex long dominated by OCGs. While hands-on leadership was clearly important for both programmes, what fatally undermined both was the lack of meaningful political support by political elites at the local level (never mind nationally). We now turn to the UPP. This could well have followed in the footsteps of the MPP and GPAE. However, due to the emergence of a committed coalition of elite actors, it was instead able to significantly increase State territorial control throughout several of Rio's MUCs for years.

3. The UPP: State Territorial Expansion into the Favelas (2008-2012)

Governor Sergio Cabral came into office in 2007, appointing a seasoned federal police official, José Beltrame, as his new security secretary. Cabral had run on a platform of reforming the police, adopting a (Giuliani-inspired) zero-tolerance approach to OCG activities, as well as extending services to the favelas and better integrating them into the city. However, just days before his inauguration as governor, widespread OCG attacks were launched, with criminals burning buses and opening fire on police stations (Reel, 2007). This was a clear signal from the city's underworld that it would not be easily subdued, one that seemingly sought to shift the incoming-Governor's aggressive anti-OCG posture. Other spill-over effects of favela violence had become increasingly salient in the years prior to Cabral's election, with murders and police-OCG shootouts occurring in historically safer, more prosperous neighbourhoods, such as Ipanema and Leblon (Phillips, 2006).

The OCG security threat at the start of Cabral's term was therefore clear, and immediately produced an intensification of State interventions into territories under criminal control. As the months went by, these continued, culminating in the invasion of the notorious CV stronghold, the Complexo do Alemão— a conglomeration of 12 favelas stretching over several hills in Rio's north zone. The invasion of Alemão was extremely bloody, with 24 killed in just a single day of the multi-week operation; its scale was also impressive, rallying over 1300 police and soldiers (Phillips, 2007). Indeed, this was the

largest operation undertaken in Rio's history (Beltrame, 2014, p.101). Such a robust intervention was made possible thanks to the significant materiel and manpower that was provided from the Federal Government. This arose in part thanks to the partisan alignment of the state and federal governments; Cabral was of the PMDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement),²⁹⁷ a close coalitional ally of President Lula's PT. Moreover, besides this partisan relationship, these two political leaders were also friendly (Fraga and Gomide, 2007). Additionally, Cabral benefitted from connections to the federal security apparatus thanks to Beltrame's longstanding work as a federal investigator. Thus, with the alignment of Lula and Cabral's administrations, the *local* management of insecurity would now benefit from *national* support.

Indeed, this convergence, and the uptick in national support for local security policy, also arose from a shared interest in altering the perception of Rio as a high-crime, insecure city. The Alemão operation commenced shortly before the opening ceremony of the 2007 Pan-American Games in Rio, and lasted until shortly after the games closed in late July. With the memory of OCG violence spilling over from favelas still fresh in Cabral's mind, this effort to project State power and contain OCG threats was therefore undertaken in a context of heightened attention on local insecurity (the Alemão intervention attracted intense international media attention (Duran and Janone, 2007)). This was in part because the Pan-American Games were seen as a test-case for "Brazil to prove it [was] capable of hosting major international sporting events", with security for megaevents in the city being a serious concern to (international) stakeholders (MacInnes, 2007). Rio was at the time entering the final months of its bid to host the 2014 FIFA World Cup and preparing its bid for the 2016 Olympic Games. Immediately after the Pan-American Games wrapped up, a series of aggressive police raids took place throughout Rio's favelas. Moreover, testament to the ongoing support that the Federal Government was now

²⁹⁷ *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro.*

lending to the Cabral administration, Lula announced that “75% of the police cars, helicopters and surveillance gear deployed [to] Rio” in the preceding weeks would remain in the city, whilst also vowing to invest in Rio’s favelas (Economist, 2007).

3.1 The UPP Emerges: An Experiment in Favela Policing

Cabral and Beltrame were criticized for the Alemão invasion and the continuation of the hardline approach on favela crime. With the announcement of Brazil’s successful World Cup bid in October 2007, the need to develop a more durable solution to the city’s persistent violence became more intense still. Beltrame was eager to break from the pattern of sporadic, police interventionism into the favelas, and so since being appointed as Public Security Secretary he had begun brainstorming and informally planning alternative security strategies with his team. Inspiration was taken from the GPAE, and lessons learned from other contexts, including Colombia.²⁹⁸ From this brainstorming process, Beltrame’s team agreed that Rio’s OCGs could no longer be perceived as ruling the favelas. As such, rather than “attack crime, arrest people and end drugs” any new security strategy would be designed to “retake territories” (Beltrame, 2014, p.106). Such a plan was developed to accompany scheduled favela infrastructure developments (the first wave of PAC, discussed shortly), however this was ultimately scaled-back and put on ice (Lessing, 2018,p.192).

Then, in late 2008, when Governor Cabral’s wife in her capacity as first lady went to visit a nursery in the favela of Santa Marta, Beltrame saw a “window of opportunity” to implement his plan, one that was not yet “perfectly organised” (Beltrame, 2014, p.105). Effectively, then, he would be undertaking an *experiment*. Indeed, he would publicly describe Santa Marta as a “laboratory” for a new kind of intervention (Freire, 2008). First, heavily armed BOPE special forces went into the favela in order to

²⁹⁸ In fact, prior to taking office, Cabral had convened with Colombian security experts in Rio in order to learn from their experience (Phillips, 2006), and then as Governor he and Beltrame travelled to Colombia, including to Medellín.

“clear” it of hostile OCGs, before then being phased out after some time and replaced by PMERJ officers. Beltrame made it clear to residents that this was part of a new approach, and that the police were there to stay. A fixed base was quickly set up in the community and police began to patrol and dialogue with residents. The favela provided ideal conditions for Beltrame’s experiment: it was small, had limited access points, and was located in the prosperous south zone near the middle-class area of Botafogo, where OCG predation was affecting residents and intractable conflict between police and OCGs heightening the sense of insecurity (Lopes and Moulin, 2013, p.23). While it did not yet bear the name, the Santa Marta intervention represented the first of the UPPs (Police Pacifying Unit).

The Santa Marta base was followed by proto-UPP installations in the favelas of Cidade de Deus, Batan, and Babilônia/Chapeu Mangueira. Like in Santa Marta, the Cidade de Deus and Batan UPPs also emerged as the result of Beltrame seizing an opportunity that presented itself— in both cases when police battalions intervened in the favelas and took them over of their own accord (Lessing, 2018, p.193). The occupation of Batan, a favela in the city’s west zone near the prosperous neighbourhood of Barra da Tijuca, is also noteworthy for other reasons. Whereas the majority of the favelas in which UPP bases would be developed lay *under CV control*, Batan was dominated by a *milicia* group. Milicias were (are) notorious for preying off favela residents, extorting, and imposing local rules and norms through coercion. Since the early 2000s, these groups have spread throughout urban Rio, though especially in the historically difficult-to-reach west zone, where the presence of other OCGs has been more limited. However, despite growing exponentially, their ties to both local police and clientelist (right-wing) Rio politicians have ensured that they have largely been spared the State repression afforded to other OCGs, especially the CV. In other words, the milicias have not generally constituted a *security threat* in the eyes of many political elites and State officials. However, in 2008, the milicias in Batan *did* present such a threat after torturing and murdering two journalists from the prominent local newspaper *O Dia*, committing a highly salient act of violence that would attract widespread media

attention. Hence, in 2008 and then again in early 2009, Batan was targeted, with a permanent policing base installed.

These early efforts at installing a fixed policing presence in different favelas were generally viewed favourably, and indeed, as with the GPPE, produced some notable successes including significant reductions in violence in targeted areas. We will return to discuss the effects of the UPP on territorial control towards the end of this section. Firstly, we need to understand the UPP's expansion. At the conclusion of Cabral's first term, five UPP bases had been created. However, during his second term (which began in 2010), this number shot up enormously. As we now see, this expansion was in no small part thanks to high levels of elite coordination, which allowed resources to be channelled to Rio and its new security initiative, with subnational political elites helped by both their *national* counterparts and local *economic elites*.

3.2 Elite Coordination: Facilitating the UPPs Expansion and Reform

Since his inauguration, Cabral had counted on support from the Federal government due to his relationship with Lula. However, in 2009 his administration gained a new ally in Edoardo Paes, who assumed office as mayor of the Rio de Janeiro's municipal government. Paes, like Cabral, was from the PMDB, meaning that there was now partisan alignment across all three tiers of the Brazilian government. Very high levels of elite coordination ensued, with federal, state, and municipal authorities working towards the shared goal of building up State institutional presence in Rio's favelas. As Beltrame himself wrote: "When we reflect on the success or failure of public policies, we can say that without alignment from top to bottom, nothing is going to function smoothly" (2014, p.111).

As such, the UPP emerged within a highly supportive political context. Indeed, not only did Lula and Paes publicly support the evolving UPP project, but both tiers of government were simultaneously

committed to implementing favela upgrading programmes of their own, and better integrating these marginalised communities into the orbit of State governance. In part, this no doubt derived from the political left's commitment to poverty alleviation (a core part of Lula's agenda), but was also likely driven by the desire to remodel and modernize Rio, given the international attention that would come with the World Cup and Summer Olympic Games (it was announced in late 2009 that Rio had been awarded the games). From the federal government, came the PAC (2007-2010) and PAC-2 (2010-2013), "growth acceleration" programmes,²⁹⁹ which invested hundreds of billions of dollars in development nationwide, including in Rio's favelas.³⁰⁰ While federally-led, this also drew significant funds from the state government, and important input from the municipal authorities (Skalmusky, 2011). Mayor Paes, meanwhile, began his own initiative, *Morar Carioca*, which similarly sought to invest billions of dollars in the city's favelas (Osborn, 2013; Phillips, 2010). While the success of these "slum upgrading" programmes is debatable, they are emblematic of the concerted effort by the different tiers of government to "thicken" State institutional presence in the city's neglected favelas. The UPP thus formed part of an inter-governmental effort to project the State into areas long considered beyond its control, and which were viewed as loci for the reproduction of urban insecurity and disorder. A political elite coalition, with shared partisan ties and a common goal had thus emerged.

The government would also be supported by Rio's economic elites. Indeed, the PAC programmes in-part relied on public-private partnerships, and drew on considerable private sector resources. Moreover, in 2010, major business elites came together to sponsor the UPP programme. These included the Brazilian Football Confederation, Coca-Cola, the tobacco manufacturer Souza Cruz, the

²⁹⁹ *Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento*. The former of these was launched under Lula, and the latter under his successor, Dilma Rousseff.

³⁰⁰ Note that the PAC, like the PUI in Medellín, also was developed with security in mind, often widening access roads to favelas to allow for the entry of large vehicles to previously inaccessible parts of these communities (Interview with Lia Rocha, sociologist with experience researching local violence. 11/04/2023. es85e).

insurance giant Bradesco Seguros (one of the largest insurers in Latin America), the conglomerate Odebrecht, and FIRJAN,³⁰¹ which represents and articulates Rio de Janeiro's industries (World Bank, 2012; Denyer-Willis and Mota Prado, 2014, p.238). Moreover, investments were also made by EBX, owned by Eike Batista, Brazil's richest man at the time. Batista pledged \$10 million USD to the UPP every year between 2010-2014. These windfall donations from the private sector were key in bypassing normal contracting processes, allowing the UPP to quickly acquire equipment and materiel, and invest in rapid expansion and training. Indeed, a further eight UPPs were installed in favelas in 2010 alone. Private sector support thus added important momentum to the UPP project, catalysing vigorous growth: what had begun as an experiment, soon cohered into the state government's flagship security programme. Economic elites did *not* serve to facilitate coordination between national and subnational political elites, nor ensure policy durability with democratic turnover, as they did in preceding cases. Still, they also did not *need to*, given the close alignment on policy and the partisan affiliation that already existed across different governmental tiers. Indeed, economic elite support appears to have been partly *incentivized* by this political alignment, with Eike Batista publicly acknowledging that collaboration between federal, state and municipal authorities presented a unique opportunity for delivering on policy (Lessing, 2018, p.257).

Clearly, Rio's business actors stood to benefit from supporting the UPP and other favela interventions. Policies including the UPP fell within the broader elite project to reshape Rio de Janeiro's global image as a safe, stable destination for global capital after years of violence—much like the mobilisation of the GEA in Medellín. In this regard, the UPP can be considered part of an effort to improve “city-branding”—to invoke Moncada (2016). Naturally, this aligned with other efforts to project an improved global image of Rio. Indeed, international megaevents “are seen as a way to showcase a city

³⁰¹ *Federação das Indústrias do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.*

[...] consolidate that city's brand and leave a lasting impression on the world that will attract capital for years to come." (Freeman, 2012, p.97). It did not escape the notice of many observers that UPP bases over the next few years were generally installed near megaevent infrastructure, providing a "protective ring" around these sites.³⁰²

Rio's business community had not always worked closely with the State to confront urban insecurity; indeed, amid the escalating violence of the 1990s, many economic elites decided to adopt a low-profile, not publicizing their business ventures, purchasing armoured vehicles, and investing in private security (Brooke, 1990b). That said, in the mid-1990s, alarmed at how insecurity— and in particular, kidnappings— were driving businesses out of the state, Rio's economic elites *did* mobilize to work with the local authorities on anti-kidnapping measures. This collaboration led to the creation of an NGO (*Associação Rio Contra o Crime*) and the implementation of an anonymous tipline in 1995, with rewards provided for information on kidnapping and drug-dealing (Forum Brasileira, 2011, p.45). As such, there was precedent for economic elite collective action, however slight, to address deficiencies in public security where this threatened local commerce. With the FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games, there would be enormous economic opportunities for local business. Not only did these events themselves entail tendering billions of dollars in contracts, but it was also expected that they would attract years of international attention and investment to the local economy, and had the potential to accelerate Rio's tourism industry. Within this context, a programme that was pitched as definitively bringing "law and order" to the favelas arguably fit within the wider ambitions of Rio's business community to improve international perceptions of their city.³⁰³ Improving Rio's "brand", however, once again required meaningful investments in *public security* rather than just *private protection*. Indeed, at

³⁰² Interview with former official who worked for Rio's Security Secretary (2012-2016). 17/04/2023. omu9y; Interview with Robson Rodrigues, former UPP Commander and researcher. 09/04/2023. k63dp

³⁰³ Interview with Ignacio Cano, expert on violence and insecurity in Rio. 13/04/2023. so692; Interview with researcher and social worker. 28/03/2023. 7c1gp

this time Rio's economic elite were also commissioning research into crime and violence, concerned with the effects of insecurity on commerce.³⁰⁴

Still, the influence of Rio's economic elites in the development of the UPP seems to have preceded the megaevents. In 2006, influential business leaders are said to have begun convening with figures close to the state government, as well as intelligence officials, to kick-start "a serious discussion of potential solutions to the city's public security dilemma". This involved studying other urban security strategies throughout the Americas, and speaking to experts (World Bank, 2012). Little is known about these closed-door meetings, which have not been widely discussed in public. That said, in our conversation, Luiz Eduardo Soares explained that he had been invited to participate in one such meeting, where different traditional economic elites from the city were present. These individuals then approached other influential elite actors, including the heads of the major news network, *Globo*, before convening with the governor.³⁰⁵ The *Globo* network has longstanding, intimate ties with politics, indeed "before the arrival of the internet, *Globo* held absolute power. Even now, *Globo* often decides what is and is not news" (Platt 2002 p.145). While it might be an exaggeration to say that the UPP was the brainchild of these discussions (as Soares has implied), informal meetings of this sort may well have been influential in creating *consensus* among different political and economic elites on security matters. As such, like the dialogues facilitated by the Presidential Council in Medellín, these discussions may have helped *prime the ground* for the UPP, with different local elites arguably then seizing the opportunity to support the program once it began to take shape. Indeed, as we have seen, Rio's

³⁰⁴ Interview with Michel Misse, sociologist and Rio security expert. 26/04/2023. g1wzd

³⁰⁵ Interview with Luiz Eduardo Soares, former Subsecretary of Security (Rio) and former National Secretary for Public Security. 26/04/2023. 2e9xn

economic elite rallied around the UPP, and it is noteworthy also that the *Globo* (and other media outlets) provided Beltrame's initiative with highly supportive coverage.³⁰⁶

As the UPP continued to expand over time, what had begun as an experiment by Beltrame thus became more consolidated and formalized. A two-step process became the template, whereby BOPE special forces would intervene in a favela, "clear" it of OCGs, and then withdraw to be replaced by a UPP base. Initially, Beltrame sought to ensure the cohesion of the nascent UPPs through appointing like-minded officers trained in community policing to positions of authority. Given that the nascent programme still relied on PMERJ rank-and-file for its operations in the favelas, this was arguably key in helping ensure police *autonomy* from OCGs. Moreover, a clear hierarchy was established within the programme: individual units would receive orders from a centralized UPP command, *not* the regular PMERJ battalions. However, as the programme became formalized, bolder steps could be taken to distance and insulate the UPP from the influence of the PMERJ. Indeed, by 2010 "UPP police began to be recruited from scratch". Furthermore, they were trained at a police academy that focused on community policing rather than the heavily militarized approach of the regular PMERJ. (Denyer-Willis and Mota Prado, 2014, pp.237, 238). Thus, a process of police reform had effectively taken place *without* causing a political fight with the powerful, authoritarian PMERJ.³⁰⁷ Indeed, while the UPPs development did initially cause tension with the military police, Beltrame attracted a lot of funding to the institution, and massively expanded it through his recruitment efforts. The PMERJ also got to take some of the credit for the UPP. As such, these factors arguably helped mitigate internal resistance from the military police (at least initially).³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ Interview with resident of Cidade de Deus, 05/05/2023. 56ktn; Interview with Damian Platt, former Rio NGO worker and author. 16/06/2023. nk1yv

³⁰⁷ Denyer-Willis and Mota Prado (2014) describe this as a process of reform via "institutional bypass".

³⁰⁸ Interview with Ignacio Cano, expert on violence and insecurity in Rio. 13/04/2023. so692

Sustained by the resources and political support that now came from Rio’s elite coalition, UPP recruits had specialized training, higher salaries,³⁰⁹ and a distinct institutional culture to their regular PMERJ counterparts. Thus, by providing careful oversight, appointing sympathetic police officers to the initial UPP “experiment”, and then building the force ground-up from a pool of recruits, Beltrame and his team had effectively constructed a brand-new local police institution, with a singular guiding mission: “to end the offense of territorial domination by gangsters” (Beltrame, 2014, p.118). This now had the *resources* as well as the *autonomy* to undertake *State Territorial Expansion*.

3.3 Increased State Territorial Control under the UPP

With the political momentum behind UPP, the State began to develop a foothold in more and more territories where access and mobility had previously been heavily restricted by OCGs. No longer simply entering sporadically, engaging in violent hostilities, and then leaving, the UPPs instead retained a 24-hour fixed presence in the favelas. This included areas which had long been viewed as beyond the State’s reach. Following a series of violent protests by the CV in 2010– which involved burning buses on city transit routes in an effort to dissuade Cabral from staying the course with the UPP (Lessing, 2018, p.195)– the government would once again prepare to intervene in the CV stronghold of Alemão, and the neighbouring Vila Cruzeiro favela. This mobilized 2700 soldiers and police, requiring considerable input from the federal government. The next year, Rio’s largest favela Rocinha was targeted without any resistance from OCGs, and a UPP base was installed there too. By this point, many OCG actors fled favelas targeted by the UPP programme, moving to other still “unpacified” territories, or simply hiding.

³⁰⁹ As was emphasized to me by a former UPP officer, these extra R\$ 500 per month were no small matter for new recruits (Interview with former UPP Coordinator in Cidade de Deus and Complexo do Lins. (2010-2016). 24/04/2023, ajbx8.

Between 2008-2012, violence fell in the favelas in which the UPP police intervened, shoot-outs between police and OCGs declining sharply. Additionally, “pacification” had secondary effects that helped garner wider support; by “reducing the ability of criminals to circulate [the strategy also] reduced crime and violence in middle-class areas” (Platt 2020 p.80).

After the initial “clearing” process undertaken by the much-feared BOPE, OCG actors were careful to hide their illicit economic activities. Whereas previously drugs were sold openly on street corners, now drug retail diminished considerably in many favelas, with OCGs selling from inside homes or from backpacks,³¹⁰ to avoid State repression.³¹¹ Given the police’s newfound presence, OCGs in these favelas ceased to be openly armed, and were no longer in a position to determine access and mobility within their turfs. Thus, civilian freedom of movement improved considerably in many now “pacified” favelas, with outsiders coming and going freely and residents circulating as they pleased. As in Medellín and Monterrey, then, many of the invisible borders that OCGs had used to divide communities were now lifted.³¹² Police too could move around freely within many of these MUCs; a former-UPP officer who was stationed in Cidade de Deus in 2011 recounted that he and his men could walk around the favela at all times, day or night, unarmed.³¹³

Moreover, with increased State territorial control, the presence of both different State institutions and private sector actors increased significantly in many favelas. This was partly planned, given that in 2010, a third step was added to the initial “capture and hold” strategy of the UPP, which relied upon the implementation of social services and formal utilities, initially grouped under the name “UPP

³¹⁰ Interview with MUC resident, Complexo do Alemão. 03/05/2023. ojit9; Interview with former UPP Captain with experience in Mangueira, Santa Marta and Cidade de Deus, 23/04/2023. 1gsqt

³¹¹ One perverse outcome of the shrinking drug market in pacified favelas and the need for OCGs to maintain a low profile in the favelas was the increased recruitment of children in favelas such as Cidade de Deus (Former UPP Coordinator in Cidade de Deus and Complexo do Lins. (2010-2016). 24/04/2023, ajbx8)

³¹² Interview with resident of Cidade de Deus, 05/05/2023. 56ktn; Interview with former official who worked for Rio’s Security Secretary (2012-2016). 17/04/2023. omu9y

³¹³ Interview with former UPP Coordinator in Cidade de Deus and Complexo do Lins. (2010-2016). 24/04/2023, ajbx8

Social”. The UPP Social programme was effectively designed to be a corrective to the UPP, complementing the original programme’s emphasis on policing with a more holistic approach to favela interventionism. This of course gelled with the ongoing PAC investments and other social spending at the time, though UPP Social sought to explicitly support the police interventions.³¹⁴ As with other favela-based social programmes at the time, the UPP Social relied on significant private sector investment for its financing (Alves, 2015; World Bank, 2012).

As such, during the initial roll-out of the UPP, State territorial control increased where the strategy was adopted. OCGs did not always leave with the arrival of the State, but *did* significantly change their behaviour in response to the presence of the high-autonomy UPP units— in line with my theory. Moreover, State *governance* in many favelas increased, not least because of the multitude of favela-upgrading projects that had emerged in conjunction with the UPP’s evolution. Eye-catching projects which explicitly drew inspiration from Medellín were implemented, such as a cable car system in Alemão, as well as in the favela of Providencia, alongside other basic infrastructure projects and human development programmes, including education and recreational activities for youths and technical training for adults (World Bank, 2012; Bentsi-Enchill, 2015).

While the considerable extension of services to many long-neglected communities was emblematic of the increased role of the State in providing governance, the influence of OCGs over community life was not completely erased in many favelas— though it did subside greatly where they fled. Indeed, while it is true that in a general sense, State territorial control and the provision of State governance increased in UPP favelas, there was a great deal of variation *across* favelas and, indeed, within them. This variation has been well-documented over the last decade. Whereas the UPP had a great deal of

³¹⁴ Beltrame had acknowledged since the earliest days of the UPP that social spending, not just policing, would be crucial to its long-term success (Bottari and Gonçalves, 2011; Jornal de Brasília, 2010).

success in some favelas, especially small ones in the more prosperous and better-integrated south zone, larger favelas and complexes such as Alemão and Rocinha would soon present significant challenges for the State. These difficulties are discussed further in the next section, which looks at the retrenchment and collapse of the UPP.

4. Declining Elite Coordination and UPP Capacity: The Breakdown of State Territorial Control (2013-2016)

By the time the FIFA World Cup kicked off in 2014,³¹⁵ forty UPP bases had been installed throughout Rio's favelas (Grillo, 2016, p.102). However, in 2015 Beltrame halted the programme's expansion, amid mounting setbacks and escalating violence (Lessing, 2018, p.198). Indeed, signs of deterioration had begun well before this point, as early as 2013. To understand why this deterioration occurred, the final section of this chapter first examines the weakening of Rio's elite coalition, before discussing the declining institutional capacity of the UPP police themselves. In accordance with my theory, the conjunction of these two processes spelled the end of *State Territorial Expansion* and precipitated a severe contraction in State territorial control in Rio's favelas.

4.1 A Weakening Elite Coalition

A concatenation of factors led to the severe weakening of elite coordination between 2013-2016. This is not to say that all traces of elite coordination disappeared; the federal government continued to support subnational authorities by providing them with manpower for favela "clearing", exemplified by the militarized occupation of the Maré favela complex that began in 2015. Indeed, it is unsurprising that the federal government continued to allocate security resources to Rio, given the need to secure

³¹⁵ Of course, the World Cup was not held exclusively in Rio de Janeiro, but across different cities in Brazil.

the megaevents of 2014 and 2016. What instead was witnessed was a gradual shift away from supporting the pacification strategy, stripping it of the political will and finances it needed to be sustainable, particularly in the wake of its dramatic expansion. Of course, this expansion had been so audacious largely *thanks* to the high levels of political and economic elite support that the UPP had initially garnered. That is, the injection of finances and early political momentum behind the UPP put the program in a position where it was over-extended, as became evident once elite coordination waned.

In mid-2014, Brazil was hit with a severe financial crisis, its GDP dropping sharply over the next two years (ECB, 2016). Following the commodities boom of the preceding decade-and-a-half and the lavish spending that this had afforded, Brazil's purse-strings now tightened, both across the public and private sectors. This was not an auspicious environment for resource-intensive programmes such as the UPP, especially given its rapid growth in the preceding years. Moreover, Eike Batista, who had initially pledged considerable financial resources to the programme, went bust in 2013 (Platt, 2020 p.67). He was later convicted for having bribed Sergio Cabral for lucrative state contracts (Gomes, 2018), in part of the now world-famous *Lavo Jato* operation. Indeed, although Cabral would step down from his second term as governor prematurely to pursue a senate seat, he too would be arrested in 2016. It transpired that Cabral had received massive payouts for contract distribution (Sreeharsha, 2016), and had in fact clinched the successful Olympic Games through paying millions of dollars in bribes to Olympic committee officials (Ingle, 2019; Viga Gaier, 2019). The fallout from Lavo Jato would, that same year, lead to the successful impeachment of Lula's successor, President Rousseff. These compounding scandals created widespread public anger, casting events such as the Olympics, and policies such as the PAC and UPP in a negative light (recall that the latter was closely associated with Cabral's administration). Still, it is notable that even prior to Cabral and Rousseff exiting the political scene, levels of national-subnational coordination appear to have been diminishing. Indeed,

Fernando Pezão, Cabral's deputy and successor as governor, failed to receive the same level of close federal support that his predecessor had enjoyed (Lessing, 2018, p.199). The conjunction of a severe economic crisis, as well as a massive political scandal that affected all tiers of the State, thus created severe dislocations where previously there had been effective intergovernmental and intersectoral collaboration, whilst also tarnishing many of the policies and programmes that had been rolled-out in the preceding years.

Unsurprisingly, this extremely turbulent environment had knock-on effects on the capacity of the police deployed to the favelas. While this is explored in detail below, I raise this here as the deterioration of the UPP *reinforced* political disenchantment and opposition to the programme. Indeed, in the 2014 gubernatorial race, Pezão's opponent– the resurgent Anthony Garotinho– publicly questioned the long-term viability of the UPP, suggesting its days were numbered (Lessing, 2018, p.199). While the UPP had initially garnered glowing support from the media thanks to the buy-in of influential elite actors such as those at *Globo*, and been reified by a “highly expensive publicity machine churned out pro-pacification propaganda” (Platt 2020, p.73), now that the programme found itself overstretched, its deficiencies were laid bare. Arguably, the evident deterioration of the UPP helped fuel a vicious cycle, whereby escalating violence and signs of corruption exacerbated criticism of– and increasing political resistance to– the UPP, which in turn further impeded the programme from receiving the political support and finances it needed to be viable. As a former UPP commander stated to me: “All the criticisms, the way the police was acting, this led to a turning point. The investments that had been coming in from NGOs and the private sector... well, they were withdrawn. They didn't want to be associated with [the UPP] any longer”.³¹⁶

³¹⁶ Interview with former UPP officer stationed in Pavão-Pavãozinho, Mangueira, Rocinha, and Complexo São Carlos. 17/04/2023. v80zi

Having discussed how political and economic crises weakened elite coordination, we now turn to the breakdown of territorial control in the favelas themselves.

4.2 Declining Police Capacity, Diminishing Territorial Control

While “without a doubt, the Pacification scheme [had] transformed certain favelas” (Grillo, 2016 p.102), many others had always remained highly contentious and conflict-riven, spaces in which the State’s territorial control remained low and fragmented. MUCs of this sort included Complexo do Lins,³¹⁷ Rocinha, Complexo São Carlos,³¹⁸ and Complexo do Alemão, to name just a few cited by former-UPP officers with whom I spoke. In Alemão, the arrival of the UPP initially seemed to herald a significant increase in State territorial control, with police undertaking patrols in the area for the first time (this then allowed for the construction of the cable car). Drug dealers hid, removing the tables of crack and solvents from the street, hiding these illicit businesses. However, this did not apply universally. Indeed, “armed drug traffickers dominated and carried on as normal in large swathes of the favela” (Platt 2020 p.87), meaning that territorial control was effectively divided within the area between CV foot-soldiers and the State. Given the presence of these two sets of armed actors “a gunfight could break out at any moment [...] pacification brought war to the favela 24-hours a day” (ibid, p.84). Naturally, this situation of intense conflict was particularly alarming for local residents, as observed collaboration with either police or CV risked repression and punishment by the other party (ibid, pp.84,85). This corresponds with findings from across different favelas that show that where UPPs were built in previously stable, established (and more “benign”) systems of local level OCG order (Magaloni et al., 2020), they faced a much harder time in gaining support and legitimacy from

³¹⁷ Interview with former UPP coordinator in Cidade de Deus and Complexo do Lins. (2010-2016). 24/04/2023, ajbx8; similar thoughts were expressed by another UPP Captain when we spoke (Interview with former UPP Captain with experience in Mangueira, Santa Marta and Cidade de Deus, 23/04/2023. 1gsgt)

³¹⁸ Interview with former UPP officer stationed in Pavão-Pavãozinho, Mangueira, Rocinha, and Complexo São Carlos. 17/04/2023. v80zi

residents. In other territories, such as Maré, occupying State forces,³¹⁹ including the military, faced constant hostilities from OCGs, with attacks on patrols fuelled by OCG competition (Barnes, 2021).

The UPP therefore already had a mixed record when examined at the micro-level. Still, its deterioration produced a significant rollback in State territorial control *more generally* across the favelas in which it had been implemented. This deterioration can be attributed in large part to the *decreasing capacity* of the UPP police. With the enormous demand in UPP officers that had emerged thanks to the programme's rapid expansion, but a diminishing pool of resources with which to ensure consistency, standards began to slip.³²⁰ Indeed, increasingly UPP officers were transferred away from the favelas to which they had been assigned to buttress policing numbers elsewhere. The “boots-on-the-ground” in each favela therefore diminished, with UPP manpower stretched thin across dozens of MUCs.³²¹ As an MUC resident explained: “Things might have been calm in the favela when there were 120 UPP cops, but when this went down to 90, then 60, then 30. Well, you can't do the same with 30 men that you can with 120”.³²²

The specialized training and oversight that had been key to the UPP's initial success were also elided in an attempt to keep up with the demand for officers; so-called “miojo” training (named after an instant noodle product) was therefore adopted, cutting the training time of UPP officers significantly.³²³ Of course, the UPP's autonomy had been achieved through insulating it from the PMERJ and its traditional policing practices. As the UPP expanded, though, the distinctions between these two institutions therefore became less and less meaningful. Across many favelas, tacit

³¹⁹ This was supposed to precede a UPP installation, but this was never actually completed.

³²⁰ Interview with Lia Rocha, sociologist with experience researching local violence. 11/04/2023. es85e

³²¹ Interview with former researcher for Rio's Security Secretary. 14/04/2023. la4v6; Interview with Michel Misse, sociologist and Rio security expert. 26/04/2023. g1wzd

³²² Interview with resident of Cidade de Deus, 05/05/2023. 56ktn

³²³ Interview with Michel Misse, sociologist and Rio security expert. 26/04/2023. g1wzd; Interview with former researcher for Rio's Security Secretary. 14/04/2023. la4v6

agreements between OCGs and UPPs thus became more common (Wolff, 2019), though so too did direct forms of collaboration.³²⁴ Coupled with this also came signs of predation, with corrupt cops using the UPPs as a means of entering previously inaccessible territories (and thus markets) to extort OCGs and extract illicit goods and payments.³²⁵ Indeed, in some favelas, not only did the installation of UPPs dislodge the presence of groups such as the CV, but it also heralded the arrival of *milicias*, suggesting collusion between UPPs and these actors.³²⁶ Moreover, recall that in its early days of the UPP Beltrame's team had made sure to appoint sympathetic officials to leadership positions within the programme. As the number of UPP bases rose, this careful placement of officers appears to have stopped: a UPP commander in Rocinha prioritized pursuing heavy handed anti-drugs operations over the community-oriented policing initially envisioned, leading to violent confrontations (Magaloni et al., 2020, p.562); meanwhile in Alemão, outbursts of violence depended on the police that were on duty: "Some patrolled peacefully, others sought out drug traffickers. You never knew what might happen." (Platt 2020 p.84).

Amid these conditions, then, increasing signs of the PMERJ's authoritarian policing practices emerged across the UPPs. Most famously, this included the disappearance of Amarildo de Souza, a bricklayer from Rochinha, in 2013. He was seemingly tortured and murdered in the main UPP base in Rochinha, provoking mass protests and intense media scrutiny. His disappearance is often viewed as the turning point for the UPP programme, the moment of inflection after which it never recovered. In 2015, UPP officers in Providência were surreptitiously recorded by favela residents executing a 17-year-old CV member. Faking a shootout, they left a discharged revolver in his hand. This received international media coverage (Platt 2020 p.88). Two months before the World Cup, a well-known local dancer in

³²⁴ Interview with Pedro Strozenberg, Lawyer and Senior figure in Viva Rio. 07/04/2023. 7owdp

³²⁵ Interview with Damian Platt, former Rio NGO worker and author. 16/06/2023. nk1yv

³²⁶ Interview with MUC activist with experience working in different favelas. 07/04/2023. drjed

Pavão-Pavãozinho was shot dead by UPP police, provoking riots (Grillo, 2016, p.103). The public outcry at events such as these, and many others, went a long way towards discrediting the UPP, fanning political opposition at a time when elite coordination was already weakening.

Contemporaneously, the State also began to lose territorial control thanks to increasing hostilities from OCGs. Seemingly attuned to the political climate, and cognizant of the increasingly widespread feeling that the UPP would not outlast the Olympics, OCG attacks against UPP bases and officers became more common following 2013. This pattern was widespread, as OCGs— particularly the CV, which had borne the brunt of UPP expansion— sought to drive out police from the favelas and reclaim their old turfs.³²⁷ Thus, while UPP bases were still present in many favelas, the ability of State agents to move around freely and unimpeded began to diminish sharply as the danger these units faced heightened. Now, under attack, UPP units were given back-up by BOPE and other police units, specialized in direct, aggressive confrontation with OCGs, thus adding further fuel to the fire.³²⁸ Testament to the fact the State was losing ground, a traffic light system for different territories was established: “in red zones, we would withdraw [UPP] officers to regroup [...] they were being attacked almost daily. Psychologically, those officers were falling apart”.³²⁹

While UPP Social had sought to back-up the presence of the police with investments and development spending, this was ultimately a failure. Those who actually ran the programme on the ground were by all accounts committed, and well-intentioned. However, a lack of support from political elite circles was evident to analysts and those involved, who bemoaned the failure of different State agencies to work together effectively (Ramsey, 2014; Bentsi-Enchill, 2015).³³⁰ The programme was transferred

³²⁷ Interview with community leader, Complexo do Alemão. 03/05/2023. lo57q

³²⁸ Interview with Ignacio Cano, expert on violence and insecurity in Rio. 13/04/2023. so692

³²⁹ Interview with Robson Rodrigues, former UPP Commander and researcher. 09/04/2023. k63dp

³³⁰ Interview with Daniel Misse, former coordinator of UPP Social. 08/05/2023, 9ej52

from the state government, to the municipal government, then rebranded before shutting down. As for other favela-upgrading initiatives, Mayor Paes' Morar Carioca stoked widespread resentment and opposition for not consulting communities whilst condemning many favela residents' houses to be demolished, and eye-catching PAC developments such as the Alemão cable car proved to be entirely "for the English to see" (as the local expression goes). Just days after the end of the Olympics, the cable cars were shut down, and have not reopened since.³³¹ The State thus failed to capitalize on its increased territorial control over the favelas to really develop its role in governing these areas. Where increased State territorial control had brought services, such as basic utilities, these were resented for being far higher than informal OCG-provided services. As State territorial control waned, OCG provision of such utilities therefore returned in earnest.³³²

Between 2013-2016, then, although the UPP continued to grow, it *did not* succeed in expanding State territorial control, as in previous years. Indeed, earlier UPP bases also began to deteriorate. As a lifelong resident of Alemão noted to me, the favela complex began to be gradually retaken by the CV following 2013: the UPP police stopped circulating, sticking to ever more restricted areas, as the CV expanded from its old holdouts deep inside the MUC. By the end of the UPP programme, the CV's territorial expansion was undeniable. The OCG even organised a *Baile Funk* dance party right outside one of Alemão's UPP posts: "[the CV] turned up in vehicles, carrying assault rifles, and the police in that base didn't do anything. They just stayed inside."³³³

After 2016, the UPP programme was all but wound up. A reversion to sporadic, militarized crackdowns was adopted, exemplified by a federal intervention in 2018. Today, UPP bases are still present in some favelas; in many others they were abandoned in their entirety in the wake of 2016.

³³¹ Interview with community leader, Complexo do Alemão. 03/05/2023. lo57q

³³² Interview with MUC resident (lived in Cidade de Deus, Rocinha, now a west zone militia territory). 29/04/2023. cyx3x

³³³ Interview with MUC resident, Complexo do Alemão. 03/05/2023. ojit9

Still, while UPP bases still exist, the State no longer exercises territorial control as once it did. During a visit to Rocinha, I went to the UPP base where Amarildo de Souza was tortured. This lies about halfway up the main access road to the favela. Police continue to use this road without any hindrance, as do guided groups of tourists interested in seeing “favela life”. However, after taking just a brief walk off this main thoroughfare and into the favela, it becomes evident how limited the territorial control exercised by the police really is: armed OCGs patrol with assault rifles, and have gone back to openly dealing drugs. Police may be present, but they no longer command control of the territory. Such is the case across many of the city’s favelas.

Conclusion

This chapter has once again shown that high levels of elite coordination are *key* to propelling *State Territorial Expansion*. As was expressed to me in numerous interviews and informal conversations, the UPP was nothing fundamentally new, having been modelled after previous security policy experiments such as the MPP and GPAE. However, what allowed it to really deliver results, expand at pace, become institutionalized, and build State territorial control in areas where this had long been restricted, was the unique political environment in which it emerged. Vertical political alignment across all tiers of government, thanks to the coalition of the PT and PMDB, was foundational in allowing the UPP to acquire the resources and political support necessary for its expansion and (initial) success. Indeed, not only did political elites at the federal, state and municipal levels of government back the UPP, but a number of powerful local economic elites *also* supported the programme, alongside other initiatives to build-up State territorial presence and governance in the favelas. This is what fundamentally set the UPP apart from the innovative favela security policies that had preceded it. While the MPP and GPAE showed initial promise, they quickly fell apart without institutional support, and thus the State’s ability to exercise territorial control in the favelas where they were implemented was not sustainable.

Still, just as high levels of elite coordination were key to consolidating the Rio's *Security Reform* process and driving *State Territorial Expansion* into the city's favelas, declining coordination then accompanied the UPP's collapse. As in the case of Monterrey, then, Rio shows that successful elite coordination is reversible, with knock-on effects for the survival of ambitious, costly security programmes. Unlike in Monterrey, though, where gains in State territorial control persisted despite declining elite coordination, the rollback of State territorial control in the Rio's MUCs was dramatic. Indeed, the dwindling resources of the UPP, and the decreasing autonomy of its police, meant that the State forces were unable to retain effective control over the favelas to which they had been assigned. State control therefore shrank in many favelas during the latter years of the UPP (2013-2016), as police with decreasing capacity faced aggressive territorial contestation from OCGs.

As a case study, then, Rio de Janeiro supports my theory, showing how elite coordination and police institutional capacity are both necessary factors to shaping variation in territorial control in MUCs. Still, certain particularities of the preceding analysis are worth underscoring.

Firstly, in Medellín and Monterrey, elite coalition building was largely driven by local level political processes. While it is true that local processes and actors are also key to my case study of Rio, elite coordination was also induced by broader, exogenous factors from beyond the city-level. Certainly, the megaevents of the World Cup and Olympic Games catalysed both local and national elite actors to focus their attention on insecurity in Rio to an unusual degree. They are unlikely to have done so otherwise. The megaevents thus dramatically heightened the perceived need to bring State order to Rio's favelas, longstanding bastions of *nonstate* order. Elite coordination over security matters at the city-level was therefore driven to a certain extent by external forces. This reality may also help explain (at least *partly*) why elite coordination would ultimately prove to be time-sensitive; as the Olympic Games drew to a close, the incentives that the megaevents had provided elite actors to coordinate also

diminished. Of course, as I have shown, the UPPs were in decline well before the end of the Olympics, so I do not mean to overstate the role that Brazil's megaevents played. My point is simply that the exogenous shock that the megaevents represented undeniably played a role in shaping the city-level processes of elite coordination I have described herein.

Secondly, Rio's Military Police are unique in comparison to the police forces seen in my other cases. Indeed, the PMERJ have access to high levels of resources, but their low levels of autonomy from OCGs have perennially fuelled favela-based violence, and confrontations with OCGs. Deep-rooted practices of preying from OCGs thus blight the PMERJ, a contrast from the local police forces seen in the preceding case studies of Medellín and Monterrey. While corrupt tendencies towards extortion are common in police forces throughout Latin America, in Rio this is coupled with OCGs, such as the CV, that are uniquely capable of confronting the State, as witnessed by the final section of this chapter. This leads to an especially volatile and violent relationship between these actors. As I showed here, the UPP not only ended up overstretched and with flailing elite support, but also began to be actively *repelled* from the favelas it had sought to retake *by OCGs*. Thus, the role of OCG coercive capacity, and the willingness of OCGs to resist the State, will be accounted for when discussing alternative explanations in Chapter 8. Finally, while the PMERJ has *low autonomy from the criminal underworld*, extorting groups such as the CV, and having been heavily involved with militia activity throughout recent history, its institutional autonomy *from the democratic government* is considerable. Internal resistance to reform, oversight, and accountability have been strong within this authoritarian institution. This is, admittedly, a somewhat idiosyncratic feature of the case study. However, it is one that should not be overlooked. The internal resistance of the PMERJ to reform has remained constant across decades past, helping ensure the perpetuation of militarized, hardline approaches towards favela policing, ones that has been favoured since well before Brazil's democratisation.

7. Ciudad Juárez and Buenaventura: Responding to

Insecurity Without Controlling MUCs

This chapter probes the plausibility of my theoretical framework by exploring two cases in which there was *no* meaningful increases in State territorial control. Both of these negative case studies, Ciudad Juárez and Buenaventura, show how in response to severe OCG threats, elite disunity and low police capacity failed to produce *State Territorial Expansion*. Instead, marginalised urban communities remained dominated by criminal factions. And yet, different outcomes were still achieved in both instances: while enough elite coordination was attained in response to an OCG security threat in Ciudad Juárez to pursue *Security Reform*, which was then followed by *Containment*, in Buenaventura no serious attempts at local capacity-building have been undertaken, and OCG activities have not generally threatened elite interests. Both cases thus exhibit particularities which allow me to test the different moving parts of the theoretical framework.

In Ciudad Juárez, the case with which we begin, OCG violence, kidnappings, and extortion of local businesses escalated dramatically thanks to an attempt by the *Sinaloa Cartel* to displace the incumbent *Juárez Cartel* in 2008. In response, a brief moment of elite coordination supported a *Security Reform* process. This allowed violence to be controlled, and OCGs contained to marginalised urban communities. However, both elite coordination and police capacity subsequently declined (though did not entirely vanish). Since, the city's local economic elites have leveraged their power in local politics to protect their interests, pressuring political elite action and dedicating their own resources to confronting Juárez' security threat. Many of these actors remain at the forefront of shaping local security management to this day. Unsurprisingly, though, their efforts have favoured particular outcomes; not ones amenable to *State Territorial Expansion*. Indeed, the case demonstrates how

changing OCG threats, and different elite incentives, can lead States to *contain* and manage violent nonstate actors without building territorial control in the areas in which they operate.

Viewing Buenaventura as a whole, we are presented with a straightforward narrative: low elite coordination in conjunction with an overstretched police force have allowed *Unchecked OCG Competition* to persist in the city's MUCs over the last two decades. However, responses to OCG insecurity have emerged amid these inauspicious circumstances which cast further light on elite actors, their interactions, and interests. In Buenaventura, we see how political elite interests have rarely been threatened by OCG violence, despite the fact that criminal gangs violently control and predate from large swathes of the urban population. Meanwhile, immensely powerful economic elites—largely non-resident stakeholders in the city's port complexes—have remained protected despite rampant insecurity. Indeed, elite actors in some instances have *benefited* from OCG violence and been implicated in localized criminal politics.

These cases are briefly compared in the conclusion to this chapter, ahead of the more dynamic cross-case comparisons provided in Chapter 8.

1. Ciudad Juárez

I begin my discussion of Ciudad Juárez by describing the emergence of a massive OCG security threat across the city. Subsequently, I discuss the response to this crisis, showing that different elite groups were disunited. I then show how greater elite coordination helped spur a security reform process, as well as some interventions into the city's MUCs. Finally, the case discusses how, with the diminishment of the local security threat, efforts to expand State institutions and fortify them from OCG corruption dissipated, though a *local coalition* of elite actors had continued containing OCGs, even without expanding State territorial control.

1.1 Unchecked OCG Competition amid Low Police Capacity (2008-2010)

Urban decay, economic precarity, and State neglect had over decades created a tinderbox in Ciudad Juárez. As outlined in Chapter 3, amid a context of acute social disorganisation, increasingly violent youth gangs had spread across the city. Many had become confederated and organised through the local penal system, engaging sporadically in violent confrontations, and undertaking low-level work for local DTO, the *Juárez Cartel*. Indeed, given Juárez's location on the border with El Paso, Texas, the city has long served as a major trafficking route for illegal drugs and, increasingly, human beings.

This relative stability that had existed under the Juárez Cartel during the latter decades of the 20th century changed dramatically after growing tensions between the incumbent DTO and its rival, the *Sinaloa Cartel*, erupted into full-scale conflict in early 2008. The Sinaloa organisation invaded Ciudad Juárez with a group of five hundred combatants, attempting to displace the local hegemons (Durán-Martínez, 2018, p.205). These were organised as the paramilitary group *Gente Nueva* (see ICG, 2015 p.6). As part of their effort, they recruited local gang confederacies, Los Mexicles and Los Artistas Asesinos (otherwise known as “Doble A”, or “AA”). In response, the Juárez Cartel also drew on gangs to bolster its coercive capacity, turning to groups Los Aztecas and Barrio Azteca. These worked for the Juárez Cartel's own para-militarized wing, *La Línea*.

While the Juárez Cartel retained control of its historical stronghold in the city's north— maintaining access to the border— the Sinaloa Cartel was able to dominate much of the urban south. The vast tracts of residential communities, or *fraccionamientos*, that populated the south were rapidly developed in the early 21st century to house factory workers. As a former gang-member explained, “these are the dormitories of the maquiladoras”.³³⁴ Although, as in Monterrey, Juárez' OCGs did not seek to uphold

³³⁴ Interview with social worker and ex-gang member. 26/08/2022, 61qio

expansive systems of civilian governance, they did patrol their territories, closely monitoring their borders, and openly brandishing firearms.³³⁵ Drug dealing grew massively during this period, with the competing gangs and cartels that occupied Juárez establishing drug retail points and extortion rackets within their turfs. In many of Juárez's marginalised communities at this time, State security forces could only enter sporadically, and only as part of heavily militarized interventions.³³⁶ Juárez's poor colonias had long been neglected by police, with many residents reporting to have hardly ever seen police in their neighbourhoods (if at all). However, scores of these communities now became simply too dangerous for police to enter, or were purposefully avoided by patrols as part of agreements struck between OCGs and law enforcement.³³⁷ As a resident of a conflict-riven MUC in southern Juárez described it: “[During that time] we were abandoned by the police”.³³⁸

The two Cartels then used their spheres of influence to launch attacks on one another, replicating the pattern previously described during Monterrey's “narco-war”, whereby convoys of combatants would strike out at their rivals' turfs. Many victims were young men with ties to the drug trade, shot dead in poor neighbourhoods (US Consulate, 2009). That said, many others were bystanders, targets of extortion and kidnappings, and even false denunciations made by neighbours and acquaintances with scores to settle (Universal, 2009). Indeed, even though violence was concentrated in poor colonias, it was not just confined to these spaces.³³⁹ Shootouts and targeted killings occurred across the city. In having “outsourced” coercion to the local gangs,³⁴⁰ but not imposing strict hierarchical discipline upon them, the cartels had fuelled a form of criminal disorder which echoed that seen in Medellín in the late 1980s. Armed and sent to wage war, local gangs began predating from the city's residents, inspiring

³³⁵ Interview with Luís Aguirre former Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez (2016-2021). 26/08/2022. fnomf

³³⁶ Interview with Arturo Luján, state director of FICOSEC. 23/07/2022. v6asy.2; Interview with Luís Aguirre, former Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez (2016-2021). 26/08/2022. fnomf

³³⁷ Interview with Ricardo Realivazquez, Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez, 5vgsk.

³³⁸ Interview with MUC resident, Southern Juárez, 26/08/2022, sqjp2.

³³⁹ Interview with Arturo Luján, state director of FICOSEC. 23/07/2022. v6asy.2

³⁴⁰ To employ Durán-Martínez's (2018) terminology.

other smaller groups (non-partisans in the conflict) to do the same. Opportunistic criminal rent-seeking and violence therefore became widespread between 2008-2010, extending beyond MUCs and into middle-class neighbourhoods (Conger, 2014, p.179). With the proliferation of armed actors across the city, their propensity to murder increased dramatically, leading to several notorious massacres. Thus, “killings became indiscriminate” (ICG, 2015, p.7).³⁴¹

Ciudad Juárez’ municipal police were unable to contend with the eruption of violence, that had spread far beyond the city’s MUCs, affecting commercial spaces and transit routes. Many officers for both the state and municipal police had been paid-off by the Juárez Cartel in the preceding years, leading to targeted assassinations of their rank-and-file by the Sinaloa Cartel. The Sinaloa Cartel had similarly recruited local police as part of its takeover strategy. Local police autonomy from OCGs was therefore extremely low, with entrenched institutional corruption. Indeed, in private discussions with U.S consulate officials in 2008, Ciudad Juárez’s Mayor, José Reyes Ferriz (2007-2010), admitted that “100 percent of the municipal police force was corrupt to a greater or lesser extent” (US Consulate, 2009). Coupled with their low levels of autonomy, the municipal police were also very poorly equipped, lacking the resources to effectively contend with the well-armed, militarized, OCGs and the thousands of affiliated gang members now engaged in violent competition. Indeed, as an expert involved in Juárez’ eventual security reform process recounted to me: “half of their patrol cars were out of commission at that time, [even still] they didn’t even have the money for gasoline to conduct patrols”.³⁴² Additionally, the communications systems they used were not specialized, but instead were

³⁴¹ Notorious events include the triple murder of a US Consulate worker, her husband, and the husband of another Consulate employee in 2010 (DOJ, 2012), as well as series of massacres in which dozens were killed at drug rehabilitation centres in 2009 (Ellingwood, 2009; CNN, 2009).

³⁴² Interview with Raúl Soto, former senior FICOSEC official, involved in the Mesa de Seguridad. 28/07/2022, bwxjs

accessible, off-the-shelf models, meaning that criminals could easily listen in on them by investing in the same hardware.³⁴³

Municipal police were then stripped of their weapons and purged *en masse* (ICG, 2015, p.6) following the arrival of the military in the city, further incapacitating them in the face of criminal violence. Purges did little to improve the autonomy or efficacy of the police, who now simply had a lower number of officers on which to rely. Bodies of many police, often mutilated, were displayed publicly with messages indicating the OCG to which they were affiliated. Police were killed on the streets, but also in their bases (police also allowed OCGs entry to their bases to steal weaponry).³⁴⁴ In 2009, the municipal police chief resigned, with OCGs threatening to continue killing officers until he left office. In July 2010, a car bomb killed four people, including, a doctor, two bystanders, and a federal policeman.³⁴⁵

Federal forces had been present in the city since shortly after the Sinaloa Cartel's invasion, as part of *Operativo Conjunto Chihuahua*, which began in March 2008 and which would ultimately deploy a total of 5000 military troops to the state alongside 5000 federal police (Economista, 2009; 2010). Initially, around 2500 of these combined forces were deployed to Juárez itself (US Consulate, 2009). Roadblocks were placed around the city, and heavily armed patrols undertaken. Federal forces then took over local policing duties (Norte, 2009a). Interview accounts suggest that while patrols would pass through OCG-dominated territories, federal forces were concentrated in Juárez' administrative and commercial centres, thus doing little to increase the State's territorial control over the city's

³⁴³ Interview with Ricardo Realivazquez, Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez, 5vgsk

³⁴⁴ Interview with Ricardo Realivazquez, Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez, 5vgsk

³⁴⁵ Police had rushed to the scene to attend what they thought was a fellow officer, whose body had been left bloodied and tortured on one of the city's main roads. As it transpired, the body was of a gang member, who had been dressed as a policeman in order to attract law enforcement agents. Once they had arrived, the car bomb was detonated.

MUCs.³⁴⁶ Moreover, besides prompting an immediate, but fleeting, decrease in homicides over April 2008 (US Consulate, 2010a; US Consulate, 2009), the deployment of federal forces ultimately supercharged violence, with Juárez becoming the world's most dangerous city over the next two years.

While federal forces ostensibly pursued a decapitation strategy against local OCG leadership, officers at the U.S consulate in Juárez reported in early 2009 that the military and federal police in fact “rarely engaged directly with the cartels and street gangs”. In light of this, they added that there existed a widespread perception that “the army is comfortable letting the Sinaloa and Juarez cartels diminish each other's strength”, effectively adopting a *laissez faire* approach and allowing the rival factions to decimate one another (US Consulate, 2009). Other evidence suggests a more partisan posture by federal forces. Indeed, different sources point to corrupt entanglements between the army and local armed nonstate actors (Carrasco, 2013; US Consulate, 2009; El Universal, 2009). However, these are far outweighed by the accusations levied at the federal police, or *federales*, who are accused of collaborating with the Sinaloa Cartel to assist in its territorial takeover. Street-level corruption certainly blighted the federal police in Juárez, with many officers having been heavily involved in extortion rackets and kidnappings.³⁴⁷ Still, there is reason to suspect that their autonomy from OCGs at an *institutional-level* was also low. President Calderón's Secretary of Public Security, Genaro García Luna, who at the time exerted enormous influence over the deployment of the federales, was later found guilty of receiving of millions of dollars in bribes from the Sinaloa cartel. In return, he used his position to protect their business interests and facilitate their expansion (DOJ, 2023). Note also that the Juárez Cartel and its armed wing, La Línea, were targeted with far greater intensity than the Sinaloa group

³⁴⁶ Reports of arbitrary abuse by army figures abounded at this time (Mendoza, 2023a), with just under a thousand reported denunciations of federal forces filed between 2009-2010 alone (Villalpando, 2010).

³⁴⁷ This is widely acknowledged in the extant literature and was confirmed in numerous interviews with city residents. Indeed, the escalation of extortion across the city is closely tied with the arrival of the federal police, and its decline with their withdrawal in 2010.

throughout the period of crisis discussed here.³⁴⁸ Around three times as many criminals affiliated with the Juárez Cartel put behind bars than those associated with the Sinaloa group (Alvarado, 2023). Therefore, the federales were not only highly corrupt, engaging in predatory rent-seeking, but there are also reasonable grounds to suspect that they were working with the Sinaloa group at the time.³⁴⁹ Reflecting on his tenure as the city's public security secretary, Julián Leyzaola (appointed in 2011) described the federales bluntly: in his estimation, they were Juárez' "third cartel" (Vulliamy, 2019).

In sum, beginning in late 2007, but escalating to unprecedented heights between 2008-2010, Ciudad Juárez was engulfed by organised crime-related violence. The city's MUCs were controlled by newly empowered gangs, who recruited by the incumbent and challenger cartels. These gangs preyed ruthlessly, whilst also using drug retail to fuel their growth. With a local police force that lacked both the resources or autonomy to contain this OCG security threat, violence, extortion, and kidnappings spilled out of the city's MUCs and across all the urban territory. In the next section we see how in conjunction with this *Unchecked OCG Competition* the city's elites were disarticulated, and thus also unable to begin bringing the security crisis under control.

1.2 Elite Disarticulation (2008-2010)

Operativo Conjunto Chihuahua was backed by both the PRI State Governor José Reyes Baeza, and the PRI Mayor José Reyes Ferriz, as well as local private sector actors (Villalpando, 2010; Norte, 2010). Still, while the intervention counted on the nominal support of different political and economic elites, it did little to actually *integrate* the second and third tiers of (opposition) government in its planning or implementation processes. Just a year into the operation, PRI deputies in Chihuahua's congress

³⁴⁸ Interview with Alejandro Hope, analyst and former senior official at CISEN. 01/09/2022, 58gf4

³⁴⁹ Indeed, after six federales were murdered by in an ambush in 2011, a message signed by La Línea was painted in the city centre. Directed at senior members of the federal police, it stated that the same fate would befall them if they continued to work with "El Chapo", head of the Sinaloa Cartel (Mendoza, 2023b).

publicly demanded that the federal government collaborate far more closely with the state, given the intervention's evident lack of success (Norte, 2009b). Indeed, in practice the *Operativo* amounted to handing over local security management in Juárez to federal forces rather than the federal government actively collaborating with local institutions and political leaders. For their part, Baeza and Ferriz seem to have both been willing— in practical terms— to pass the buck in this regard, allowing federal forces to take the lead given the obvious deficiencies in local policing capacity. When we spoke, a former government official with experience coordinating responses to OCG insecurity in Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey reflected upon her experience by denouncing the deleterious effects of “irresponsible leaders” on local security: “That’s the only way to describe them, they don’t take responsibility in terms of security. It was easier for them to go to Mexico [the capital] and ask them to send in the army [...] They would say “*when the army arrives all of this will calm down*” [...] people shirk their responsibilities at all levels of government, there are perverse incentives”. She elaborated further: “It is way cheaper to just bring in the army, who have experience, [but] it takes a long time to hire and properly train police [...] so lots of [subnational] leaders have ended up ceding their responsibility, and saying to the army “*come over here*”. I know this from experience.³⁵⁰

The city therefore lacked “hands-on governance” from subnational political elites at this time (US Consulate, 2010b), with Mayor Ferriz retreating to El Paso rather than remain in Juárez, and Governor Baeza effectively cut out of local security affairs. Nonetheless, tensions existed between these two actors, despite their partisan ties, with the governor “not fully [supporting] the mayor’s security policies”, and the mayor ending his term by denouncing the lack of coordination with the state

³⁵⁰ Interview with civil servant based in Monterrey, with experience working at FICOSEC, and in both the Federal and state governments. 17/08/2022. lf416

government (Durán-Martínez, 2018, p.207). As with the federal crackdown in Monterrey, then, *Operativo Conjunto Chihuahua* occurred amid political elite disarticulation.

From Juárez political elites, we now turn to discuss the city's economic elites. Civil society actors had mobilized to denounce impunity, corruption, and violence well before criminal conflict began in 2008. Indeed, since 2001, a diverse group of civic and business leaders had been involved in a body known as the *Plan Estratégico de Juárez* ("Strategic Plan for Juárez"), which convened in order to shape the city's development, conscious of long-standing socioeconomic problems and growing urban insecurity. However, civil society activism increased in earnest with the onset of Juárez' narco-war, including numerous protests and marches. The largest of these would occur in late 2009, when 2000 citizens gathered outside city hall in a protest named *Solución para Juárez* ("Solution for Juárez"), explicitly calling for inter-governmental collaboration to resolve the security crisis (Conger, 2014, p.179).

Private sector actors were also spurred to act, thanks to the dramatic increase in extortions and the dangers that unchecked violence posed to the city's economy. Initially, many businesspeople turned to private security to protect their immediate interests— which may have even included funding OCG hit-men (US Consulate, 2009). However, this failed to protect either their security or improve the city's economic outlook, given the intensity of the security crisis. Hence, business groups began to turn *to the State*. The first private sector actors to directly lobby the local government were from the medical profession, which was now at breaking point given the escalating violence, and whose practitioners were heavily extorted and frequently kidnapped (ICG, 2011, p.9). However, the maquiladora sector, far more central to the city's economy, also then began leveraging its influence to try and impel government action. Indeed, not only did insecurity present enormous challenges for the local manufacturing plants and their ability to do business, but Juárez' security crisis had coincided with a period of significant economic shrinkage in the local economy, prompted by the 2008 financial

crisis. Unemployment had increased, manufacturing declined, and now unprecedented insecurity posed a serious threat to attracting international investment and restarting cross-border commerce. Between 2008-2009, approximately 100,000 people left the city, and the maquiladora sector alone cut 80,000 jobs (Alvarado, 2023).

Thus, many maquiladora businesses, united under the association AMAC,³⁵¹ alongside other local private sector and civil society actors, formed the organisation *Juarenses por La Paz* (“Juárez Residents for Peace”), which sought to monitor crimes and lobby the government and law enforcement to enact more effective measures (ICG, 2011, p.10). This organisation fostered important cross-sectoral dialogue and coordination between major local business groups and other civil society actors on the common challenge of insecurity (Conger, 2014, pp.178,179). Economic elites involving themselves in politics during times of crisis was not unprecedented. In the early 1990s, business leaders across the state rallied in response to a flash flood that had caused significant damage, and then created a social development trust, FECHAC,³⁵² to sustain their involvement in fostering regional development. FECHAC was financed through a payroll tax increase, volunteered by the business community. To prevent government mismanagement or politicisation of the trust, regional economic elites would be in charge of distributing its resources.³⁵³

Still, despite these linkages to local politics, the success of Juárez’ economic elites in actually instigating government action through initiatives such as *Juarenses por La Paz* was extremely limited. Indeed, while these actors maintained linkages to *local and regional* politicians (Moncada, 2016, p.171), only a handful of local business leaders had close contacts in the federal government that they could leverage to

³⁵¹ *Asociación de Maquiladoras.*

³⁵² *Fundación del Empresariado Chihuahuense.*

³⁵³ Interview with Arturo Luján, state director of FICOSEC. 22/07/2022. v6asy

influence security policy (unlike, say, in Monterrey or Medellín).³⁵⁴ The instrumental power of these economic elites, at least *beyond the local level*, was therefore limited. Indeed, this may explain why they turned to the (non-elite) pressure groups and protest movements outlined above, viewing these as the only way to amplify their demands in the absence of significant clout or connections to national level actors. Moreover, despite their centrality to the local economy, collective action within the maquiladora sector was difficult. Many (American) firms rented these industrial parks, but did not *own* them outright, allowing them to expand their output when demand was high, but withdraw their operations and capital when this declined. Many top firms operating in Juárez, then, had little attachment to the city itself, were not enmeshed in its politics, and were able to simply withdraw economically when they pleased. In the words of one interviewee: “Ford [Motor Company] doesn’t care about the local situation, they can get parts made elsewhere [...] the maquiladoras are very important to the local economy, but many [of those who operate through them] aren’t affected by the security situation, so they don’t get involved in local politics”.³⁵⁵ Therefore, while the maquiladora sector played an outsized role in the city’s economy, cohesive sectoral interventions in politics were difficult to achieve, further limiting the instrumental power of those private sector actors whose interests were affected by OCG violence.

1.3 *Todos Somos Juárez*: Elite Coordination and Security Reform (2010-2012)

In early 2010, events would transpire that galvanized far greater elite coordination in Juárez, helping drive forward a multi-faceted intervention across the city as well as localized *Security Reform*.

In late January, fifteen young people were murdered while partying in an abandoned home in the Villas de Salvárcar neighbourhood, shot dead by a team of armed men with assault rifles. The perpetrators

³⁵⁴ Interview with Arturo Luján, state director of FICOSEC. 22/07/2022. v6asy

³⁵⁵ Interview with Raúl Soto, former senior FICOSEC official, involved in the Mesa de Seguridad. 28/07/2022, bwxjs

escaped without hindrance, despite the presence of police just blocks away. Law enforcement then took over half an hour to arrive at the scene (ICG, p.8). Neighbours from the Salvárcar area are even said to have seen Federal Police collaborating with the sicario perpetrators (Mendoza, 2023b). Shortly thereafter, in reacting to the tragedy, President Calderón suggested that the murdered youths had been gang members. This off-hand and inaccurate dismissal of the victims as criminals, coupled with the indiscriminate nature of the killings and the evident failure of the government's law and order strategy in Juárez, supercharged the event's salience. Indeed, the massacre came to national media attention, enveloping the President in scandal and highlighting the deficiencies in his administration's security policy. Moreover, Calderón faced not only a media scandal, but also increasing "pressure from the Chihuahua State government and other political opponents", as well as scrutiny from *within his own party* (US Consulate, 2010b). The OCG security threat in Juárez had come to *directly* damage the President, casting an extremely unflattering spotlight on his administration and competency as leader.

In response, Calderón went on to pledge an unprecedented raft of investments to the city. Throughout 2009, the federal government had begun drawing up a multifaceted intervention for Juárez (ICG, 2011, p.10), with support from US authorities (US Consulate, 2010b). This was designed to target many areas of the city, and included a series of proposed investments to the city's MUCs, chiefly in the form of social spending and development initiatives. Following the massacre, these plans were immediately actioned, despite still being in the planning stage. In total, the equivalent of 340 million USD was ultimately spent in Juárez over the next two years (ICG, 2011, p.11), making this by far the most significant investment in a single city undertaken during Calderón's War on Drugs. Alongside massive spending on socioeconomic development, including health and education, as well as improving public infrastructure in several MUCs, two core pillars of the new strategy would be strengthening the rule of law and overhauling and the local police force (US Consulate, 2010b).

Governor Baeza was quick to denounce the lack of inter-governmental cooperation, expressing that he had been left out of the planning process of the new intervention, and calling for far greater local level involvement (US Consulate, 2010b).³⁵⁶ While tensions between political elites did not therefore abate, the intervention that followed the Salvárcar massacre— *Todos Somos Juárez*— was successful in fostering greater coordination between the different tiers of government. Rather than simply counting on the nominal support of all three governmental tiers (as in the case of *Operativo Conjunto Chihuahua*), Calderón immediately took steps to harmonize federal, state, and municipal government actions.

With Ciudad Juárez emerging as a national security priority for the federal government in the wake of Salvárcar, cabinet officials regularly travelled to the city in order to plan with their local counterparts. This included Jorge Tello Peón, whom readers will remember from the previous case study on Monterrey, who was sent to coordinate the new local security taskforce, the *Mesa de Seguridad* (Conger, 2013, p.180). *Todos Somos Juárez* sought to implement a holistic response to urban insecurity, integrating the actions of six different task forces, or “*mesas*”, each working on a designated area (e.g., health, education). Discussions in the *Mesa de Seguridad* were not frictionless, but it did succeed in bringing representatives from all levels of government, State security officials, and members of civil society into constant dialogue— including the economic elites and social leaders who had previously been involved in *Juarenses por La Paz*. As such, the mesa helped develop much needed trust between these different actors.³⁵⁷ Over time, the mesa would become a key institution in local security management, and one of the most important and durable legacies of *Todos Somos Juárez*. Indeed, it is the only taskforce that still functions to this day.

³⁵⁶ Indeed, Baeza too was facing widespread scrutiny following the Salvárcar massacre at the time and so was keen to shift public attention solely towards Calderón’s failings.

³⁵⁷ Interview with Angela Sánchez the coordinator of the *Mesa de Seguridad*, and mesa member for over 10 years. 25/08/2022. hyewy

In late 2010, with Todos Somos Juárez already underway, a new governor, César Duarte, and a new mayor, Hector Murguía, were elected to lead both Chihuahua state and Ciudad Juárez respectively. Like their predecessors, both were PRI politicians. While the continuing partisan divide between the national and subnational authorities did not fatally undermine intergovernmental coordination, buy-in from the subnational authorities was not automatic.

The governor pushed forward several innovative anti-crime measures (Durán-Martínez, 2018, p.209), adopting a collaborative posture publicly and praising inter-governmental coordination (Conger, 2014, p184). However, behind the scenes, he had misgivings about Todos Somos Juárez, having initially viewed it with suspicion as a multimillion-dollar PAN vote-buying strategy. The Governor and Chihuahua state authorities therefore took a lot of convincing, achieved through dialogue with non-partisan intermediaries, to ensure coordination with the federal government.³⁵⁸

The mayor, Murguía, initially sought to create distance between himself and the Mesa de Seguridad. With time, though, he came to welcome the investments that Todos Somos Juárez made available,³⁵⁹ and by 2013 he had publicly shifted his position towards the Mesa de Seguridad, expressing support for its work going forward. Murguía's government even took on recommendations from the mesa, in an evolving effort at local *Security Reform*. That said, this is not to deny that considerable tension existed between Murguía and the federal government, which in Durán-Martínez's account was largely fueled by ongoing, and very public, disputes between the municipal police and the federales. These persisted until the end of 2011, at which point the federales' presence in the city was reduced (Durán-Martínez, 2018, pp.205-214). Despite this very clear inter-agency friction, the Mesa de Seguridad is credited as having been a key bridge in beginning to harmonize the actions of the different security forces present

³⁵⁸ Interview with Raúl Soto, former senior FICOSEC official, involved in the Mesa de Seguridad. 28/07/2022, bwxjs

³⁵⁹ Interview with Raúl Soto, former senior FICOSEC official, involved in the Mesa de Seguridad. 28/07/2022, bwxjs

in Juárez. As senior police officials recalled, the mesa brought the heads of the municipal and state police into dialogue together for the first time ever; they had not *met* prior to this point.³⁶⁰

Juárez municipal police was placed under new leadership in 2011. Colonel Julian Leyzaola, a former military officer, was appointed to the position of public security secretary in Juárez. Leyzaola had built a reputation for using excessive force— including sanctioning torture and arbitrary detention— during his time as police chief in Tijuana, but was also credited with having helped end Tijuana’s security crisis. It was hoped that he could replicate this success by taking charge in Juárez. Indeed, Leyzaola undertook significant steps to deepen *Security Reform* processes that had been kickstarted following Todos Somos Juárez, cloistering police in barracks to avoid OCG attacks and penetration, undertaking purges to remove compromised officers, and then boosting the force’s manpower to 2000 strong (Conger, 2014, p.182). With more funds being made available to the municipal police thanks to the increased State attention on Juárez, under Leyzaola’s tenure officers also now had access to better equipment. Thus, the municipal police were now not only greater in number, but also armed in accordance with the new militarized logic inculcated by Leyzaola. Local police *resources* and *autonomy* thus grew during Leyzaola’s tenure as police chief. That said, this is not to overstate the improvements in the force, as discussed further in the final section of this chapter. Indeed, by 2013, Leyzaola himself admitted that an estimated 25 percent of the municipal police was still compromised by OCG influence (WOLA, 2011, p.11).

Moreover, Leyzaola sought to significantly increase the number of police patrols throughout Juárez (Conger, 2014, p.182). Having previously built his success in Tijuana around augmenting the “physical presence” of the municipal police across the city (Vulliamy, 2008), Leyzaola sought to do the same in

³⁶⁰ Interview with Ricardo Realivazquez, Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez, 5vgs; Interview with Luís Aguirre, former Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez (2016-2021). 26/08/2022. fnomf

Juárez, summarizing his strategy as one designed to “take back the city colonia by colonia” (Vulliamy, 2019). Thus, the police’s presence across the city, including its MUCs, grew during this time— as indicated in conversations I had with senior police officials in Juárez.³⁶¹ By the end of 2011, violence across the city was declining and the security crisis appeared to have climaxed.³⁶²

1.4 Containment and Low Territorial Control in Juárez’ MUCs (2012-2020)

Security Reform therefore boosted police presence across Juárez, including in its MUCs.³⁶³ The ability of the police to access many of these territories was augmented due to their increased institutional *resources*, waning OCG violence, but also because of the infrastructural developments that accompanied Todos Somos Juárez. Indeed, according to residents who reside in the city’s north, the arrival of paved roads allowed police to conduct vehicular patrols in their neighbourhoods for the first time ever.³⁶⁴ As the Secretary of Public Security said to me: “Beforehand there were citizens who had never seen a patrol in their colonia. Now that’s changed”.³⁶⁵

Nonetheless, the police did not attempt to build a permanent foothold in these spaces, as in Medellín or Rio. Thus, OCG insecurity was *contained* to marginalised urban communities, but efforts at actually *expanding* State institutional presence into these troubled spaces were short-lived. Consequently, many MUCs today lack any consistent policing presence, and remain hotbeds of OCG territorial control. Interviewees from such communities recounted that they only saw police patrols very infrequently.³⁶⁶

³⁶¹ Interview with Ricardo Realivazquez, Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez, 5vgsk.

³⁶² Though increases in elite coordination and local policing capacity, as described above, played into this, the improving security situation cannot be associated solely with these factors. Violence also fell due to the territorial repartition that was agreed between the Sinaloa and Juárez cartels after the latter group’s weakening (Durán-Martínez, 2018), as well as the internal disciplining of the street gangs that had been armed and let loose by the cartels after 2008 (Wolff, 2018).

³⁶³ Interview with MUC resident, 27/08/2022, 32p9y; Interview with MUC resident, 27/08/2022, tg1gv.

³⁶⁴ Interview with social worker and ex-gang member. 26/08/2022, 61qio

³⁶⁵ Interview with Ricardo Realivazquez, Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez, 5vgsk

³⁶⁶ Interview with MUC resident, Southern Juárez, 26/08/2022, 9ko2k; Interview with MUC resident, Southern Juárez, 26/08/2022, clmpy; Interview with MUC resident, Southern Juárez, 26/08/2022, gzomn; Interview with MUC resident in northern Juárez, 29/08/2022, a8g3f

Unsurprisingly, then, the nature of governance in these spaces has not been significantly altered: police play only a very limited role in their capacity as law enforcement agents. OCGs *generally* do not interfere in civilian affairs,³⁶⁷ just as prior to the security crisis. However, in the old strongholds of the Juárez Cartel, to the city's north, local cells of La Linea are known to have a more active presence in governing their communities, violently punishing residents for infractions,³⁶⁸ controlling common crime, resolving interpersonal disputes, and even organizing the distribution of basic household goods.³⁶⁹ Still, this is the exception to the norm.

In addition to the lack of meaningful *State Territorial Expansion*, Juárez's *Security Reform* process was troubled and incomplete. This is not to say it was *entirely ineffective*, as both city residents and police themselves attested,³⁷⁰ but nor should the continuing deficiencies with Juárez' police be overlooked. Once violence began to subside—homicides dropping dramatically between 2012 and 2015—the reform effort slowed. A government official formerly involved in Ciudad Juárez' security response stated: “[the politicians] went back to being irresponsible, and the police stopped being a priority for them. They kept buying them new equipment, as that's where the money is, but they stopped trying to build police capacity [...] instead they keep on taking refuge in [army deployments]”.³⁷¹ Leyzaola and his successors undertook important measures to try and rebuild the police, but their long-term success is questionable. Corruption continues to affect local law enforcement (though chiefly the

³⁶⁷ OCGs do involve themselves aggressively with residents who engage in drug use. Given that different OCGs sell different drugs (e.g., La Linea does not sell crystal meth, whereas the Sinaloa Cartel does), consumers can be violently punished for using substances purchased from a given OCG's rival (Interview with senior police official, 24/08/2022, drjed).

³⁶⁸ Interview with MUC resident in northern Juárez, 29/08/2022, a8g3f

³⁶⁹ Interview with social worker and ex-gang member. 26/08/2022, 61qio; Interview with social worker and former gang member, 27/08/2022, rt0h4; Interview with MUC resident, 27/08/2022, tg1gv; Interview with MUC resident and rapper, 27/08/2022, shpsk.

³⁷⁰ Interview with Ricardo Realivazquez, Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez, 5vgs; Interview with former Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez (2016-2021). 26/08/2022. fnomf; Interview with social worker and ex-gang member. 26/08/2022, 61qio; Interview with MUC resident, southern Juárez 27/08/2022, pfppr

³⁷¹ Interview with civil servant based in Monterrey, with experience working at FICOSEC, and in Federal and state government. 17/08/2022. lf416

municipal force), with police known to still extort drug dealers and collaborate with OCGs, as was attested in numerous interviews.³⁷² Although Leyzaola's tenure may have left the municipal police better equipped to confront Juárez' warring OCGs, and thus boosted the force's *coercive capacity*, it is less clear whether he actually developed the institution's law enforcement capabilities. Seasoned security analyst, Alejandro Hope, put it to me bluntly: "They weren't able to build [the police's] capacity, or generate a new institutional culture. So [the police] went back to being killers [...] many of them are just killers in uniforms".³⁷³ Like in Rio, then, local police with enhanced coercive capacity have been able to *contain* OCG insecurity to MUCs, but not enhance State territorial control over these spaces.

As for Todos Somos Juárez itself, this initiative allocated significant social investment towards several of the city's MUCs, building schools, public health facilities, community centres and recreational spaces in some of these neighbourhoods. Indeed, as in Monterrey and Rio, the program's architects had been inspired by the success of the "Medellín model" (Igarapé Institute, 2016, p.33). However, given its rushed implementation, the initial intervention was poorly planned and organised. Individuals involved in the program recounted that although many of its constituent policies were well-intentioned, they were poorly coordinated, and sometimes even worked at cross-purposes.³⁷⁴ Given the lack of effective planning, coordination, and oversight, many funds associated with the multi-million dollar intervention went missing. Todos Somos Juárez formally concluded with the departure of Calderón from the presidency in 2012. His successor, President Peña Nieto, continued to fund social spending through his flagship program, PRONAPRED. And yet, follow-up to many of the initial interventions was not consistent, and much of the physical infrastructure built in Juárez' MUCs

³⁷² Interview with local PAN mobilizer in an MUC, 26/02/2022, regpk; Interview with MUC resident in northern Juárez, 29/08/2022, a8g3f; Interview with Arturo Luján state director of FICOSEC, 22/07/2022. v6asy

³⁷³ Interview with Alejandro Hope, analyst and former senior official at CISEN. 01/09/2022, 58gf4

³⁷⁴ Interview with Raúl Soto, former senior FICOSEC official, involved in the Mesa de Seguridad. 28/07/2022, bwxjs

was poorly maintained. After 2012, many projects were terminated, and many others have been wound-up since.

The State's failure to develop local policing capacity, or build a durable institutional presence in Juárez' MUCs, can be associated with the (fragile) nature of the elite coalition that emerged during the city's security crisis. As we have seen, political elite relations during Juárez' most intense period of violence were not harmonious, but fraught with tension and mistrust. Indeed, active coordination between the relevant political authorities at both the national and subnational levels was only achieved after the instigation of Todos Somos Juárez, and the routinized meetings it facilitated. Following the end of the federal government's intervention, and with the city's improving security outlook, collaboration between the federal, state and municipal government tapered-off. Political elite coordination was therefore limited and temporary.

Despite this, coordination between *local private sector actors* and *local government* has remained strong since Todos Somos Juárez. The development of this *localized elite coalition* has arguably benefitted Ciudad Juárez, sustaining long-term multisectoral engagement over security matters. Nonetheless, this has also arguably reinforced the pursuit of *Containment* over *Territorial Expansion* into MUCs. As Moncada (2016) has shown, the maquiladora sector used its outsized local influence to affect police deployments through the Mesa de Seguridad. Police were thus tasked with securing transit routes that connected maquiladoras to the border, even blocking-off roads and escorting shipments of manufactured goods (p.172). They also heavily persecuted OCG activities that specifically affected the private sector, aggressively targeting Extortion rackets and kidnapping. Thus, while high levels of insecurity remain in many of Ciudad Juárez' MUCs, the extortion and kidnapping that spilled out of these areas after 2008 has been all but eradicated. The maquiladora sector therefore used the mesa as a vehicle through which to promote their interests over those of other civil society actors, securing the free flow of

international commerce even while OCG insecurity remained prevalent in Juárez' MUCs. Indeed, although the mesa convenes multi-sectoral meetings with a variety of different actors, decision-making power is vested in a far smaller group of three individuals, who liaise with government. Since its creation, this group of mesa leaders has been almost exclusively dominated by local economic elites.³⁷⁵

Echoing the creation of FECHAC, economic elites from across Chihuahua state formed a new trust in 2011, FICOSEC,³⁷⁶ focused solely on questions of violence, law enforcement, and security. This is funded by a 0.05 percent payroll tax applied to all formal sector employers in the state, and works very closely with law enforcement,³⁷⁷ subnational authorities, and the Mesa de Seguridad (members of the mesa are also key players in FICOSEC).³⁷⁸ FICOSEC is another important institution through which local economic elites have consolidated their position as protagonists in local security management, promoting their interests and shaping security policy. As was emphasized to me repeatedly during my time in Juárez, this has allowed for policy continuity on security matters where this might otherwise have been hindered by democratic turnover.³⁷⁹ In the case of Juárez, this has amounted to sustained *Containment* of OCG threats to the city's MUCs.

Summing Up

Police presence remains limited in Juárez MUCs, and police autonomy low. The city's OCGs still engage in territorial disputes, though shifting alliances and perennial confrontations have produced a reformulation of the criminal underworld since the abatement of the security crisis. While a weakened Línea and Juárez Cartel operate in the city's north, in the city's south the Sinaloa Cartel and a host of

³⁷⁵ Interview with Raúl Soto, former senior FICOSEC official, involved in the Mesa de Seguridad. 28/07/2022, bwxjs

³⁷⁶ Fideicomiso para la Competitividad y Seguridad Ciudadana.

³⁷⁷ Interview with NGO worker focused on security monitoring in Juárez. 22/08/2022, 207ro

³⁷⁸ Interview with Angela Sánchez the coordinator of the Mesa de Seguridad, and mesa member for over 10 years. 25/08/2022. hyewy

³⁷⁹ Interview with civil servant based in Monterrey, with experience working at FICOSEC, and in Federal and state government. 17/08/2022. lf416; Interview with director of MUC youth programme, funded by FICOSEC. 22/08/2022. uwdio; Interview with Gilberto Loya, Security Secretary for Chihuahua state. 24/08/2022. so1y1

other gangs and OCGs vie for territory and control of illicit markets.³⁸⁰ Despite this patchwork of criminal territorial control, OCGs now engage in far more selective killing than in the recent past, the gangs acting with greater discipline after years of unrestrained warfare. Emblematic of this is the fact that, as senior police officials explained to me, far more OCG-related murders now take place in victim's homes, and are generally carried out with pistols, not the “*cuernos de chivo*” (AK-47s) used during the security crisis.³⁸¹ Moreover, as one former gang member stated: “there are a lot more pacts now, both between the [OCGs] and the government, and between the criminals themselves, so things are pretty stable, even if there is still a lot of violence”.³⁸² Indeed, violence has risen considerably since 2016. As a FICOSEC official put it: “The fire went out but then grew again”.³⁸³ Furthermore, police admitted in interviews that some MUCs are still very dangerous for them to enter, and— while rare— OCGs do still occasionally use vehicular convoys to launch attacks on their rivals' territories.³⁸⁴

Just days before I arrived in Juárez to begin fieldwork, OCGs had resorted to killing civilians indiscriminately, burning businesses, and engaging in armed confrontations with the police in order to distract law enforcement from reaching the city's main prison. At the prison, members of the gang Los Mexicles had begun murdering their rivals with firearms. Such is the engrained power of organised criminal actors across the city.

2. Buenaventura

We now turn to Buenaventura, which has witnessed two decades of *Unchecked OCG Competition* amid *low elite coordination* and *low police capacity*. Given that both of these variables remain unchanged over

³⁸⁰ Interview with Gilberto Loya, Security Secretary for Chihuahua state. 24/08/2022. so1y1; Interview with senior police official, 24/08/2022, drjed.

³⁸¹ Interview with Gilberto Loya, Security Secretary for Chihuahua state. 24/08/2022. so1y1

³⁸² Interview with social worker and former gang member, 27/08/2022, rt0h4

³⁸³ Interview with Arturo Luján, state director of FICOSEC, 22/07/2022. v6asy

³⁸⁴ Interview with Gilberto Loya, Security Secretary for Chihuahua state. 24/08/2022. so1y1; Interview with Ricardo Realivazquez, Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez. 25/08/2022, 5vgsk.

time in this case, I do not periodise my analysis of Buenaventura, as I have done in other cases. Instead, I begin by outlining how OCG territorial control and governance have become indelible features of the port city's MUCs over the last twenty years. Then, I show how despite rampant OCG violence in the city's MUCs, local political elites and powerful economic actors with high instrumental power have remained relatively insulated from this potential security threat. Finally, I discuss the persistently low capacity of Buenaventura's local police.

2.1 Two Decades of Unchecked OCG Competition (2000-2020)

As foreshadowed in Chapter 3, violence arrived in Buenaventura in the late 1990s, when the FARC's 30th Front began taking over the rural spaces surrounding the port city, before then moving into its urban territory. Given the FARCs increased involvement in the cocaine trade in the 1990s, and the massive territorial expansion they undertook alongside this, controlling Buenaventura offered both economic and military benefits to the group (Andrade et al., 2019, pp.75, 76). Guerrillas enforced order on the communities they controlled, prohibiting the petty criminality which had escalated in the wake of the 1990s' mass redundancies and then recruiting local youths to bolster their ranks (CNMH, 2015, p.159).³⁸⁵ Much like in Medellín, however, Buenaventura's guerrilla cells were soon engaged in a brutal conflict with right-wing paramilitaries, fighting under the AUC's *Bloque Calima*. The paramilitary incursion into the Valle del Cauca had come at the behest of "important businessmen and narcotraffickers" whose interests had been prejudiced by the FARCs growing power (CNMH, 2015, p.163). Having been aided in their approach to Buenaventura by State security forces (ibid, p.169), the Bloque Calima began their urban assault in the summer of 2000, perpetrating massacres in MUCs throughout the city. Consisting of only 54 men initially—led by Éver Veloza, alias *HH*— the Bloque

³⁸⁵ They also used their control over territory to launch attacks against State security officials (police were targeted across the city under "*Plan Pistola*" (CDV, 2022a, p.151)), critical State infrastructure, and to extort businesses in the region (CNMH, 2018, p.214).

Calima at first eliminated local criminal gangs, but soon also began recruiting them (CNMH, 2018, p.223).

Paramilitary rule developed across many of the city's MUCs over the following years. Territorial control and civilian governance were, as in Medellín, key to the paramilitaries' strategy to exclude insurgents. That said, given the Bloque Calima's ties to narcotraffickers, controlling the city's shoreline also provided them with opportunities to organize and protect the passage of drugs through the port, providing bountiful revenue. Indeed, Buenaventura became the "financial centre" of the Bloque Calima, as the paramilitaries were able to charge tolls on every kilogram of cocaine that passed through their territories (Verdad Abierta, 2011). Between 2001-2002, paramilitaries imposed themselves in almost every comuna of Buenaventura, with commanders placed in charge of groups of barrios, which were in turn directly administered by local gang recruits (CNMH, 2015, pp.179,180).

It was at this time that life changed radically for residents of Buenaventura's deprived urban communities. Indeed, the paramilitaries and the gangs they enlisted were highly abusive. Draconian order was enforced upon civilians in areas controlled by these actors, upheld by torture, arbitrary murders and rampant sexual violence. Anybody suspected of having ties to the guerrillas (however tenuous) was killed (CNMH, 2015; 2018).

Fighting continued between FARC and paramilitary cells in the following years, escalating severely between 2005-2007, following the formal demobilisation of the Bloque Calima. Indeed, in 2006 Buenaventura registered the highest homicide rates in Colombia (Romero, 2007; HRW, 2014). With demobilisation, narcotrafficking became even more central to some post-paramilitary structures, as they allied with the powerful *Rastrojos* OCG. The *Rastrojos* were originally an offshoot of the *Norte del Valle Cartel*, itself a successor organisation of the *Cali Cartel* (Insight Crime, 2022). Contemporaneously, cocaine production was increasing in Colombia's Pacific (Andrade et al., 2019,

p.93), further consolidating the port city's importance to international trafficking. By the end of the decade, the FARC had been all but driven out of the city (ibid, p.96), thanks to sustained collusion between State actors and post-paramilitary groups (CIJP, 2008a; 2008b; 2009). A new criminal structure, known as *La Empresa* ("The Business"), had also consolidated, a local affiliate of the Rastrojos.

The legacies of (post-)paramilitary rule have remained firmly entrenched across Buenaventura ever since. Soon after its ascent, *La Empresa* was challenged by *Los Urabeños*, and by 2016 the group *La Local* had seized power (LCS, 2021; Insight Crime, 2023). In December 2020 *La Local* split, following police repression of its leadership. This violent rupture produced the *Shottas* and *Espartanos* (Matta, 2024; Bravo, 2022), who dominate the city to this day. The former groups has ties to the post-paramilitary narco-trafficking organisation the *Clan del Golfo* (aka., *Los Urabeños*), and the latter with FARC dissidents.³⁸⁶ While there is no doubt that the OCGs in Buenaventura have kept *changing* over the last two decades and a half, these differences are largely superficial. New groups rise and fall, but their modus operandi remains constant: they control MUC territories, impose brutal order on their resident populations, and uphold strict civilian governance structures. Below I outline how these patterns manifest.

OCG Control in Buenaventura's MUCs

Throughout the last two decades, Buenaventura's OCGs have chiefly sought to control territory in order to facilitate and profit from narcotrafficking. While active across the city's MUCs, OCGs have *prioritized* controlling the palafitte communities built on wooden stilts above the sea, known locally as the *bajamar* neighbourhoods. There is no doubt that significant amounts of cocaine flow through the city's *licit* ports in shipping containers (Tiempo, 2010b), however the *bajamar* neighbourhoods serve

³⁸⁶ Interview with three senior police officials in charge of security in Buenaventura, 22/03/2022, m6gay

as *illicit* ports for this illegal merchandise.³⁸⁷ Drugs are brought to these MUCs in relatively small loads. They are then stockpiled in far more significant quantities³⁸⁸ and subsequently transported into the jungle areas surrounding the city by boat, where they are then loaded onto semi-submersibles for onward passage to Central America and beyond.³⁸⁹ OCGs thus collect rents from protecting and transporting drugs as they transit through the city.³⁹⁰

That said, while the city's OCGs therefore profit from their role in facilitating narcotrafficking, increasing criminal fragmentation has led to the rampant and systematic extortion of MUC residents across the city, a trend that began following paramilitary demobilisation. This includes taxes on properties, with fees levied on residents who invest in home improvements, and violent punishment for non-compliance.³⁹¹ To underscore how systematic this has become, a city resident recalled how in the *Juan XIII* neighbourhood, the Espartanos had undertaken a census of each house, bracketed them by income, and marked properties with different coloured ribbons in accordance with the fees they should pay.³⁹²

During the period of paramilitary ascendance, the docks in the bajamar neighbourhoods used by fishermen and other small-scale rural merchants, began to be patrolled and extorted (CIJP, 2016a),³⁹³ with monopolies imposed on basic local goods, with only particular suppliers and retailers of

³⁸⁷ Interview with three senior police officials in charge of security in Buenaventura, 22/03/2022, m6gay

³⁸⁸ For example, in 2010 672 kilograms of cocaine were found stockpiled in the neighbourhood of Santa Cruz (Tiempo, 2010c)

³⁸⁹ Interview with municipal attorney, 22/03/2022, gei92

³⁹⁰ Interview with Colonel of the Coast Guard, Buenaventura. 08/03/2022, hlaf9; Interview with municipal attorney, 22/03/2022, gei92

³⁹¹ Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 4, 19/03/2022, f4fhg; Interview with MUC resident from El Progreso, 03/02/2022, e1so3; Interview with academic from Buenaventura, 24/12/2021, inuam; Interview with journalist from Buenaventura, 21/12/2021, jrxq9; Interview with journalist from Buenaventura, 26/11/2021, 84dh2; Interview with government liaison in Buenaventura, 02/12/2021, bxbat

³⁹² Interview with journalist and MUC resident, Buenaventura, 03/12/2021, sf49t

³⁹³ This, in conjunction with the danger faced by fisherman in the waterways surrounding Buenaventura all but drove subsistence fishing to extinction in the city. Thus, as with the mass redundancies of the 1990s, another key economic activity in the city dried up.

household staples such as plantains, eggs, and meat allowed access and sell in (parts of) the city (Estupiñan et al., 2010). Monopolisation of basic goods continues to this day, having driven up their cost far above the national average, despite the high levels of poverty in the city,³⁹⁴ which has also forced many local businesses to close (CIJP, 2021a; 2021b). At the time I undertook fieldwork, it was said that even plastic bags in one barrio were monopolized, with fines imposed on residents who used those brought from outside.³⁹⁵

As in other cases in this thesis, armed territorial competition has brought with it ‘fronteras invisibles’, which have severely restricted the mobility of city residents. Curfews and forced displacements also began in earnest during the period of paramilitary control, with residents being threatened and intimidated out of their homes.³⁹⁶ These have remained since.

Moreover, OCGs have coupled their predation of community residents with the enforcement of strict behavioural codes, imposing curfews, restricting neighbourhood access, and demanding that residents seek approval before gathering (HRW, 2014; Rodríguez, 2023). They also control other common crime, such as thefts.³⁹⁷ OCGs have also driven alarming levels of inter-urban forced displacement, controlled community organisations, forcibly recruited minors, and undertaken ‘social cleansing’ (CIJP, 2017) as a means of controlling MUC residents. To this day, residents in many areas of the city report seeing OCGs openly carry assault rifles and pistols.³⁹⁸ Indeed, the power of these groups is upheld through conspicuous violence: shortly before I arrived in Buenaventura in early 2022, the

³⁹⁴ Interview with journalist, 13/12/2021, hzmdi; Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 14/12/2021, p0wvc; Interview with José Domingo Cantillo, Colonel of the Marines, Second Brigade, Buenaventura 10/03/2022, vmjev; Interview with Diego Giraldo, director of territorial planning at ProPacífico, 03/02/2022, wvv38

³⁹⁵ Interview with journalist and MUC resident, Buenaventura, 03/12/2021, sf49t

³⁹⁶ Interview with journalist from Buenaventura, 21/12/2021, jrxq9

³⁹⁷ Interview with Víctor Hugo Vidal, Mayor of Buenaventura (2019-2023). 18/03/2022, 3vcb9; Interview with Orlando Castillo, politician and community leader, 09/03/2022, 836ut

³⁹⁸ Interview with Social worker from Buenaventura, 29/11/2021, irtup; Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 14/12/2021, p0wvc; Interview with journalist from Buenaventura, 14/12/2021, s0bfe

Shottas and Esparitanos had prohibited— and violently punished— city residents from wearing red and black clothing, colours associated with each group.³⁹⁹

2.2 Political and Economic Elites: Insulated from OCG Violence

Despite persistent OCG violence and insecurity across much of Buenaventura, elite coordination has not been achieved. In this part of the case study, I discuss why. Here I show that the interests of local political and economic elites are generally *insulated* from the effects of OCG violence in the city's MUCs. Given this insulation, and the ability of different elites to prosper in spite of (and sometimes *thanks to*) OCG violence, elite coordination remains an unlikely outcome.

Political Elites: National Disengagement, Local Buck-Passing

In response to the *Unchecked OCG Competition* that has emerged in Buenaventura's slums, Colombia's national (and departmental) authorities have periodically sent both police and military reinforcements to the city, and on some occasions even undertaken militarized occupations of entire neighbourhoods— this is addressed in greater depth shortly, when discussing local police capacity.

Still, while these interventions by the national government might signal coordination with the local authorities, they have generally been very short-lived. National political elites have reacted to especially acute moments of crises in Buenaventura, staging interventions after OCG violence becomes *highly salient* at the national level. For example, one national government crackdown in the city followed a car bomb attack in 2010, and another in 2014 followed the revelation of mass dismemberments in the city's MUCs. The media attention that this latter scandal garnered (Saavedra, 2014) was in no small part thanks to intensive civil society mobilisation in 2014, which sought to shine light on OCG

³⁹⁹ Interview with MUC resident and youth leader, 29/01/2022, lblwt; Interview with social leader from Juan XIII, 14/01/2022, xuud3; Interview with journalist and MUC resident from Buenaventura, 17/01/2022, ar2kj; Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 14/12/2021, p0wvc; Interview with journalist and MUC resident, Buenaventura, 03/12/2021, sf49t; Interview with journalist from Buenaventura, 26/11/2021, 84dh2

violence, extreme poverty, and the continued lack of basic services in the city. The biggest march of 2014 involved an estimated 30,000 people calling for an end to violence and denouncing the city's "casas de pique", or "chopping houses" (Silva, 2017), where MUC residents had been hewn apart by local gangs, often while still alive. Buenaventura has a history of protest, and indeed mass mobilisation has proven to be remarkably effective at amplifying (generally ignored) local issues onto the national stage. This is due to the fact that Buenaventura is Colombia's main port city, and so by shutting down transit routes in and out of the city, protestors can directly impact the (inter)national economy. In 2017, protestors shut down Buenaventura's Port complexes for 43 days, as part of a *Paro Cívico*. This was followed by a significant security intervention as well as an unprecedented commitment by the national government to social spending in the city. Nonetheless, partisan politics, democratic turnover, and a lack of intergovernmental coordination have severely frustrated the delivery of the promised investments and development in the city.⁴⁰⁰

Indeed, coordination between national and local political elites has been low throughout recent history, with local political leaders having long called on the central State to "meet its obligations" to the peripheral port city.⁴⁰¹ Since the early 2000s, local political elites have expressed scepticism about the willingness of the national government to take the drastic measures required to address insecurity and underdevelopment in the municipality (Tiempo, 2005), have denounced the indifference of national authorities to the city's manifold plights (CNMH, 2013), and called for more effective cross-governmental collaboration (Tiempo, 2014). In sum, political elites in the national government have generally been disengaged from Buenaventura. Their involvement in the city has been sporadic, and

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with Jhon Reina, Comité del Paro Cívico leader and spokesperson. 07/03/2022, n1ah8.2; Interview with government liaison in Buenaventura, 02/12/2021, bxbat; Interview with activist and community leader, Leonard Renteria. 08/12/2021, 2qnka

⁴⁰¹ Interview with member of the Comité del Paro Cívico, 21/03/2022, imkim.2

reactive, responding to crises as they emerge, but not actively collaborating with local authorities for any length of time towards shared goals.

Disengagement by national elites has also been undergirded by their low levels of trust in the competencies of the local government. Municipal administrations have been notorious for their corruption, which has inhibited effective policy implementation and fostered friction in intergovernmental relations.⁴⁰² Four of the city's mayors elected since 2000 having been detained on corruption charges (País, 2022), as have many senior local officials, politicians and civil servants. Local politicians have been jailed for contracting irregularities, and numerous multimillion-dollar infrastructure development programs have been left half-finished— their finances ransacked (País, 2014; Semana, 2017).

Moreover, as security officials with experience working in Buenaventura explained to me, national forces have tended to be deployed to Buenaventura so fleetingly in part *due to the local government's low fiscal capacity*.⁴⁰³ When police reinforcements are deployed to the city, the municipal government has to eventually assume financial responsibility for this extra manpower, paying for their lodgings and basic necessities.⁴⁰⁴ It cannot afford to do so for long. The head of Buenaventura's Chamber of Commerce put it to me frankly: "Institutional weakness at the local level means that we [the chamber of commerce] are the most relevant actor here", not the municipal authorities. She added: "City Hall is not able to control the situation [so] we end up being the first port of call for the national government, the military and the police [...] They come to us first. They trust us more."⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰² An illustrative example of this is when President Uribe publicly called for the arrest of Buenaventura's Secretary of Government for suspected involvement in narcotrafficking when he visited the city in 2006 (Tiempo, 2006).

⁴⁰³ Interview with naval officer formerly stationed in Buenaventura, 21/01/2022, ffdts; Interview with Navy Captain, with experience working throughout the Pacific, 22/01/2022, v4gol

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with David Gómez Bernal security analyst for ProPacífico, 02/02/2022, 0qr1i

⁴⁰⁵ Interview with Milady Garces Arboleda, President of Buenaventura's Chamber of Commerce, 11/03/2022, 8v4wd

On the one hand, the poverty of the municipality has allowed local political elites to credibly *pass the buck*, paint OCG violence as beyond their control, and therefore ultimately as an issue for *the national government* to resolve. On the other hand, for much of the last 20 years, local leaders have not generally had to fear electoral punishment and accountability at the ballot box, given the extreme levels of clientelism in the city. In other words, clientelism helps insulate local political elites from the pressures that result from politicised *OCG Security Threats*. As an official charged with organizing election oversight throughout the *Valle del Cauca*⁴⁰⁶ explained to me, elections in Buenaventura were incomparable to any others he had monitored: “spending on campaigns is overwhelming, the amount of advertising and money spent [...] elections in the city are unique”.⁴⁰⁷ Most elections since 2000 are widely considered to have been heavily influenced by clientelist practices, Buenaventura’s extreme poverty providing fertile ground for non-programmatic politics, as well as electoral fraud.⁴⁰⁸ Indeed, when I observed elections in the city in March 2022, vote buying was obvious, and in the poor neighbourhoods of the bajamar areas, attempted ballot rigging was flagrant. A social leader from one such neighbourhood described local elections: “If you want to win an election [here], you need to come with bags of green bills. You need to offer transport, *tamales*, and bottles of *aguardiente*. [...] here, you even have to pay for people’s laughter”.⁴⁰⁹

It is widely suspected that many candidates and party machines in Buenaventura have over the last two decades received financing from illicit sources,⁴¹⁰ given the importance of the port to narcotraffickers, and the benefits that these criminal actors can obtain from having conspirators in

⁴⁰⁶ The Colombian department in which Buenaventura is located.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview with academic and election observation coordinator, Valle del Cauca. 15/12/2021, gv4wh

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with journalist and MUC resident from Buenaventura, 17/01/2022, ar2kj; Academic and election observation coordinator, Valle del Cauca. 15/12/2021, gv4wh; Interview with social leader from Juan XIII, 14/01/2022, xuud3

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with social leader from Juan XIII, 14/01/2022, xuud3

⁴¹⁰ Interview with social worker and MUC resident, 27/11/2021, myw8p; Interview with Social worker from Buenaventura, 29/11/2021, irtup; Interview with academic who has researched social intervention in Buenaventura, 27/11/2021, gvb6m; Interview with academic and election observation coordinator, Valle del Cauca. 15/12/2021, gv4wh.

city hall. Narcotrafficking is of course a cornerstone of the local economy, and it is an open secret that local businessmen with ties to narcotrafficking have invested in the city to launder money.⁴¹¹ Moreover, several local politicians and political appointees have been embroiled in narcotrafficking scandals and arrested, and accusations have been made that link senior local politicians– including Mayor Bartolo Valencia (2012-2015)– to drug traffickers (Semana, 2013; Las dos Orillas, 2014). Community leaders I spoke to attested that OCGs still interfere in elections to this day (particularly in the bajamar neighbourhoods),⁴¹² a practice well documented in the city’s recent past. The electoral victory of Saulo Quiñones, Mayor of Buenaventura from 2004-2007, was aided by paramilitaries who controlled voting in their urban territories (CDV, 2022b). Connections between Quiñones and the paramilitaries are said to have been brokered through their mutual connections to a prominent local narcotrafficker (CDV, 2022a, p.132). Paramilitaries in the port city also turned out a massive vote for Senator Juan Carlos Martínez Sinisterra⁴¹³ in 2002 (CNMH, 2018, p.532), who had close ties to many of Buenaventura’s mayors and city councillors.⁴¹⁴ As Colombia’s truth commission reported: “Paramilitarism coopted local institutions and interceded in electoral processes, taking advantage of the connections that narcotraffickers had with sectors of the port city’s political class”. Through this means “The power of criminal groups associated with narcotrafficking infiltrated State institutions”. (CDV, 2022a, p.132). It is very plausible that in the post-paramilitary era, Buenaventura’s territorial OCGs, narcotrafficking groups, and local democratic politics, remain heavily interconnected.

In sum, coordination between political elites has remained consistently low, preventing the policy continuity, long-term planning, and local capacity-building that would be necessary to begin rectifying

⁴¹¹ Interview with municipal attorney, 22/03/2022, gei92

⁴¹² Interview with senior JAC leader, Buenaventura, 09/03/2022, jxj8p; Interview with city councillor and MUC Resident, 13/03/2022, ujku

⁴¹³ The Senator formed part of the bloc of congressmen who promoted paramilitary interests in the national legislature, and would eventually become embroiled in the ‘parapolítica’ scandal before being jailed in 2011.

⁴¹⁴ Interview with academic who has researched social intervention in Buenaventura, 27/11/2021, gvb6m

the dire insecurity faced in Buenaventura's MUCs. Political elites *at the national level* have not prioritised the city, intervening sporadically in response to highly salient security crises (the salience of which has usually been amplified by city residents' protests). Political elites *at the local level* have generally passed the buck, avoiding responsibility for containing violence and instead deferring to the national authorities. Perversely, local political elites are somewhat insulated from OCG security threats in the city. Systematic vote-buying has compromised accountability at the ballot box, and evidence suggests that OCGs are still involved in influencing local elections.

Economic Elites: Private Protection amid Cyclical Violence

As I have argued, economic elites can play an important role in catalysing political elite coordination when they command high levels of instrumental power. Given the central importance of Buenaventura to Colombia's economy, senior directors of Buenaventura's port complexes have close links to figures in the national government, as well as direct communication channels with city hall.⁴¹⁵ *However*, these economic elites have little connection to the city itself. It is widely known that shareholders in the port complexes live in Cali, Medellín, Bogotá, or abroad (Bonilla, 2014). These actors thus have little direct connection to the city; as long as the ports function smoothly, they have no reason to leverage their instrumental power to galvanize political elite action.

The ports themselves also rely on private security and even have their own intelligence gathering capabilities,⁴¹⁶ which in conjunction with the significant State protection they receive, has ensured they have been all but unaffected by the rampant OCG violence elsewhere in the city.⁴¹⁷ Economic elites

⁴¹⁵ Interview with Milady Garces Arboleda, President of Buenaventura's Chamber of Commerce, 11/03/2022, 8v4wd; Interview with Social worker from Buenaventura, 29/11/2021, irtup

⁴¹⁶ Interview with Milady Garces Arboleda, President of Buenaventura's Chamber of Commerce, 11/03/2022, 8v4wd

⁴¹⁷ Evidencing the security of the port installations is the changing pattern of OCG behaviour that followed the opening of the TCBuen Port complex in 2011 (Chacón, 2011). Whereas previously bajamar neighbourhoods on the city's northern and southern shorelines had been used by OCGs as narcotrafficking hubs, with TCBuen's inauguration on the northern shore, and with the robust State presence that accompanied its opening, cocaine stockpiling and trafficking shifted nearly

with stakes in Buenaventura's ports are therefore rarely threatened by OCG violence in the city, which— as we have seen— overwhelmingly affects its MUCs.

Perversely, there are signs that OCG violence may have *benefitted* economic elite interests in the port city. In the mid-2000s, as plans were being formulated to build the TCBuen port complex across several neighbourhoods of Comuna 5 (construction began in 2008, and the port opened in 2011), paramilitary affiliated gangs are said to have increased violence in these areas, supposedly to drive down the price of land and displace residents (Restrepo, 2018). To this day, many believe that OCGs were key to clearing the area for development.⁴¹⁸ This is plausible, given that similar land-grabs have previously taken place in both urban and rural parts of Buenaventura (Molano, 2013; CIJP, 2012; 2016b), as well as more widely throughout Colombia. Similar accusations have been made of other large-scale development projects since (CIJP, 2009). Commercial development and violence are therefore, in the eyes of many city residents, closely intertwined.

In contrast to Buenaventura's commercial elites, local private sector actors, who reside and do business in the city itself, have been left far more vulnerable to OCG predation. However, *these groups* have lacked the instrumental power to influence local government security policy, let alone facilitate dialogue with national authorities. Many local business groups have sought meetings with security officials,⁴¹⁹ and protested to amplify their concerns and pressure State action (Tiempo, 2014; Nuevo Siglo, 2014; País, 2021). Still, these mobilisations have had limited success, and port authorities have not supported these broader private sector actions, given that protests in the city affect the flow of

entirely to the southern waterfront. (Interview with municipal attorney, 22/03/2022, gei92; Interview with JAC Leader and MUC resident, Miramar. 23/03/2022, 1uwy4)

⁴¹⁸ Interview with academic from Buenaventura, 24/12/2021, inuam; Interview with journalist from Buenaventura, 26/11/2021, 84dh2; Interview with Social worker from Buenaventura, 29/11/2021, irtup; Interview with community leader who works on the Mesa de Victimas, 10/03/2022, qgj9n

⁴¹⁹ Interview with transport union leader, 13/03/2022, mz98d

imports and exports (Ramírez, 2014). The interests of port stakeholders and local private sector actors are therefore frequently highly conflictive.⁴²⁰

Besides mobilising to pressure government action, private sector actors with low instrumental power have also turned to *private protection*. This has included funding violent nonstate actors, further fuelling Buenaventura's cyclical violence. One of the key institutions for coordinating Buenaventura's private sector actors and channelling their demands– the Chamber of Commerce– hosted a meeting with AUC paramilitary leader Vicente Castaño in the year 2000, immediately prior to the intervention of paramilitaries in the city (CDV, 2022b).⁴²¹ Local economic elites are then said to have helped finance and support the paramilitaries urban campaign in the port city; unlike the FARC, these groups worked with (certain) economic elites and did not threaten port and commercial infrastructure. As paramilitary leader *HH* himself admitted: “In Buenaventura nearly all businesses collaborated with us” (País, 2013a). After the AUC's demobilisation, local business actors then went on to finance the post-paramilitary structure, *La Empresa*. This group is said to have been funded initially by a disgruntled night club owner (País, 2013b), who was then joined by other businessmen, tired of the extortions they were obliged to pay to local gangs in the absence of State protection.⁴²²

To summarize, stakeholders in the port complexes have rarely had their interests threatened by OCG violence. The city's ports have continued to grow, and been afforded ample State protection, even as Buenaventura's MUCs have remained trapped in spiralling violence. While the economic elites of the ports have considerable power, with ties to both national and local authorities, the status quo favours their interests. Meanwhile, local business actors *without the instrumental power to affect policy* have

⁴²⁰ Interview with Milady Garces Arboleda, President of Buenaventura's Chamber of Commerce, 11/03/2022, 8v4wd

⁴²¹ Note, this is not to suggest that any such linkages between the Chamber of Commerce and armed nonstate groups continue to this day– I have come across no evidence suggesting this.

⁴²² Interview with municipal attorney, 22/03/2022, gei92

responded by trying to amplify their demands through mobilisation, or invested in illegal private protection.

2.3 Persistently Low Police Capacity

While a lack of elite coordination is key to understanding the State's failure to articulate any long-term response to persistent insecurity in Buenaventura, *Unchecked OCG Competition* has prevailed throughout Buenaventura's MUCs over the last two decades also thanks to *low police capacity*.

On its face, Buenaventura appears to be well positioned to counter the OCGs that control its MUCs. Not only are the city's ports of paramount importance to the national economy, but the police, army, and navy are all active in the city. Moreover, as numerous interviewees from across the police and military informed me, for the last decade these different security forces have worked closely to carry out joint operations, and meet routinely with the local mayor to ensure effective coordination with civil authorities.⁴²³ Surrounding Buenaventura's ports, and along its main highways, State security forces maintain a robust presence. Indeed, while naval units are primarily tasked with patrolling rivers and interdicting smugglers at sea, over 500 marines are also positioned in the municipality to protect critical infrastructure.⁴²⁴ And yet, despite this robust presence of different State security forces in Buenaventura, the mandates of the army and navy restrict them from entering into the city's MUCs, unless undertaking specifically sanctioned operations.⁴²⁵ These areas, where OCG activity and conflict

⁴²³Interview with Víctor Hugo Vidal, Mayor of Buenaventura (2019-2023). 18/03/2022, 3vcb9; Interview with three senior police officials in charge of security in Buenaventura, 22/03/2022, m6gay; Interview with Javier Bermúdez, Colonel of the Coast Guard, Buenaventura. 08/03/2022, hlaf9; Interview with José Domingo Cantillo, Colonel of the Marines, Second Brigade, Buenaventura 10/03/2022, vmjev; Interview with Navy Captain, with experience working throughout the Pacific, 22/01/2022, v4gol; Naval officer formerly stationed in Buenaventura, 21/01/2022, ffdts

⁴²⁴ Interview with José Domingo Cantillo, Colonel of the Marines, Second Brigade, Buenaventura 10/03/2022, vmjev

⁴²⁵ Interview with Navy Captain, with experience working throughout the Pacific, 22/01/2022, v4gol; Interview with naval officer formerly stationed in Buenaventura, 21/01/2022, ffdts

has been most heavily concentrated over the last two decades, are the *sole* responsibility of Buenaventura's police.

Numerous interviewees recounted having seen police openly work and fraternize with paramilitary and post-paramilitary structures in the first decade of the 2000s– which resonates with existing findings (Estupiñan et al. 2010, p.28; CIJP, 2015; 2019)– and almost all MUC residents with whom I spoke suspected that corrupt entanglements between criminal gangs and local law enforcement had persisted in the years since.⁴²⁶ Some even attested to having witnessed instances of ongoing collaboration at the time of my data collection,⁴²⁷ and indeed police have been jailed for corruption in recent years (Caracol Radio, 2019). Accurately assessing the autonomy of local police from the city's OCGs is of course extremely difficult. Still, it does not seem that corruption is systemic. In recent years police oversight has improved due to the use of new protocols and technology,⁴²⁸ and other local security forces *trust* the police and are willing to work closely with them and share intelligence.⁴²⁹ What is clear is that Buenaventura's police *lack the resources* to control the urban territories that fall under their purview.

Police are most visible and active in areas such as the city centre and near to port and transport infrastructure. However, as residents of MUCs across the city confirmed, police presence has been

⁴²⁶ Interview with social leader from Juan XIII, 14/01/2022, xuud3; Interview with MUC resident and youth leader, 29/01/2022, lblwt; Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 14/12/2021, p0wvc; Interview with bajamar resident and journalist, 14/12/2021, s0bfe; Interview with activist and community leader, Leonard Renteria. 08/12/2021, 2qnka; Interview with journalist and MUC resident from Buenaventura, 17/01/2022, ar2kj; Interview with MUC resident from Barrio Ciudadela, 20/03/2022, 2c8kg; Interview with community leader who works on the Mesa de Victimas, 10/03/2022, qgj9n; Interview with MUC resident, Comuna 4, 19/03/2022, f4fhg

⁴²⁷ Interview with journalist from Buenaventura, 26/11/2021, 84dh2; Interview with journalist and MUC resident, Buenaventura, 03/12/2021, sf49t

⁴²⁸ Interview with three senior police officials in charge of security in Buenaventura, 22/03/2022, m6gay; Interview with Javier Bermúdez, Colonel of the Coast Guard, Buenaventura. 08/03/2022, hla9

⁴²⁹ Interview with Colonel of the Coast Guard, Buenaventura. 08/03/2022, hla9; Interview with naval officer formerly stationed in Buenaventura, 21/01/2022, ffdts; Interview with Navy Captain, with experience working throughout the Pacific, 22/01/2022, v4gol.

minimal in the city's slums now for decades, with patrols being extremely infrequent.⁴³⁰ Many of Buenaventura's neighbourhoods, particularly those in the bajamar area, are difficult to enter by vehicle, impeding ready access to police patrols.⁴³¹ That said, police absence is by no means exclusive to the bajamar neighbourhoods. MUC residents have long argued that the police completely abandoned conflict-riven neighbourhoods during particularly intense periods of violence in the recent past (HRW, 2014), and that to this day they regularly appear late to the scenes of homicides, seemingly to avoid violent confrontations with OCGs. As interviewees put it:

“The police have only got handguns, so they don't go far [into the barrios]. Maybe you will see them, staying on the main roads in pairs. But they don't go far out of fear”⁴³²

“[The police] have no other option, in Buenaventura it's *plata o plomo*. [...] If they hear assault rifle fire, what are they going to do with their 9-millimeter [handguns]? So, they retreat.”⁴³³

“They aren't strong enough to actually exercise control, so they just enter and then leave [...] They come in when they feel safe, they are looking out for themselves.”⁴³⁴

Members of the local security forces admitted to me in interviews that police manpower was simply too low to be present across the city's barrios⁴³⁵. Indeed, as of 2020, Buenaventura's population could count on only 400 police officers on average for the entire municipality (Bravo, 2020), which has a

⁴³⁰ Interview with activist and community leader, Leonard Renteria, 08/12/2021, 2qnka; Interview with journalist from Buenaventura, 21/12/2021, jrxq9; Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 14/12/2021, p0wvc; Interview with bajamar resident and journalist, 14/12/2021, s0bfe; Interview with journalist and MUC resident from Buenaventura, 17/01/2022, ar2kj; Interview with MUC resident from El Progreso, 03/02/2022, e1so3; Interview with MUC resident, La Playita, 13/03/2022, 0zs8l; Interview with city councilor and MUC Resident, 13/03/2022; Interview with MUC resident Comuna 12, 19/03/2022, zbngt; Interview with MUC resident, Independencias, 13/03/2022, 6hhj4

⁴³¹ Interview with three senior police officials in charge of security in Buenaventura, 22/03/2022, m6gay

⁴³² Interview with academic from Cali, who worked in Buenaventura in the early 2000s, 29/11/2021, b0pxn

⁴³³ Interview with social leader from Juan XIII, 14/01/2022, xuud3

⁴³⁴ Interview with social worker from Buenaventura, 29/11/2021, irtup

⁴³⁵ Interview with José Domingo Cantillo, Colonel of the Marines, Second Brigade, Buenaventura 10/03/2022, vmjev; Interview with naval officer formerly stationed in Buenaventura, 21/01/2022, ffdts; Interview with Navy Captain, with experience working throughout the Pacific, 22/01/2022, v4gol

population estimated between 300,000-500,000 residents.⁴³⁶ Moreover, as senior police officials revealed to me, the local government had failed to deliver the resources for funding and maintaining key policing infrastructure, such as security cameras in poor neighbourhoods.⁴³⁷ Buenaventura's police are under-resourced, and so remain ill-prepared to contain OCG violence or challenge OCG control over MUCs. State territorial control over these areas is minimal, and has been for the last two and a half decades.

As already outlined, national authorities have periodically deployed reinforcements to the city in response to crises. These interventions in the city began in the early 2000s in response to the increasing FARC presence, though given that State forces were working hand-in-hand with paramilitary groups and facilitating their incursion into the area, this did little to quell the violence.⁴³⁸ Under President Uribe, a major intervention occurred in late 2007 and sustained into 2008 (Tiempo, 2008). Uribe explicitly compared this to Medellín's *Operación Orión*, deploying around 2000 police and soldiers to patrol Buenaventura's streets, occupy strategic locations, and take back control of entire city comunas (CNMH, 2018, pp.200, 201). In 2010, the local government called for aid from the national authorities after a car bomb was detonated in the city centre, leaving nine dead and a further fifty-nine wounded (Universo, 2010). In response, the city was once again placed under a state of militarisation (Tiempo, 2010d). Then, in 2014, responding to a highly salient spate of dismemberments in the city (Saavedra, 2014), the national government once more intervened in Buenaventura with a significant deployment of police and soldiers. This included 1400 police, 900 navy troops, and 200 soldiers (Colombiano, 2014). Again, in 2017 and 2019, significant police interventions were undertaken in the city, with

⁴³⁶ As my interviews with local State officials revealed, this is extremely difficult to gauge with accuracy, given how large the municipality is as a whole, the periodic influxes of displaced populations who arrive to the city, and the difficulty of collecting reliable census data in OCG-controlled territories (or, indeed, guerrilla-controlled territories in Buenaventura's rural areas).

⁴³⁷ Interview with three senior police officials in charge of security in Buenaventura, 22/03/2022, m6gay

⁴³⁸ Interview with academic from Cali, who worked in Buenaventura in the early 2000s. 29/11/2021, b0pxn

reinforcements dispatched to stabilize violence riven neighbourhoods in the city (LCS., 2021). This pattern of intervention continues to this day (Rodríguez, 2023; Osorio, 2023) with police and soldiers periodically deployed to the city for short periods of time, only to then withdraw.

The more recent short-term interventions have reportedly been more effective at containing OCG violence and have enabled State actors to exert greater control over the city's MUCs. Evidently, then, by bolstering the resources available to the local police in Buenaventura, the State has been able to counter and *Contain* OCG threats in its MUCs. During State interventions into these areas, the social control exerted by OCGs has also diminished according to interviewees, creating a temporary sense of calm, even while MUC residents are cognizant that State forces will eventually withdraw, and the criminal gangs reemerge.⁴³⁹ Unlike in Juárez, then, where the deployment of federal police to the city *deepened insecurity* (in part due to their lack of autonomy from OCGs), security forces deployed to Buenaventura by both the Departmental and National governments evidently do have sufficient resources and autonomy from OCGs to effectively deter and punish them.

In sum, low police resources at the local level have ensured that OCGs have been able to thrive and consolidate enclaves of territorial control and civilian governance in Buenaventura's MUCs. Where police resources have been boosted— due to temporary interventions by the national government— State forces have been able to control the city's MUCs and impose order. These gains, though, have been short-lived, lasting as long as the national government has prioritized containing violence in the city.

⁴³⁹ Interview with Orlando Castillo, politician and community leader, 09/03/2022, 836ut; Interview with social leader from Juan XIII, 14/01/2022, xuud3; Interview with journalist, 13/12/2021, hzmdi; Interview with journalist from Buenaventura, 26/11/2021, 84dh2; Interview with MUC resident and social worker, 14/12/2021, p0wvc; Interview with journalist from Buenaventura, 25/11/2021, I81nk; Interview with journalist and MUC resident from Buenaventura, 17/01/2022, ar2kj; Interview with MUC resident from El Progreso, 03/02/2022, e1so3; Interview with MUC resident from Barrio Ciudadela, 20/03/2022, 2c8kg.

3. Conclusion: Findings from the Negative Cases

The two case studies presented here demonstrate in two distinct settings from Mexico and Colombia that State *Territorial Expansion* is an improbable outcome, even in instances where OCGs control marginalised urban communities, undertake shocking acts of violence, and predate rapaciously. Consistent with my argument, both cases show that without elite coordination, and local level police capacity, States will be unable to build territorial control in OCG-dominated communities.

As we have seen, the political incentives that shape elite decision-making in response to OCG violence often do not prioritize security in MUCs, let alone produce the sort of long-term interventions that can begin to augment State territorial control. Both cases also show that political elites are highly responsive to the *salience* of OCG violence— especially when this produces scandals or civil society mobilisation— validating the relevance of the mechanisms outlined in my theoretical framework. This was exemplified by Calderón’s response to the Salvárcar Massacre, and the national government’s militarisation of Buenaventura following mass mobilisation against violence. Indeed, both cases also show that political elites *do not* intrinsically act to repress OCGs simply because they control urban territory.

In Ciudad Juárez we saw how in response to a security threat that exploded from the city’s MUCs, political elites did eventually begin to actively collaborate, a process that helped drive forward *Security Reform*. Consequently, police resources (and thus coercive capacity) have increased considerably, ensuring effective *Containment* of OCG threats to the city’s MUCs. However, elite coordination between both tiers of government and local economic elites was short-lived, meaning that although *Security Reform* boosted police capacity, its success has been dubious in the long-term. Local police institutions remain riddled with corruption, many MUCs remain dangerous, and State presence within them extremely limited.

Unlike in Juárez' during the security crisis, OCG violence in Buenaventura has generally been restricted to the city's MUCs, especially those in the bajamar neighbourhoods. Highly salient violence has emerged from these communities. And yet, this has rarely threatened elite interests, which have been largely insulated from OCG insecurity. Indeed, local political and economic elites appear to have been closely bound up in, and even benefitted from, the city's criminal politics. While the local police and other security forces also have a history of collaboration with armed criminal actors in the city, my analysis of Buenaventura shows that it is less their lack of *autonomy* from OCGs than it is a serious deficiency in *resources* (e.g., financing, manpower, technology) that prevent police from effectively containing OCG violence or beginning to build a meaningful law-and-order presence in the city's MUCs. *Unchecked OCG Competition* therefore continues to this day.

Thus, pairing these case studies reveals that even where *State Territorial Expansion* does not occur, the interaction of the variables in my framework remains relevant to explaining State responses to insecurity, as well as local level outcomes in territorial control. However, their comparison also reveals the relevance of other factors, which add important nuance to my theoretical framework.

Firstly, while elite coordination in Ciudad Juárez arguably emerged only during the height of Todos Somos Juárez, it is clear that a localized coalition between the private sector and local political elites has consolidated in the years since. While this does not contradict my argument, given that local-national political elite coordination in the city remains limited (and *State Territorial Expansion* absent) this *local coalition* continues to be highly influential in shaping local security policy, reinforcing patterns of *Containment* amenable to the interests of the local manufacturing sector.

Secondly, Buenaventura underscores sharply the perverse incentives that political and economic elites can acquire amid contexts of high OCG insecurity. My theoretical chapter outlined that political elites may not be incentivized to contest OCG territorial control, may tolerate OCG presence, and that they

may even benefit from OCG activities. However, this did not take into account that extent to which elite actors in urban settings— both political and economic— may be *involved* in promoting OCG violence. In Buenaventura, what we see is not just an absence of OCG *threats* galvanizing elite action, but instead *opportunities* for elites emerging from the territorial control these groups exercise and their capacity to inflict violence.

Thirdly, while very different in many senses, Ciudad Juárez and Buenaventura do share comparable features in terms of their *political economies*. In both instances, the cities' major industries (cross-border manufacturing and port complexes respectively) are in large-part comprised by multinational business interests with *few ties* to the cities themselves, and thus little concern with helping respond to local *OCG Security Threats*. This starkly contrasts Medellín and Monterrey, where we saw powerful *regionalist* economic elites being highly proactive in addressing OCG violence. Still, Ciudad Juárez also has a committed regionalist elite (though one which lacks instrumental power beyond the local level), and in Monterrey and Rio, economic elite actors were also comprised of major multinationals, but very different outcomes were still evidenced in both cases. How, and to what extent, multinational and regionalist economic elites are key to shaping elite coordination is therefore unclear. As I argue in the next chapter, focussing on the interests, agency, and instrumental power of these actors, rather than characteristics such as these, affords greater explanatory leverage.

Still, the pairing of Buenaventura and Ciudad Juárez does suggest that *transit hubs*, such as ports and border regions, produce particular political economies which— shaped by both legal and illegal economic and political interests— ultimately safeguard the international passage of both *licit and illicit goods* at the expense of expanding State territorial control. In other words, these locales concentrate interests that shape the distribution of territorial control and the allocation of security resources in such a way as to ensure the stability (and growth) of *both legal and illegal international markets*. Nonetheless,

the full implications of this intriguing, and worrying, possibility are beyond the scope of this study, and best left for future research.

8. Comparative Analysis: Reviewing the Theory, Assessing the Alternatives

Having now reviewed all the cases, this chapter moves to consider the strength of the theoretical framework as a whole by engaging in comparative analysis. The preceding chapters pointed to important variation within particular subnational locales across different temporal periods—decades in the case of Medellín, but more truncated timespans in other cases—showing how OCG security threats, elite coordination, and police institutional capacity interacted to shape varied outcomes in territorial control in marginalised urban communities. Now, our attention shifts to analysing trends *across* the cases, synthesizing the main findings and assessing the argument’s explanatory leverage in the different empirical contexts included herein. Moreover, this comparative analysis is key in allowing me to assess the relevance of alternative explanations. I do not lay out any singular “competing” theory against which to contrast my argument, given the dearth of scholarship investigating the causes of heterogenous territorial control. Instead, I probe alternative explanations in relation to each step of my theorized causal chain, as presented in Chapter 2. Overleaf, **Table 8.1** provides a summary of the different case studies, presented in the order in which the reader encountered them.⁴⁴⁰

1. Cross-Case Analysis: The Theory in Comparative Perspective

When considered comparatively, the case studies firstly reinforce the notion that State responses to the emergence of OCG threats are very *unlikely* to produce expansions in State territorial control. In Medellín, amid the chaos of the 1980s and early 1990s, the State’s default response was to crack down on OCGs and pursue a “decapitation” strategy, but physically “retaking” urban territories from violent

⁴⁴⁰ For simplicity’s sake, in Table 8.1 I score the majority of the variables from my framework with the values “High” or “Low”, rather than including a range of other intermediate values. This is also in accordance with how I have presented the variables previously, such as Table 2.1 in Chapter 2. On occasion, I use “Increasing” or “Decreasing” to signal a variable’s direction of travel during a particular temporal period from a case study.

Table 8.1 Summarizing the Case Studies

City	Time Period	Elite Coordination	Police Capacity	Outcome
Medellín	1980s-1990s	Low	Low	<i>Unchecked OCG Competition</i>
	late 1990s-2002	Low	Increasing	<i>Containment</i>
	2002-2008	High	High	<i>State Territorial Expansion</i> (mixed governance)
	2008-2012	High	High	Renewed OCG threat, continued <i>Expansion</i>
	2012-2020	High	High	Sustained State Territorial Control in MUCs Territorial Control and Governance: Increased, durable State territorial control, and much greater State governance in MUCs following 2004. Governance in MUCs remains coproduced with local OCGs, though police autonomy from criminal actors has increased over time.
Monterrey	2007-2010	Low	Low	<i>Unchecked OCG Competition</i>
	2010-2012	High	Low	<i>Security Reform</i>
	2012-2015	High	High	<i>State Territorial Expansion</i> Territorial Control and Governance: Reformed security forces produce increases in State territorial control and governance. Significant decrease in OCG territorial control in MUCs (though enclaves of criminal control remain). OCG imposition of order declines. Following 2015, <i>State Territorial Expansion</i> stops as the security threat dissipates, and elite coordination subsides.
Rio de Janeiro	1999-2004	Low	High	<i>Containment and Experimentation</i>
	2008-2012	High	High	<i>State Territorial Expansion</i>
	2013-2016	Decreasing	Decreasing (police resources overstretched, police autonomy deteriorates)	Declining State Territorial Control in MUCs (OCGs challenge <i>State Territorial Expansion</i>) Territorial Control and Governance: Police with high resources but low autonomy conduct short-lived favela policing “experiments” between 1999-

				2004 (MPP and GPAA). Following 2008, State control increases in OCG-controlled favelas where UPPs are deployed, and State governance augments also. The UPP begins deteriorating in 2013, and collapses after 2016, rolling-back gains in State control made in targeted favelas. OCGs regain exclusive territorial control of many favelas previously occupied by the UPP.
Ciudad Juárez	2007-2010	Low	Low	<i>Unchecked OCG Competition</i>
	2010-2012	High	Low	<i>Security Reform</i>
	2012-onwards	Mixed (<i>local</i> political and economic elite coordination)	High	<i>Containment</i> Territorial Control and Governance: Following 2012, OCGs have been punished by the State, and OCG governance has become less fierce. However, State territorial control remains limited in many marginalised urban communities, not having increased significantly. Gains in police capacity achieved through <i>Security Reform</i> have since deteriorated. Still, local police have much greater coercive capacity than in the past, enabling them to contain OCG security threats to MUCs.
Buenaventura	2000-onwards	Low	Low	<i>Unchecked OCG Competition</i> Territorial Control and Governance: OCG territorial control consolidated across the city between 2000-2005. Following this, criminal groups have changed, but OCG territorial control and governance remain high in the city's MUCs. State control and governance in these spaces is low.

criminal actors was not a priority. Other strategies, such as an urban militia demobilisation, and tentative attempts to bring services and infrastructure to MUCs, were attempted due to the work of the Presidential Council, though these too did little to quell OCG threats or expand State territorial control in conflict-riven MUCs. In Monterrey during the escalation of conflict between the Zetas and the Gulf Cartel, a heavily militarized federal intervention was undertaken in the hope of quelling OCG

bloodshed, given the deficiencies in local law enforcement. This intervention, though, did not prioritize bringing State order to the city's MUCs, and instead chiefly focused on the urban centre and transit routes. Meanwhile, Rio de Janeiro's history of favela policing since democratisation has chiefly been characterized by highly aggressive, militarized crackdowns, which have both responded to and fuelled outbursts of OCG violence. While the "pendulum swings" of Rio politics have occasionally produced other types of interventions— even ones designed to build State presence in the favelas— these have been deviations from the norm. In all three of these cases, we only saw the State increase its territorial control for any meaningful length of time under particular conditions, those identified in my theoretical framework.

Still, beyond these positive cases, we should also recognise the "near misses". The GPAE in Rio was able to build State territorial control in an MUC for a short period of time; so long as a very diligent and hands-on leader (Antonio Carballo Blanco) ensured effective oversight, and so long as the programme remained contained to a singular set of favelas. When leadership changed and the programme expanded, the State's ability to actually control territory in targeted favelas diminished. Similarly, in Buenaventura— unlike in Monterrey or Medellín— crackdowns on MUCs by high-resource, high-autonomy military forces have proven to be capable of diminishing OCG threats and imposing State territorial control over MUCs. This has allowed State and civilian actors greater freedom of movement, and even briefly subdued the power that OCGs exercise over community life. That said, the repeated "militarisation" of MUCs has been very short-lived, usually lasting a matter of months. As such, these momentary crackdowns and emergency stabilisation efforts have been unable to boost State territorial control in the city's conflict-riven slums for very long.

Accepting then that durable increases in State territorial control are rare and highly contingent, how do the moving parts of my theory hold up in explaining my outcome of interest when considered comparatively?

1.1 OCG Security Threats in Review

In Chapter 2, I claimed that *politicised OCG Security Threats* serve as a precondition for State interventions into MUCs. This holds up across the cases: while criminal gangs were present in MUCs in Medellín, Monterrey, and Ciudad Juárez for years, it was only after OCG violence became *highly salient* and *affected non-marginalised spaces* that State actors began significantly mobilizing to enter these spaces and repress OCG actors. Within-case variation from Rio de Janeiro exemplifies this neatly: the MPP targeted Pereirão, after OCG activities spilled-over into the middle-class Laranjeiras; the GPAE was implemented in Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavãozinho, also near wealthy areas, following a period of highly salient favela violence. Many UPPs, such as that installed in Batan, similarly responded to violent events in favelas that attracted intense media scrutiny. To reiterate, States generally lack incentives to exert territorial control over long neglected urban areas; *OCG Security Threats* offer a powerful incentive in this regard.

Moreover, my cases demonstrate that only certain subsets of OCG threats affect the interests of both political *and economic elites*. Massive levels of highly salient OCG violence spread out from Medellín's MUCs in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Still, the city's powerful economic elites, the GEA, did not initially seek to protect their interests through strengthening the State. Rather, they retreated and sought private protection. Only when persistent violence presented itself as an obstacle to their long-term regionalist ambitions did they pivot and more actively involve themselves in local security politics. Economic elites in Rio acted in a comparable manner: largely insulated from the rampant violence in the city's MUCs, they only began to turn their attention towards improving urban security *through the*

State once OCG and police violence in the favelas posed a threat to their vision of cementing Rio's status as a safe, global city for international capital investments. Prior to this, powerful business actors had used private protection to safeguard their immediate security needs. Economic elites in Monterrey and Ciudad Juárez acted similarly, up until OCG violence escalated to such a degree that investing in private security was insufficient to ensure meaningful protection.

While *OCG Security Threats* therefore play an important role in triggering State interventions into OCG turfs, comparative analysis reveals certain nuances omitted from my theoretical argument.

Firstly, across the cases, it seems that the *scale and geographical distribution* of OCG threats is also influential to shaping State actions. In the Mexican cases— Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey— elite actors responded to city-wide security crises; OCG violence began in MUCs, but then quickly spread across the entire urban landscape. In Monterrey, increases in State territorial control were ultimately durable but limited, while in Juárez *State Territorial Expansion* did not occur. By contrast, Medellín and Rio exemplify clearcut examples of *State Territorial Expansion* (even if this then collapsed in Rio), but ones that *did not* emerge in response to security crises. While Medellín did witness a city-wide security crisis (characterised by police assassinations and narco and guerrilla bombing-campaigns), it was *only after* this phase of urban violence had ended that its elite classes undertook efforts to develop State territorial control in the city's MUCs. Meanwhile, although Rio registers consistently high levels of violence, at no point in the city's recent history has there been a full-blown security crisis comparable to that of Ciudad Juárez or Monterrey; violence is generally confined to the favelas (indeed, the PMERJ is powerful enough to ensure enduring *Containment*). Certainly, it is plausible that rapid-onset security crises of the sort seen in Mexico may not be amenable to the considered planning and coalition formation that help facilitate *State Territorial Expansion* in the long-term. Still, nor do such crises entirely

preclude this outcome, as Monterrey shows. Further research on the distribution and intensity of OCG security threats is therefore required to elucidate how these can shape State action.

Secondly, it is worth noting that in Medellín, the *intensity* of OCG security threats in the city has subsided significantly since 2012. However, this diminishing threat has *not* stopped *State Territorial Expansion*, as it arguably did in Monterrey. Indeed, *elite coordination* and *police institutional capacity* remain high in the city. This suggests that while OCG security threats might be key to initially catalysing *elite coordination*, threats do not necessarily need to be sustained for coordination (and any *State Territorial Expansion* that might result) to persist. Based off the case of Medellín, it appears that after a certain point, expansions in State territorial control become consolidated, even if security threats, the necessary precondition for their achievement, dissipate.

1.2 Elite Coordination: Reviewing its Impact

My cases have clearly shown that high levels of elite coordination are fundamentally important to ensuring *State Territorial Expansion*. In this regard, my findings strongly support extant research that emphasizes the importance of inter-governmental alignment and State cohesion as a means of diminishing OCG violence (Durán-Martínez, 2018; Trejo and Ley, 2020), though they build on this to show that the success of subnational efforts at *State-building* (returned to in the next chapter) are also fundamentally reliant on these alignments. In other words, while scholars have shown that coordination enables States to effectively punish OCG violence, meaningful long-term expansions of State territorial control rely on continuous collaboration across different tiers of government. Subnational State territorial expansion is thus highly politically contingent.

State territorial control in Medellín's MUCs only began to increase following the Uribe government's hardline shift towards actively reclaiming territory from (certain) armed nonstate actors under *Seguridad*

Democrática. This cohered with the interests of local mayors around augmenting State institutional presence in areas of the city where this had been restricted. While Sergio Fajardo, a political outsider, was not of the same partisan affiliation as Uribe, both had close ties to the Antioquian elite, especially the extremely instrumentally powerful GEA which had for years been looking to turn the tide of insecurity in Medellín, concerned with how OCG violence would affect their long-term economic interests. By contrast, in Monterrey, partisan differences between political elites at the national and subnational levels, as well as buck-passing by Nuevo León's governors, *did undermine* elite coordination. However, these differences were eventually overcome *in large part thanks to* powerful regional economic elites, who used their clout and connections to facilitate coordination between both tiers of government. Indeed, this is the clearest example of economic elites mobilizing to bridge divides between political elites that appears from my case studies. As the Monterrey chapter shows, elite coordination was then crucial to reforming the police, galvanizing the creation of *Fuerza Civil*, as well as breaking the fierce territorial control of the Zetas in the metropolis' MUCs.

In Rio, repeated *experiments* designed to increase State territorial control in the favelas fell through, lacking even sufficient *local level* political elite support to be sustainable— never mind any buy-in from the national government or the city's economic elites. The UPP could have easily followed a similar path. However, it emerged at a unique point in time, one where political elites at the national and local level were aligned, sharing both partisan ties and a mutual desire to project a sense of local stability and security to an international audience. They were supported in this effort by local economic elites, who similarly viewed this as an important step towards growing the local economy. Like in Medellín, some interviewees described this time period as Rio's "historic moment". As discussed in the conclusion to Chapter 6, the processes which drove elite coordination on security matters in Rio did differ slightly from those seen in other case studies, given that this was at least *in part* galvanised by exogenous factors beyond the city-level, such as Brazil's megaevents. While acknowledging this is

important, it does not detract from the strength of my core claim regarding the central importance of elite coordination for explaining my outcome of interest. As my positive cases show, elite coordination is not only theoretically *necessary* in this regard, but also *the primary driving force* behind the processes that produce increases in State territorial control.

In keeping with my theory, my cases also demonstrate that *declining elite coordination* has *detrimental effects* on the State's ability to control territory. When elite coordination broke down in Monterrey, efforts to continue growing the *Fuerza Civil* and consolidate institutional reforms, ground to a halt. Indeed, with the dissipating security threat, and democratic turnovers at the national and local levels, only quite *limited* State territorial expansion took place in this case study. In Ciudad Juárez, a brief moment of elite coordination was achieved under *Todos Somos Juárez*, but this was not sustained for long. As such, reforms in the municipal police were shallow, and for much of the last decade the city's MUCs have largely lacked any consistent policing presence, with OCG territorial control remaining entrenched. Still, it is worth noting that locally, close coordination *does* persist between the *subnational* governments and the city's economic elites, who routinely meet to focus on security issues. This does complicate the application of my theory to the case, though, crucially, the federal government has not sustained high levels of involvement in helping coordinate or manage local responses to insecurity, meaning that elite coordination is limited to the subnational level.

In Rio, the picture is more complicated. While weakening elite coordination was certainly important to explaining the UPP's collapse, disentangling this from a host of other contemporaneous processes is difficult. Indeed, the massive wave of corruption scandals and acute economic recession that occurred from 2014 onwards plausibly played an independent role in undermining the UPP, beyond the effects it had on undermining the city's elite coalition. The programme was extremely high-cost,

as numerous interviewees attested,⁴⁴¹ so even *with* united elite support, external shocks such as the economic crisis would have likely been detrimental to the State's ability to sustainably build territorial control. Moreover, as my case study showed, the diminishing success of the UPPs *themselves* contributed to undermining elite coordination. As such, *declining territorial control* in the city's MUCs may have *weakened elite coordination*, thus pointing to a feedback mechanism in this case. Still, determining the independent effect of these factors on the UPP is probably impossible. Hence, I have argued that the concatenation of these factors, and their effects (both direct and indirect) on Rio's political and economic elites, were what fatally undermined the UPP. In sum, Rio certainly demonstrates the positive effects *of elite unity in increasing* State territorial control, even if the evidence that *elite disunity undermines this* is less clearcut.

Precisely *why* elite coordination matters also becomes evident when reviewing my (positive) case studies. Firstly, successful efforts at expanding State territorial control in these instances required significant financial investments, ones that were far easier to achieve with elite unity. A significant amount of the resources that fuelled the (over)ambitious growth of the UPP came from the local private sector, and the federal government also allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to the programme and other favela interventions at the time, showing clear support for the UPP's overall goal of "retaking" the favelas. Meanwhile, in Medellín, territorial expansion into the city's MUCs was funded largely thanks to significant increases in local fiscal capacity. Preceding administrations had been prone to financial mismanagement, and left the municipal government heavily in debt. However, as Sergio Fajardo had strong backing from the city's economic elites, he was able to raise taxes substantially, grow the municipal budget significantly, as well as push forward initiatives such as the

⁴⁴¹ Interview with Robson Rodrigues, former UPP Commander and researcher. 09/04/2023. k63dp; Interview with Michel Misse, sociologist and Rio security expert. 26/04/2023. g1wzd; Interview with Lia Rocha, sociologist with experience researching local violence. 11/04/2023. es85e; Interview with former official who worked for Rio's Security Secretary (2012-2016). 17/04/2023. omu9y

PUI infrastructure programme. The municipality's augmented financial resources were also key to funding the installation of CAI police bases in OCG-dominated comunas. Indeed, although the Colombian police are a national institution, municipal resources matter significantly in shaping local policing capacity. This contrast is underscored when comparing Medellín to Buenaventura, which lacks the resources to invest in building-up the local police, despite hosting port complexes that generate enormous wealth. The dislocations between (licit) economic and political elites are thus key to understanding the divergent localized politics of security in both Colombian cases. In Monterrey, the private sector also pledged important resources to building the Fuerza Civil. That said, like the UPP, the Fuerza Civil was extremely costly. Once economic elites stopped investing, the emergency payroll tax having expired, Fuerza Civil's deterioration became evident; recall that El Bronco's hostility towards the force partly stemmed from the financial burden it represented.

Naturally, besides finances, elite coordination also afforded subnational State authorities the manpower needed to begin countering and containing OCG threats. While the deployment of national forces to subnational spaces is *no substitute* for having high-capacity local police (Juárez, Buenaventura, and Monterrey all attest to this) these forces can *still* play a key role in helping build State territorial control in MUCs at the local level. That is, even if military interventions alone are *insufficient* to build territorial control (especially in the long-term), they can still provide vital operational support towards this end. In Medellín, the deployment of military forces was essential to the State capturing Comuna 13 under *Operación Orión* (as well as other comunas). In Monterrey, while the military's *Operativo Nuevo León* failed to contain the city's OCG security threat in isolation, military officers would go on to offer important support to Fuerza Civil units when they first took to the streets, providing these "green" policing units with operational backing in their efforts to take control of the city's MUCs. In Rio, transfers of materiel to the local police beginning in 2007 provided major injections of equipment to

the PMERJ, and when the UPP was underway, the use of soldiers (not just BOPE forces) underpinned State efforts to begin “pacifying” particularly large and violent favelas (e.g., Alemão and Maré).

Furthermore, my cases also show that elite support helped shield ambitious State responses to OCG threats from criticism. In Medellín, Sergio Fajardo benefitted from high levels of support from the GEA, whose ties to local media were well-known. Whether the positive publicity these connections afforded him were crucial to the success of the *State Territorial Expansion* that occurred under his administration is debatable, but it certainly didn’t hurt it, particularly as these MUC interventions were also reliant on otherwise uncomfortable political realities; namely, Don Berna’s hegemony and the (tacit and transactional) relations his “Oficina” maintained with different State actors. Recall also that in the case of Monterrey, I argued that it was only *after* elite unity began to fray that the evident deficiencies in the Fuerza Civil began to come to light. Given that insider testimony indicates that these deficiencies were *longstanding*, it is reasonable to infer that elite cohesion had previously protected the reformed police force, glowing publicity having masked evident shortcomings. A similar case to that of Monterrey can be made for Rio. Problems with the UPP existed from the very start, even during the programme’s initial period of success: UPP recruits, like those of Fuerza Civil, were not the high-quality candidates initially envisaged by reformers, and indeed while training did deteriorate as the programme became overextended,⁴⁴² some experts argue it was never as distinct from mainstream PMERJ training as UPP’s most vociferous supporters suggested.⁴⁴³ Indeed, one UPP commander admitted he had never received any specialized training before taking charge of UPP units.⁴⁴⁴ Therefore, the role of the media in publicizing the merits of the programme during its initial rollout, may have arguably helped conceal some of its inadequacies. Luiz Eduardo Soares had a slightly

⁴⁴² Interview with Lia Rocha, sociologist with experience researching local violence. 11/04/2023. es85e

⁴⁴³ Interview with researcher on violence and policing. 03/04/2022, 87n7f

⁴⁴⁴ Interview with former UPP officer stationed in Pavão-Pavãozinho, Mangueira, Rocinha, and Complexo São Carlos. 17/04/2023. v80zi

different take. As the UPP took root, he had argued that “[it] has no future. There’s no way for it to advance because as soon as the press stops covering it daily, we will see extortion, extrajudicial executions, and renegotiated [Police-OCG] agreements”.⁴⁴⁵ In other words, intensive media coverage, supplied by sympathetic local networks such as *Globo*, was providing oversight to the UPP, but in so doing was allowing it to avoid serious scrutiny, and thus spread without political elites undertaking the deep institutional reforms it required for lasting success. Perhaps, as Rio’s elite coalition broke apart, and Cabral’s government came into disrepute, the protective role of the media declined, thus exposing the inherent deficiencies of the UPP.

Cases such as Rio and Monterrey therefore clearly underscore the difficulty of sustaining and consolidating localized efforts at police reform (the *Security Reform* outcome in my theoretical framework), as does Ciudad Juárez. Indeed, to reiterate a point made earlier in this thesis, there is no guarantee that efforts at *Security Reform* will succeed, even with supportive coalitions of elite actors. Purges and recruitment drives yielded mixed results in Monterrey, even if they did— in conjunction with new financing— help boost the autonomy and resources of the local police force. In Juárez, the results were far more dubious, with the municipal police gaining greater coercive capacity under Leyzaola, but still suffering from persistent institutional corruption. While this has left the local police better equipped to *Contain* OCG security threats, the successes of the reform process are questionable. In Rio, the power of the PMERJ has been a persistent barrier to effective reform, hindering reform efforts and experimentation in the 1990s and early 2000s, and then also contributing to undermining the UPP (we return to this again shortly).

⁴⁴⁵ Interview with Luiz Eduardo Soares, former Subsecretary of Security (Rio) and former National Secretary for Public Security. 26/04/2023. 2e9xn

1.3 Police Institutional Capacity: Reviewing its Impact

Moving beyond the dynamics of coordination between elite decisionmakers, my theoretical framework also contends that the capacity endowments of the street-level bureaucrats deployed to MUCs, in this case the local police, are key to enabling the State to build territorial control in these locales. Specifically, my cases demonstrate the relevance of the two facets of police institutional capacity identified in my framework— police *resources* and *autonomy*— for explaining my outcome of interest. While at the point at which each of my case studies began, these two dimensions of police institutional capacity rested at a particular level, as we have seen, capacity can alter in response to shifting patterns of elite coordination, the reform processes these galvanize, and indeed conditions faced by police in the MUCs to which they are deployed.

Police need the manpower, equipment, and finances to effectively control territories in which State actions and mobility have (long) been restricted by armed OCGs. As we saw in Monterrey during the Zetas' urban conquest, in Medellín during the 1990s when the police were some of the least well-financed across any of Colombia's major cities, and in both Ciudad Juárez and Buenaventura at the onset of armed territorial competition, police with low manpower, poor equipment, and low coercive capacity presented little disincentive to the expansion of armed OCGs, and the spread of criminal and political violence beyond MUCs and into the very centres of urban administrative and economic power. *Unchecked OCG Competition* emerged in all instances. Indeed, given the persistently low resources of Buenaventura's local police force, this has now been the prevailing outcome in the city's MUCs for *decades*. While certainly a history of police-OCG collusion has blighted law enforcement in this city, it seems unlikely that these low levels of autonomy persist across the local police as once they did. What is clear is that Buenaventura's police simply lack the manpower to effectively control the city's slums. When locally available "boots-on-the-ground" have been increased by external police and

military deployments, temporary increases in State territorial control *have* been achieved in targeted areas.

In Rio de Janeiro, by contrast, my case study begins by discussing the PMERJ, a high-resource local policing institution, but one with *low levels of autonomy*. In Rio, the combination of these variables has produced a situation in which PMERJ battalions routinely use their considerable coercive power to extort favela-based OCGs. Thus, while increases in institutional resources were key to the UPP's expansion, what was arguably more crucial to the initial success of *both* the GPAE and UPP were the efforts to ensure effective oversight and increase policy *autonomy* from criminal actors. Of course, in both instances, these were unsuccessful in the long-term. Still, while decreasing levels of police autonomy from OCGs undermined attempts at building State territorial control in the case of Rio, it is *not necessarily* the case that low police autonomy impedes State territorial control in MUCs. Indeed, Rio is somewhat idiosyncratic in this regard. In Medellín, close cooperation between some elements of the State's local security and law enforcement apparatuses, as well as tacit agreements (and collaboration) between beat-cops and the *combos*, were key to facilitating *State Territorial Expansion*. Corrupt entanglements persist to this day. Of course, Medellín's territorial expansion was underpinned by the dramatic growth in police *resources*, rather than simply the collaboration that ensued between cops and criminals thanks to low police autonomy. As we have seen, in cases where police had *low autonomy in conjunction with low resources* (e.g., early in my case studies of Medellín, Monterrey and Ciudad Juárez), police were highly vulnerable to OCG violence, and were killed with alarming frequency

My cases have also shown that levels of police autonomy are important in shaping governance outcomes in MUCs. Under the initial rollouts of the UPP and GPAE, when police autonomy from OCGs was high, OCG actors diminished their role in regulating community life, even if their influence did not disappear entirely. These actors *adapted* in response to the presence of high autonomy police.

This stands in stark contrast to the patterns of governance seen in areas where the PMERJ has maintained ties with local militias (see Arias, 2017), and have coproduced governance with these actors, or where PMERJ battalions have received corrupt payoffs from drug retailers in exchange for non-intervention, and so ceded control of these areas to criminals and allowed them to organize the governance of favela populations. In Medellín, governance of the city's MUCs has been coproduced by State and OCG actors since *State Territorial Expansion* began in 2004. Indeed, at the localized level of the comuna, there is abundant evidence that police retain linkages with OCGs. Still, the autonomy of the police has clearly augmented since the heights of police collaboration with paramilitary and then post-paramilitary structures. This has meant that some of the more egregious forms of OCG involvement in civilian affairs have decreased, with OCGs adapting to the increasing territorial presence and heightened autonomy of police. OCGs, for example, are far less involved in controlling community centres and organizing votes than they were in the immediate post-paramilitary period. Nonetheless, they still impose rules on the populations within their turfs, punish infractions, and (tacitly) coordinate with police to uphold order.

Finally, in reviewing the cases, it is worth underscoring once more the *relative* nature of police institutional capacity. Police may have sufficient capacity to accomplish certain tasks, however this can grow or decline in accordance with changing duties and objectives. In Rio, while the PMERJ's resources were arguably consistently "high" throughout my case study, the expansion of the UPP led a (shrinking) pool of resources being spread ever more thinly across the city's MUCs. The number of UPP officers in pacified favelas reduced as they were assigned to new territories, decreasing their relative manpower in different areas, and thus their capacity to exert territorial control. Moreover, as the UPP became overextended, instead of fixed police bases being built, or installed in existing buildings, repurposed freight containers were increasingly used as "bases" for police. These lacked air-conditioning, basic facilities such as working toilets and kitchens, and provided no protection against

attacks from the high-calibre weaponry used by Rio's OCGs.⁴⁴⁶ Levels of police resources *relative* to the MUCs they sought to control thus declined, even while the PMERJ as a whole still remained a far more “resource-rich” police force than those seen in other cases.

While elite coordination is therefore the *main driver* of State efforts to build territorial control in MUCs, the case studies have shown that police capacity is *also* a vitally important factor in *achieving this outcome*. Additionally, police capacity is not only *necessary* to increase State territorial control, but it also plays a unique role in shaping the systems of *governance* that emerge in MUCs following State intervention, conditioning *how* OCGs adapt to the increasing presence of the State in their turfs.

Having discussed the relevance of my explanatory variables across the case studies, we now turn to the alternative explanations.

2. Considering the Alternatives

Given that scholars have focussed more on the effects of (State and nonstate) territorial control, rather than on the processes which produce its variation, there are no existing theories to my knowledge which provide a direct alternative to the argument outlined here. That said, the foundations of this argument, that both elite coordination and police institutional capacity are necessary to explain augmentations in State territorial control, should be scrutinized, and their explanatory strength gauged vis-à-vis plausible alternatives. Recall that in the introduction, I used my case selection to rule out certain alternative explanations by design. These included the possibility that State capacity in the aggregate explains subnational outcomes in terms of territorial control, the impact of institutional

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with former UPP Coordinator in Cidade de Deus and Complexo do Lins. (2010-2016). 24/04/2023, ajbx8; Interview with researcher on violence and policing. 03/04/2022, 87n7f; Interview with resident of Cidade de Deus who has researched UPP, 05/05/2023. 56ktn

design (unitary versus federal States), and OCG type— all OCGs studied here are “territorial OCGs”, also known as “Governance-type” organised crime. Below, I now draw together plausible alternative explanations for the different stages of my theory. I organize these thematically in three subsections, in accordance with the different sequential stages of my theory.

2.1 Elite coordination in response to Threats

Rent Extraction

Firstly, might increases in State territorial control emerge not as responses to *OCG threats*, but rather as manifestations of corrupt *rent-seeking* by State actors? While it is true that State repression can be used to squeeze criminal groups for resources (Feldman and Luna, 2023; Lessing, 2018), I do not believe that rent-seeking State actors will seek to increase *State territorial control* in OCG dominated areas. I thus sustain that political elites project State authority in order to maintain popular support and safeguard their reputations. If State actors want kick-backs from OCGs, then they are more likely to punish them in the short-term (through temporary crackdowns), not risk putting them out of business by potentially extending rule-of-law institutions in the long-term. While corrupt police may use repression to extract money from OCGs (as in Rio de Janeiro or Ciudad Juárez), it is far less likely that *political elites* will be incentivized to squeeze *criminal gangs* in this way. Corrupt political elites certainly use State repression to get pay-offs from lucrative criminal enterprises (for example, narcotrafficking), but are less likely to do so with territorial OCGs in deprived urban neighbourhoods. This is not to say that corrupt rent-seeking by political elites in MUCs never happens. Indeed, in Rio, police and militia groups with ties to local politicians have evidently coordinated to take over particular favelas, with the aim of securing rents and votes. However, in terms of galvanizing efforts at *State Territorial Expansion*, my case studies all clearly show the primacy of OCG security threats in this regard, *not* incentives relating to extraction. An important takeaway suggested by my framework, therefore, is

that when it comes to the politics of security, politicians do not seek to contest OCG territorial control to *maximize gains*, but rather to *minimize losses*.

Urban Political Economies: Moncada (2016)

In explaining my outcome of interest, the *effects* of elite coordination or division are ultimately more important than its causes. Still, Moncada (2016) argues that cities display distinct types of political economy. These in turn condition the possibility of private sector collective action, and thus influence the relations between business and politics. As a result, they can affect the efficacy of State responses to insecurity at the city-level (though note that Moncada is not concerned with explaining territorial control). While I do not lay out the entirety of Moncada's argument here, given its complexity, suffice to say that while some areas of his theory are arguably relevant to my case studies, his argument cannot simply be carried over.

Firstly, I do not deny the relevance of urban political economies; clearly, the connections between politics and business play an important role in shaping the efficacy of State responses to OCG threats, as my cases have repeatedly shown. However, Moncada's categorisation of business-politics relations as simply conflictive, disengaged, or collaborative, fails to capture the nuances of when and why economic elites become involved *specifically in the politics of urban security* and seek to mitigate OCG threats *through the State*. In the cases of both Rio and Monterrey, for example, relations between the local government and "big business" have been very longstanding, with recent histories of close involvement between both sets of actors. These political economies are therefore typified by *collaborative, engaged* relations. However, powerful private sector actors only sought to involve themselves in the *politics of public security* under very particular circumstances, once the recourse to *private security* was insufficient to safeguard their particular interests. In other words, there can be close collaboration between government and the private sector on a host of policy issues (indeed, this is

arguably the case for *all* of my case studies), without economic elite actors having any bearing on the politics of urban security. Overarching types of *political economy* and *business-politics linkages* therefore fail to explain why economic elites choose to involve themselves specifically in security matters; by focusing on actors' changing incentives across time, my theory has greater explanatory leverage in this regard.

Moreover, Moncada's distinction between *encompassing* and *segmented* business communities *is* useful. Indeed, all *positive* cases in this thesis are ones in which economic elite collective action was more easily achieved thanks to the existence of *encompassing* business communities in which diverse business elites shared linkages (Medellín, Monterrey, Rio⁴⁴⁷). Negative cases included *segmented* business communities, in which particular local industries had greater political power vis-à-vis their counterparts (Ciudad Juárez, Buenaventura). However, to account for changes in my outcome of interest, constants such as business community configurations have limited explanatory leverage in comparison to the dynamic, interactive processes of elite coordination I have laid out in this thesis.⁴⁴⁸ How could we account for the breakdown in elite coordination and territorial control in Rio if encompassing business communities were in fact integral to these outcomes? What is more, I have argued, in line with Fairfield (2015), that it is the *instrumental power* of business groups that is key to explaining their ability to shape the politics of security. While this *often* goes hand-in-hand with business community configurations, it does not necessarily: we could well imagine a case in which a city's local business community has encompassing ties, but lacks the instrumental power to lobby political elites at the national level of government; likewise, Buenaventura exemplifies a segmented business community with very high instrumental power.

⁴⁴⁷ Although I do not have absolute clarity as to whether Rio meets the threshold of having an “encompassing business community” by Moncada's standard, there is a strong case to be made for this based on the available evidence.

⁴⁴⁸ Of course, Moncada is not arguing for the singular importance of business community configurations.

Finally, and perhaps most crucially, Moncada argues that collaborative ties between local mayors and business communities are useful in minimizing the *scope* of responses to urban violence; effectively, close ties mitigate against other actors interceding in local responses to insecurity, including higher tiers of government. By contrast, I have argued— and demonstrated *especially* through the case of Monterrey— that one of the key roles of the private sector in the politics of urban violence can be in *bringing in* the national government, and ensuring coordination between national and subnational actors. Indeed, while minimizing the involvement of the national government may be key to ensuring the sustainability of “participatory” responses to insecurity (Moncada’s outcome of interest), I maintain that ensuring the support of political elites at the national level is key to the success of local efforts at expanding State territorial control, especially in the long-term.

In sum, it is evident that political economies can shape State responses to OCG insecurity. However, in understanding how and why this is the case, my theory shows that the static *structure* of a given urban political economy is less relevant than the *agency* of the different elites that comprise it, their evolving incentives, and whether business actors’ interests are sufficiently protected through the recourse to private protection.

2.2 Building the State in Marginalised Urban Communities

Community Support and Embeddedness

Transitioning away from the domain of elite interactions, we now turn to alternative explanations that pertain to MUCs themselves. Rather than simply associating increases in State territorial control with the institutional capacity of the police, an alternative explanation worth considering is whether *bottom-up support from civilian populations* in MUCs does not in fact undergird the success of these localized efforts at territorial expansion. To some extent, this follows the logic of modern counterinsurgency

strategy (COIN), whereby territorial control is consolidated not simply through the presence of armed actors, but by winning over civilians' 'hearts and minds' at the local level.

Following the COIN logic, we might reason that where States were more effective at extending services and other public goods (that is, providing 'thicker' forms of governance) they were better positioned to maintain territorial control, having more fully embedded themselves in targeted communities and garnered greater bottom-up support. In this sense, increasing State *governance* might activate community support, which in turn may lead to more durable State *territorial control*.

Certainly, this logic seems plausible if we consider Medellín, where a holistic set of interventions into the city's comunas accompanied durable *State Territorial Expansion*. However, the picture is not straightforward, and the mechanism of community support facilitating State territorial control dubious. Firstly, even if in Medellín's comunas the State has acquired a far greater role in governing than in decades past, governance in these spaces is still divided with armed OCGs, and many MUC residents still view State (and OCG) actors with scepticism and distrust. The State has increased its territorial control over many MUCs, and governs with far greater intensity than it did previously, but there is no evidence to suggest that bottom-up support for the State in targeted communities has been a key factor in ensuring durable control. While initially during Fajardo's administration there was considerable emphasis on ensuring community participation in MUC development spending, this has declined significantly since. Still, State presence in Medellín's MUCs continues to grow.

Secondly, there is no clear link between community "embeddedness", popular support, and the sustainability of State territorial control in Rio de Janeiro. On the one hand, Beltrame himself said that "retaking" favela territory could not rely on the UPPs alone, but required social services and investment— recognizing a need for multifaceted State interventions into the favelas to boost State governance (Bottari and Gonçalves, 2011; De Aquino, 2016). Similarly, favela residents at the time

demanded greater services and public goods alongside the installation of UPPs. Of course, the UPP Social never truly delivered, and many of the investments and infrastructure developments in favelas failed to address residents' needs (including white elephant projects such as the cable cars). *And yet*, under the UPP programme State territorial control clearly increased in many favelas. One might retort that given the lack of multifaceted State institutional embeddedness in the favelas, it is no surprise that these gains in State territorial control eventually collapsed. Still, as I have argued, the decline in the UPP can be better explained by other factors, rather than simply a lack of community buy-in.

Thirdly, in Monterrey, increases in State governance in MUCs were minimal, especially in comparison to Medellín or Rio. Even so, State territorial control in this case *did* increase, albeit in a limited manner. Finally, in Ciudad Juárez, a massive injection of federal cash through *Todos Somos Juárez* led to significant increases in infrastructure and social spending in MUCs in 2012. This did not, however, lay the foundations for durable increases in State territorial control.

Thus, extending governance and garnering local support appears to have had a dubious effect on securing State territorial control; States can increase territorial control without “winning over” locals with services and public goods provisions. This reinforces why, although *territorial control* and *governance* overlap considerably, these concepts must be considered separately. None of this is to say that investment in building-up a multifaceted State institutional presence in MUCs, and embedding the State in these deprived areas is not a *worthwhile endeavour*; it certainly is. However, that this encourages community support for the State, and thus that this is instrumental in explaining outcomes in territorial control, is not borne out by the evidence. The *top-down* factors in my framework, and not *bottom-up* factors such as community support, have greater explanatory power.

State Security Forces— Cohesive or Fragmented? Durán-Martínez (2018)

Instead of looking at the *institutional capacity* of the local police, might coordination *among* State security forces not offer a better explanation for the State's ability to augment its territorial control? This builds off insights by Durán-Martínez (2018), who argues that State fragmentation exists on multiple levels (beyond just inter-governmental alignment) and that these in turn affects localised security outcomes. One important variety of fragmentation, in this line of thinking, is between different State security forces. In brief, fragmented security forces are both ineffective at *coercing* OCGs and unable to uphold the *credible commitments* necessary for sustaining corrupt equilibria; by contrast, cohesive security forces are. Fragmented security forces are therefore far less effective at imposing State order on OCGs than are cohesive ones.

Certainly, coordination across security forces in local settings does appear to be key to *dismantling* OCGs. In Medellín, greater integration across intelligence agencies, the police, and military, was key to breaking down criminal structures after Don Berna's extradition led to the onset of inter-OCG conflict. Prior to this, occupations of OCG territories relied on coordinated actions between the military and police (as well as paramilitaries), most famously under *Operación Orión*. A similar case can be made with regard to Monterrey. The State's fight against the Zetas began to advance only after ongoing military actions were integrated with the deployment of the newly formed Fuerza Civil, and the intelligence capabilities of the different State agencies operating in the metropolitan area were pooled and coordinated. The creation of *Centros de Fusión* was key to facilitating this coordination. In Rio de Janeiro, while the military and other forces deployed by the national government were instrumental in occupying highly conflictive favela complexes such as Maré, it is not the case that there were high levels of coordination between the different security forces active in the city. Indeed, deficits in inter-institutional collaboration between the PMERJ and Rio's investigative Civil Police persisted

during this time. This extended to the UPP bases, which like the GPAE before them, lacked investigative and intelligence-gathering capabilities. Still, while a lack of security force coordination may plausibly account for the failure to dismantle OCG structures in Rio, it is clear that State territorial control expanded despite this.

Indeed, while most of my cases therefore support Durán-Martínez's core contention (security force cohesion diminishes OCG violence), the evidence that coordination between security forces helps develop State territorial control is less compelling. In Buenaventura, there is a high level of coordination between navy, coastguard, army, and police. These actors regularly meet with the mayor, dialogue among themselves, and share intelligence, ensuring clear operational mandates and divisions of labour. One consequence of this is that only the local police are present in the city's MUCs on anything like a routine basis (besides occasional joint operations). State security force cohesion, in this case, has not therefore been conducive to augmenting State territorial control. Moreover, in Ciudad Juárez, it is evident that the institutionalisation of the Mesa de Seguridad since 2012 has brought far greater coordination across the municipal and state police, as well as federal forces operating in the city. While this has made the State far more effective at repressing OCG violence (in-line with Durán-Martínez), this same coordination has not produced durable expansions of State territorial control into Juárez's MUCs. As with community embeddedness, there are undeniably benefits to ensuring effective coordination across the State's security forces; this can be crucial in decreasing OCG violence, as Durán-Martínez has shown. Still, this variety of coordination, does not help explain increases in State territorial control.

2.3 OCGs and Violence

My theory is unapologetically State-centric. Still, while I have elaborated on how different *State* actors—namely political elites and the police—are involved in shaping patterns of territorial control, the extant

literature points to numerous characteristics of *OCGs* that might also be highly influential to this process. Again, rather than simply assuming that increases in State territorial control derive from *top-down* impositions by the State, these would suggest that contextual factors in MUCs, including *bottom-up* resistance by OCGs, are more relevant.

OCG Territorial Competition

Very plausibly, the degree of OCG territorial competition in a city might impact the State's ability to increase its control over marginalised communities. Numerous studies have demonstrated that where multiple rivalrous OCGs operate within a given area, and thus control is divided, violent competition is likely to ensue (Barnes, 2021; Arias, 2017; Durán-Martínez, 2018; Moncada, 2016). In areas with violent OCG competition, such as MUCs, heightened insecurity and turbulence *can* mean that States might struggle to implement policy effectively. By contrast, where control is monopolized by a *single* criminal organisation, there is scholarly consensus that violence tends to be lower. This in turn provides stability and can thus afford State actors with greater latitude to act and implement decisions. From this we might intuit that criminal monopolies (controlled by hegemonic groups), or indeed atomized criminal landscapes (with multiple low-level armed groups), are more propitious for the expansion of State territorial control than divided ones (with two or more organised criminal belligerents).

At the macro-level of the city, in all of my case studies in which *State territorial control increased*, this occurred amid *divided* criminal landscapes. Perhaps Medellín can be considered an exception to this, as initially *State Territorial Expansion* occurred amid Don Berna's hegemony. Still, as outlined already, State territorial control continued to grow *even after* this monopoly broke down. Thus, while inter-OCG competition can encourage violence, it does not necessarily compromise the State's ability to

(re)claim territory. Indeed, where police have sufficient capacity, their presence can encourage OCG restraint, decreasing violence, as my case studies have shown.

Still, arguably this is a question of aggregation, and of the geographical level at which the analysis has been pitched. When we dive into *specific* MUCs, it becomes evident those in which OCG territorial control was divided, and violent criminal competition ongoing, State actors often *did* face greater challenges in building territorial control than in those in which this was absent. As Barnes (2021) has shown, when OCGs in Rio's Complexo da Maré felt actively threatened by the possibility of territorial conquest from their rivals, they would violently resist not only these competitors, but also the State, which at the time marshalled overwhelming military force, having undertaken a military occupation of the favela complex.

Still, at the micro-level of individual MUCs, we nonetheless find variation; it does not appear to be universally the case that OCG territorial competition/territorial hegemony neatly aligns with greater/lesser difficulty for the State in building territorial control and mitigating OCG-related insecurity. Indeed, also drawing on evidence from Rio, Magaloni et al. (2020) have shown that even in territories monopolized by single OCGs, State security forces confronted very different challenges. Whereas State actors faced armed criminal resistance and alienated civilian populations in some monopolized favelas, they found community support and minimal resistance from OCGs in others. Patterns of criminal territorial control therefore interact with other variables to shape OCG behaviour (including the recourse to violence). Thus, even at the micro-level, we cannot consistently explain localized outcomes based on the extent of OCG territorial competition alone.

To briefly digress, as the preceding discussion shows, studies at the micro-level of individual neighbourhoods are evidently extremely important. These add texture and nuance to accounts of urban violence— such as my own— that are focused at higher levels of analysis. Even so, a focus on

city-level processes remains important in its own right, but also is not completely disassociated from changes occurring on a more magnified geographical scale. Indeed, allowing for the fascinating heterogeneity observed between neighbourhoods, my theory can still speak to changing patterns of territorial control occurring at the micro-level. To return to the (evidently problematic) case of Rio, while patterns of OCG territorial competition, as well as other highly localized factors, *do* help to explain variation in the State's ability to build territorial control in *specific* micro-level territories, it is still the case that State territorial across many different MUCs *increased* as the UPP on the whole expanded, and *decreased* when it then then collapsed. The particularities of individual favelas do not preclude identifying a more general trend. Accounting for why this trend emerged, and produced comparable outcomes *across multiple favelas*, is therefore valuable. Nuances at the MUC-level do not dispel the relevance of identifying changing patterns of territorial control at the city-level.

OCG (Coercive) Capacity

Rather than simply consider the *institutional capacity of the police*, might not *the capacity of OCGs* instead be key to determining the distribution of territorial control? Indeed, if territorial control is a “bargaining outcome” (Giraudy and Luna, 2017), it makes sense to account for the organisational capacity of criminal groups, which includes their ability to resist State incursions into their territories. In all three positive cases, the State faced very well-organised, para-militarized, OCG structures, with a high capacity for resistance. While in both Medellín and Monterrey, these groups recruited local (less organised) gangs, and in Rio groups such as the CV *are* prison gangs, in all cases these actors exerted high levels of coercive and organisational capacity. Still, allowing for micro-level heterogeneity as acknowledged already, this did not prevent the State from building territorial control in each instance. Indeed, the State's coercive capacity *almost always* exceeds that of OCGs, at least in the urban settings considered here.

Instead of simply considering OCG coercive capacity in isolation, it is more apposite to consider this in conjunction with the *relations* that OCGs have with the State. Hence, my theory has also considered the autonomy of police from criminal organisations. In Rio, a predatory, high-resource and low-autonomy police force has engaged in perennial conflict with OCGs, such as the CV, which have high coercive capabilities of its own; in Monterrey, a high-resource and high-autonomy police force was successful in subduing a high-capacity OCG; in Medellín, high-resource but low-autonomy police faced scant resistance from post-paramilitary structures. Simply put, OCGs with high coercive capacity can use this to resist *State Territorial Expansion*, but this does not mean they *will*, nor that they will *succeed* in repelling the State if they try. In sum, at least in the cases examined here, OCG coercive capacity does not explain whether States are capable of building territorial control in MUCs.

What about other assets of OCG structures, beyond their coercive capacity? Certainly, based on the extant literature, we might assume that where OCGs had occupied and controlled MUC territories for longer, and perhaps (extrapolating upwards some of the logics seen at the micro-level),⁴⁴⁹ where they had developed ‘thicker’ systems of local governance and more sophisticated local level orders, the State might face a greater challenge in building territorial control. As Chapter 3 showed, there is considerable variation in this regard across my case sites. This possibility, however, is not borne out by the evidence from my cases: histories of OCG embeddedness and expansive governance do not inhibit successful *State Territorial Expansion*. Quite to the contrary, it appears that where OCGs have been embedded in territories for *longer* and developed *expansive* systems of civilian governance, the State has actually sought to implement the most robust and comprehensive efforts at building territorial control in the MUCs they occupy (take Medellín and Rio). Indeed, this might plausibly suggest that localized efforts at expanding territorial control are at least in-part influenced by the extent

⁴⁴⁹ For example, see Magaloni et al. (2020).

to which OCGs consolidate de facto nonstate orders and parallel systems of governance. Understanding how this fits into the choices made by policy decisionmakers, however, is best considered in future research.

Conditionality and Anti-State Violence: Lessing (2018)

Finally, in keeping with the arguments outlined above, it is plausible that anti-State violence spurred by *unconditional repression* might diminish the State's ability to build territorial control. In this alternative, elite coordination and police capacity are relevant to explaining variation in territorial control only insofar as they affect the conditionality of State repression. Lessing (2018) argues that where State forces repress OCGs irrespective of how violent they are (unconditional repression), then OCGs will resort to anti-State violence in order to change State policy. Clearly, escalating anti-State violence in a marginalised community is likely to severely undermine any attempt by the State to secure territorial control. The alternative explanation we can import from Lessing's research, therefore, is that States will be able to build territorial control in OCG-dominated spaces only where they uphold *conditional repression*; by contrast, *unconditional repression* will trigger anti-State violence, and thus a breakdown in State territorial control.

As shown in my cases, policies of conditional repression certainly can help facilitate *State Territorial Expansion*. In Medellín, the State's decided not to actively persecute post-paramilitary groups, and these armed nonstate actors in turn ensured that violence in the comunas was controlled. In Monterrey, the State began to win back control over the metropolitan area after shifting towards purposefully attacking only the most violent cartels; the Zetas being the primary target. The same is also true for Rio, where the UPP disproportionately intervened in turfs controlled by the CV, the city's most notorious and brazenly hostile OCG. Anti-State violence *also* accompanied the breakdown of State territorial control in this latter case, as Lessing has previously shown.

As such, ensuring conditionality is arguably beneficial to State efforts at *Territorial Expansion*. However, conditionality does not provide greater explanatory leverage than my own theory in explaining my outcome of interest. Indeed, Mayor Federico Gutiérrez' in Medellín launched what was arguably an unconditional crackdown on OCGs, but this did not produce anti-State violence, nor did it lead to a retrenchment in State territorial control in peripheral comunas. In Buenaventura, State security forces do not generally face violent resistance from OCGs (unlike in the past) and yet they remain unable—and unwilling—to control the city's slums. Clearly, anti-State violence is *not conducive* to (building or maintaining) State territorial control, but it is also a rare phenomenon. While conditionality provides important leverage for understanding particular varieties of OCG violence, and certainly is not irrelevant to my case studies, my theoretical framework remains more suitable for understanding variation in territorial control in MUCs.

3. Reflections on Territorial Control and Empirical Complexity

My theoretical framework therefore holds-up across the cases studied: there is sufficient evidence to substantiate my claims that State territorial control in MUCs is determined by the presence of OCG security threats, and the subsequent interaction of elite coordination and police institutional capacity. Alternative explanations point to many plausible and relevant factors, but still lack the explanatory power of my theory.

To close this chapter, I highlight important nuances about what expansions of territorial control into OCG-dominated territories mean in practice, and address some of the complexities and idiosyncrasies of the cases.

Firstly, as posited at the beginning of this thesis, given that the logics of *State* and *criminal* territorial control are not mutually exclusive, increases in State territorial control do not necessarily drive out

organised criminal actors. In Rio de Janeiro, some CV-controlled areas witnessed evacuations of OCGs with the arrival of the UPPs. However, very often, pacified favelas retained some presence of organised criminal actors and illicit economies. In others, OCG actors never stopped confronting the State, and would simply shift their activities to parts of the favela in which State actors were still absent. In Medellín, the arrival of the State to the long neglected comunas did not reduce the presence of OCGs in these spaces. OCGs, who had close linkages with State actors during the first period of *State Territorial Expansion*, instead stayed put, and retained enormous power over community life. In Monterrey, the State *did* clear out Zeta presence from many MUCs, forcing a severe territorial retrenchment for this OCG by decimating its urban cells. That said, attempts to build a multifaceted State institutional presence in the city's colonias were limited.

Where OCGs *did* remain in territories now controlled by the State, the presence of police with high institutional capacity prompted behavioural changes from these actors. As expected, OCGs generally ceased to openly brandish weapons as once they had, and took measures to ensure that illicit economic activities became more surreptitious. While I presented evidence of this in several case studies, the starkest examples came from Rio de Janeiro, where following the installation of UPP bases in favelas, open drug markets disappeared (with drug retail now being conducted from houses and backpacks), blockades between communities were lifted, and OCGs ceased to patrol their turfs armed with assault rifles. Still, adaptation and the exercise of increasing restraint *does not* mean that OCGs cease to be involved in community life, and in fact they often continue to exercise some role in dispute resolution and settling interpersonal grievances even when forced to share territory with the State. In this same vein, my evidence broadly supports the notion that increasing State territorial control and governance does not necessarily “crowd-out” OCG governance. Indeed, nowhere exhibits this fact better than Medellín, where even in areas in which the State developed an expansive institutional presence, such as in Comuna 13, local *combos* jumped to take advantage of new market opportunities. Increasing State

territorial control does not therefore amount to OCG exclusion, and increasing State governance does not mean decreasing *OCG governance*. Governance by both actors can intensify (Blattman et al., 2021).

That said, increases in State territorial control in particular MUCs did produce other, secondary effects, which are worth acknowledging. While my three positive case studies detailed how subnational governments in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico were able to achieve *State Territorial Expansion*, in all three instances there were also *displacement effects*. In Medellín, while the State has continued to increase its territorial control in MUCs, local security experts noted in our conversations that other areas of the metropolis had since 2012 (and the end of the war between alias *Sebastián* and alias *Valenciano*) witnessed OCG expansion. Bello, a separate municipality immediately adjacent to Medellín, has thus reportedly become increasingly prone to OCG violence, as different factions from Medellín's criminal underworld vie for control over the territory. In Monterrey, similarly, the crackdown on OCG violence in particularly high-crime and stigmatized colonias such as La Independencia, San Bernabé, and La Campana did break the hold that OCGs held over large swathes of these communities (though recall that parts of these neighbourhoods still remain effectively off-limits to State actors). That said, other colonias, generally towards the peripheries of the metropolitan area, have since begun to see the emergence of patterns of OCG control and violence akin to those previously seen closer to the urban centre. In Rio, the UPP programme is widely acknowledged to have successfully driven many CV and other OCG "foot soldiers" out of the favelas it targeted. However, what has also gained widespread recognition is the fact that with the UPPs expansion, many other favelas throughout the *Baixada Fluminense*— part of the broader Rio metropolitan area— were then captured by OCGs. Once State territorial control in the favelas broke down, however, OCGs did not simply *abandon* these new turfs. Instead, they retook their old territories, whilst retaining control over the new ones as well.

In all three cases where the State increased its territorial control, therefore, this prompted some degree of OCG migration, bringing criminal actors to areas in which they had previously been absent. Medellín, Monterrey, and Rio therefore act as microcosms of the so-called “balloon effect”, whereby pressure applied to OCG actors in one area or market encourages them to move to another. This does not negate the gains in territorial control made by the State in the MUCs it targeted in each instance, but certainly does complicate the picture. Increasing State control in previously OCG-dominated areas may therefore not only *fail to drive criminal actors out* of these spaces (and instead simply encourage them to exercise restraint and undergo processes of adaptation), but it seemingly also encourages them to *seek out new territories* for their illegal enterprises. Certainly, this is a concerning finding. Just as increasing State governance in a territory does not necessarily crowd-out OCG governance, but rather can lead to its adaptation and intensification, so too it seems that increasing State territorial control can in some areas lead to the proliferation of OCG territorial control in others.

3.1 Acknowledging Complexity

Finally, I now address some of the complexities of the empirical case studies and how these align with my theoretical framework.

Monterrey and Ciudad Juárez are often compared as examples of successful responses to OCG insecurity in subnational arenas in Mexico; both brought together coalitions of State and private sector actors, both initiated security reforms to overhaul the local police, both invested in infrastructure in MUCs, and both were able to reduce OCG violence following the onset of acute security crises. And yet, I have sought to distinguish sharply between the outcomes of the two cities here. As I have emphasized, only a limited form of *State Territorial Expansion* was achieved in Monterrey; while policing presence in the city’s MUCs increased notably, bases akin to those of the UPP were not developed in conflict-riven colonias, and broader State efforts at building-up institutional presence, such as through

infrastructure developments, paled in comparison to the magnitude of those seen in Medellín. However, complementing these limited increases in *State* territorial control, is the fact that *OCG territorial control* in many of Monterrey's MUCs retrenched significantly thanks to State actions. In this regard, then, the contrast with Ciudad Juárez is stark. In Juárez, while MUC residents confirmed that police patrols have increased since the abatement of inter-cartel conflict in 2012, the city's MUCs remain hotbeds of OCG activity, violence, and control— even if expressions of criminal power are much less obvious than they were in Medellín and (are still) in Rio. While OCG insecurity has now largely been *contained* to the city's MUCs, State presence in these spaces remains very limited, and they continue to be sites of territorial contestation between different criminal groups. Hence, for the purposes of this study, despite some similarities across both cases, the outcomes are distinct.

Additionally, there are idiosyncratic factors that fall outside my theory, but which are crucial to understanding the trajectories of particular cases. In Medellín, we cannot account for the State's impressive territorial expansion into MUCs under Fajardo without recognizing the fundamental importance of collaboration between State and armed nonstate actors; specifically, between State security forces and OCGs tied to Don Berna's hegemonic post-paramilitary structure. These collaborative relations benefited the Fajardo administration enormously as it undertook efforts to build up State presence in the comunas, mitigating friction with local OCGs across Medellín. Indeed, much of the groundwork for *State Territorial Expansion* had been laid in the preceding years when police, military, and paramilitary groups had coordinated to rid Medellín's slums of independent OCGs and insurgent cells. Medellín's early successes in expanding State territorial control therefore need to be understood within this context, and as part of the Uribe government's broader effort to work with right-wing paramilitaries towards common goals: capturing territory and crushing opposition. State-paramilitary collusion and Don Berna's hegemony might therefore be considered a case-specific permissive condition that benefitted the initial process of *State Territorial Expansion* in Medellín.

Nonetheless, this *does not* negate the explanatory power of my theory. Indeed, the end of Don Berna's supremacy in 2008 (and the decreasing ties between State and OCG actors that accompanied this), did not then *impede* the local government from continuing to expand into new MUCs. Moreover, in Buenaventura close collaboration between State coercive actors and paramilitaries *did not* produce a comparable outcome to that seen in Medellín, but merely marked another chapter in the city's history of carnage.

In Rio de Janeiro, a case-specific factor of central importance in determining local security outcomes is the nature of the military police. Indeed, the PMERJ exercises impressive coercive capacity, is subject to minimal oversight, is highly corrupt, and has close ties to party politics. The unique institutional autonomy and power of the PMERJ therefore make it very capable of resisting reform and lobbying for its interests (both through legal and illegal means). In understanding the persistent failures of local efforts at *Security Reform* and *State Territorial Expansion*, including the MPP, the GPAE, and the UPP, this reality cannot be ignored. Governor Antony Garotinho had close ties to the PMERJ,⁴⁵⁰ factors that may have explained his unwillingness to seriously support innovative favela policing programmes during his administration, such as the MPP and GPAE. When Beltrame was security secretary, interviewees who had participated in closed-door meetings with him recounted that he had openly confessed that he “could not control the PMERJ”.⁴⁵¹ Indeed, UPP police were known to be looked down upon by their PMERJ counterparts, symptomatic of an institutional culture which favoured militaristic confrontation with OCGs (and the opportunities for illicit rent-extraction that this entailed). Following the breakdown of the UPPs, Wilson Witzel was elected governor in 2018. He

⁴⁵⁰ Interview with Luiz Eduardo Soares, former Subsecretary of Security (Rio) and National Secretary for Public Security. 26/04/2023. 2e9xn

⁴⁵¹ Interview with Ignacio Cano, expert on violence and insecurity in Rio. 13/04/2023. so692; Interview with Michel Misse, sociologist and Rio security expert. 26/04/2023. g1wzd

is said to have made a pact with the PMERJ for their support.⁴⁵² Upon assuming office, he abolished the role of Public Security Secretary in Rio, thus vesting the military police with even greater discretion over their affairs. The PMERJ, and their unique power and autonomy, therefore remain key to understanding the politics of insecurity and violence in Rio. That said, this fixed reality does not undermine the explanatory leverage of my theory, as I believe my case study of Rio demonstrates.

Theory cannot account for everything, and the chaos of empirical reality frequently confounds and complicates the expectations of our analytical frameworks. I have underscored the relevance of these idiosyncrasies and nuances here for full transparency.

Summing Up

In this chapter, I engaged in comparative analysis, showing how my theoretical framework applied *across* the cases studied in this thesis. This contrasted the periodised *within-case* analyses undertaken throughout the five preceding empirical case studies. Through comparing the relevance of OCG security threats, elite coordination, and police institutional capacity across the cases, I showed that my theoretical framework has considerable explanatory power for understanding variation in my outcome of interest. Beyond synthesizing my findings, the cross-case analysis presented in this chapter also allowed me to then probe the strength of each stage of my causal chain in relation to plausible alternative explanations. Many of these alternatives certainly have merit, and as such I do not dismiss their relevance to understanding patterns of urban violence and insecurity in Latin America, including in the cases studied here. *Nonetheless*, having considered the relative strength of these alternatives in relation to the different steps of my argument, I maintain that my theoretical framework has greater explanatory leverage for explaining variation in territorial control in MUCs.

⁴⁵² Interview with Robson Rodrigues, former UPP Commander and researcher. 09/04/2023. k63dp

This chapter's cross-case analysis has also allowed me to underscore once again the complexities that arise from the iterative interplay between the theoretical framework and the empirical case studies. I have tried to be as open and candid as possible throughout this thesis regarding such case-specific idiosyncrasies. Embracing these complexities, and the subtle disjunctions between theoretical expectations and empirical reality, I believe, is vital for the sake of transparency, but also helps enrich and add further nuance to the findings. The conclusion to this thesis now follows.

9. Conclusion

Around the world, we find areas in which de facto State territorial control is limited, or even effectively non-existent. These include zones in which States choose not to develop their presence, such as remote deserts, jungles, and mountain ranges— so-called “ungoverned spaces” that lie far from any centres of administrative power. In these instances, State presence, authority, and control has simply not been *projected*. However, we also encounter spaces where the State’s actions and influence are *restricted* by armed nonstate actors. For example, in the context of civil wars, rebels frequently hinder the access, mobility, and governance of State actors within given areas, contesting State territorial control and even supplanting it. This generally occurs in rural settings, but in revolutionary situations rebel actors can contest the control of entire cities, as recently seen in Syria.

In this thesis, I have focused on variation in territorial control in another, very particular type of territory, here termed the *marginalised urban community*. Marginalised urban communities display relatively low State presence, having been shaped by histories of State neglect given their (often irregular) development, and given the fact that political elites generally have few incentives to attend to their populations. However, while marginalised urban communities often remain characterised by State *neglect*, as I have shown, they can also emerge as spaces in which State territorial control is actively restricted by armed nonstate actors, such as *organised criminal groups*.

Although OCGs are not rebels, and do not share the same overarching goals, the control that organised criminal actors exert over territory nonetheless exerts a profound influence over the lives of millions of people worldwide, shaping localized patterns of governance, economic interaction, development, and politics. This may well mean that, while less dramatic and jarring than rebel territorial control and governance in civil wars, OCG territorial control and governance is perhaps far

more prevalent across the world, very plausibly shaping the lives and livelihoods of a far greater segment of society than do rebel groups.⁴⁵³ Indeed, although armed criminal actors generally do not profess ideologically-charged political aspirations, as do many rebel groups, their control over territory and influence over society mean that they can nonetheless become agents with considerable political power and leverage.

Still, the evident differences between rebels and OCGs mean that in explaining how and why States *build territorial control* in marginalised urban spaces dominated by OCGs, we cannot simply carry over arguments relating to State and rebel territorial contestation from the civil war literature. Thus, understanding territorial control in these contexts requires both *conceptual* innovation— to move beyond the zero-sum dynamics of civil wars and instead account for how State and OCG territorial control can overlap and interact— and *theoretical* attention, to explain its variation in the first instance. Indeed, while heterogenous patterns of territorial control are *centrally important* to explaining a host of different outcomes of interest to scholars (including distinct facets of violence, and governance), very little attention has been dedicated to theorising the causes of its variation to begin with. This thesis has sought to begin rectifying these oversights.

1. A Framework for Explaining Variation in Territorial Control: A Recap

In this thesis I have advanced a novel theoretical framework to explain how States are able to build territorial control in marginalised urban communities dominated by armed OCGs. I restricted my geographical scope to Latin America, a region in which the existence of both marginalised urban communities and violent OCGs frequently intersect to produce patterns of armed nonstate territorial control in neglected parts of cities. Although pitched at the city-level, as the reader has seen, my

⁴⁵³ See for example Prieto-Curiel, Campedelli, and Hope (2023).

framework sought to reconcile macro-level and micro-level understandings of the politics of urban violence and insecurity, taking into account highly localized factors, but contextualizing these in relation to broader structural conditions, and explaining how national level actors and dynamics interact with subnational political processes (in line with Moncada, 2016). As laid out at length in Chapter 2, my theoretical argument hinges upon the existence of politicised *OCG Security Threats*, as well as the interaction of different levels of *Elite Coordination* and *Police Institutional Capacity*. Distinct constellations of these variables at given points in time produce different responses to OCG threats, ranging from *State Territorial Expansion*, to *Security Reform, Containment and Experimentation*, and *Unchecked OCG Competition*. As emphasised throughout this thesis, given the confluence of factors needed to not only *build* but then *sustain* State territorial control in MUCs dominated by criminal actors, this is a rare outcome, especially over the long-term.

The reasons underlying the spread of OCG territorial control throughout urban Latin America were explored in Chapter 3. This showed that the proliferation of marginalised communities across the region's cities was in large part thanks to particular structural transformations during the 20th century. These spaces then provided ideal conditions for the consolidation of OCG territorial control. Such groups emerged thanks to a confluence of factors. Local gangs, arising amid neglected urban settings and with few opportunities for upward mobility, would go on to interact with powerful criminal networks, ones that had consolidated principally (though not exclusively) thanks to Latin America's central importance to the trade of cocaine and other illegal drugs. The linking of these two sets of criminal actors, and their complex relations with the State, have been decisive in shaping the politics of security across many parts of Latin America now for decades, well beyond the boundaries of the marginalised urban communities on which this thesis is focused.

As Chapter 3 showed, the onset of OCG territorial control in the MUCs of the different cities studied here varied considerably. Still, only “territorial”/ “governance-type” OCGs were considered in this thesis. As such, even if variation can be found in their emergence, important similarities can be drawn when considering their actions, incentives, and means of controlling territory (even while their systems of civilian governance vary starkly).

In Chapters 4 through 7, the empirical case studies were presented. These focussed on cities from Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico, drawing on extensive fieldwork conducted in six different field sites (one of these, a shadow-case of Acapulco, was left out of this thesis due to word constraints). The case studies employed a considerable amount of original qualitative data to evidence the different parts of my theorised causal chain. This data was gathered through extensive archival research as well as 214 research interviews, which were conducted with a host of actors relevant to understanding both State responses to OCG-related insecurity as well as shifting patterns of territorial control in marginalised urban communities. Interview subjects included elite decisionmakers, street-level bureaucrats including many police officers, MUC residents, and even some former-OCG members. Leveraging considerable within-case variation, I periodised the majority of the case studies, dividing them into distinct temporal moments in which the different components of my causal chain were in flux, and thus distinct outcomes from my theoretical framework could be observed.

While in Medellín and Monterrey we saw how State territorial control in OCG-dominated spaces was sustained over time (though in Monterrey this occurred in a more limited and truncated way than in Medellín), in Rio de Janeiro extremely impressive gains in State territorial control proved not to be durable in the long-term. While my two negative cases, Ciudad Juárez and Buenaventura, did not showcase increases in State territorial control, they nonetheless help substantiate how the independent variables from my framework interact to shape other urban security outcomes. Chapter 8, presented

a comparative analysis, looking at evidence from across the empirical chapters to assess the strength of the theory, and test its moving parts in relation to alternative explanations. My theoretical framework remains consistently stronger at explaining my outcome of interest across the case studies.

In what remains of the concluding chapter, I discuss the limitations of this study, as well as the main theoretical contributions of the thesis to the interdisciplinary social science scholarship. Both of these discussions naturally serve as foils from which to suggest avenues for future research and points to new paths forward.

2. Limitations of the Research and its Findings

My research and its findings are limited principally in three ways. As I now discuss, these limitations relate to underexplored dimensions of my theory's explanatory variables, the nature of the data collected, and the restricted scope of the study.

2.1 Underexplored Dimensions of the Theory

Firstly, my theory accounted for how certain factors— elite coordination and police capacity— shaped State responses to OCG security threats, but said less about the *causes* of these factors. In other words, while I discussed *some* important antecedent conditions (see Chapter 3), in this thesis I have taken others as given. Might the theory not benefit from exploring further the determinants of elite coordination and police capacity at T-1? While perhaps interesting, I do not believe this would offer any theoretical advantage over the approach adopted here. For example, when considering elite coordination, I maintain that the agency afforded to elite actors in my theory provides greater explanatory leverage for understanding elite coordination than does a reliance on strictly structural arguments (see Chapter 8). That is, I believe that focussing on elites and their (shifting) *incentives* is superior for explaining my outcome of interest than ascribing patterns of elite coordination to distinct

types of *urban political economy*. This enables me to foreground the dynamic, interactive, and interest-driven processes that drive elite coordination (and how these vary over time), rather than allow elite coordination to be overdetermined by more fixed, structural factors. Tracing the *causes* of elite coordination to longer-term factors is thus omitted here in favour of a more agentic argument. Moreover, my theory has not sought to identify the causes of police capacity at the local level. In decentralised contexts, particularly federal ones such as Brazil and Mexico, varied subnational democratisation and development processes are likely to have shaped the evolution of local policing institutions in important ways. Indeed, some noteworthy differences existed between the police forces of the cities studied here, with varying levels of police resources and autonomy at the start of the case studies. Still, I reiterate, understanding the causes of heterogenous police institutional capacity at the onset of OCG territorial control is much less relevant to my framework than recognizing the effects this then yields. In other words, what matters most is *how* varying levels of police capacity shape my outcome of interest.

Where my theory is arguably more limited is in contending with precisely *why* subnational State actors develop policies *designed* to build territorial control. That is, aspects of the decision-making processes that produce policies amenable to this outcome are left out my framework. Indeed, even though politicised OCG threats raise the *probability* that States will move to repress OCGs in the territories they control, and even though I have argued that high levels of elite coordination are essential to implementing ambitious, costly, and arduous processes such as *State Territorial Expansion*, there is nothing in my framework that *guarantees* this outcome. Why might State actors not instead wage war on OCGs but not extend territorial control? Or negotiate with criminal groups to arrive at settlements?

I contend with this by restating that my framework relies on a probabilistic notion of causality, and by noting that *in fact* my framework explains increases in State territorial control in MUCs *even without* State actors having devised policies with this end explicitly in mind.

To elaborate, I firstly concede there is no doubt that understanding the factors that feed into the policy decision-making process would be a worthwhile subject for future research. Comprehending *why* State actors implement policies that *intentionally* pursue *State Territorial Expansion* would be especially insightful given the diffusion of the so-called “*Medellín Model*” after the mid-2000s, and the interest of different subnational governments studied herein to learn from and replicate Medellín’s experience. However, while the exclusion of this dimension of the decision-making process is arguably a limitation of the theory, it does not diminish the relevance of the framework as a whole. Indeed, my argument has rested on a *probabilistic* rather than a strictly *deterministic* causal logic. As such, I maintain that the confluence of OCG security threats, elite coordination, and high levels of police institutional capacity significantly raise the *likelihood* that States will increase their territorial control over areas dominated by OCGs. I have provided strong evidence for this by probing the applicability of my framework across distinct cross-national and subnational contexts, and exploiting important longitudinal within-case variation across time in each instance.

Moreover, adding further support to my approach is the fact that when we reflect upon the evidence from the cases, it *does not* actually appear that decisionmakers necessarily *planned* to reclaim territorial control of MUCs in every instance where this occurred. In Rio, programmes such as the GPAE were very experimental and ad hoc, having originated effectively as an improvised community policing programme led by a *single* dedicated police officer; this was *not* the product of careful planning, learning, bargaining, or decision-making by elites. Nonetheless, it still amounted to a very promising, if short-lived and geographically limited, attempt at extending State territorial control into particular favelas.

Following the logic of my argument, had the GPAE developed amid a *different* political climate, one akin to that in which the UPPs emerged, it *very well could have* led to far more widespread and durable *State Territorial Expansion*. Similarly, while Monterrey's Fuerza Civil was deployed to many MUCs, it is not clear that elite decisionmakers *explicitly sought* to expand State territorial control into the city's conflict-riven colonias through these actions, so much as use the reformed police force to dismantle the Zetas. My theoretical framework is therefore *strengthened* by excluding many of the complexities of policy decision-making; this allows us to focus on the factors which explain increases in State territorial control (and variation in territorial control more broadly), even when this outcome may not have been *specifically planned* by State decisionmakers. Certainly, the active, intentional pursuit of policies designed to augment State territorial control by elite decisionmakers would help to achieve this outcome, but my framework shows that this is *not* in fact necessary. That said, this does mean that my theory is necessarily characterised by *multifinality*. We will return to this later.

2.2 The Data

Secondly, there are clear limitations to the data I have gathered. Sceptical readers might first take issue with the representativeness and reliability of the primary data I used to substantiate my claims.

Of course, I have already acknowledged the fact that the level of analysis at which this study is pitched—the city-level—necessarily occludes important inter-neighbourhood variation. That said, much of my fieldwork relied on visits to *specific* MUCs, given that access to these communities was dependent on the guidance of trusted local contacts. Indeed, self-evident security issues prevent researchers from simply entering whichever OCG-controlled communities might interest them. Moreover, many interviews were conducted with actors (e.g., police) who had experience working only in particular neighbourhoods, at particular moments in time, but not others. It is reasonable to question then, whether my access, and the data collected, might have skewed my interpretation of changes in

territorial control, leading me to over-generalize from a limited sample. Certainly, I would expect further data collection conducted in a broader sample of MUCs to add greater complexity and nuance to my case studies. However, *I do not believe* that this would fundamentally change my overall assessment of the cases and their outcomes, or the explanatory power of my theoretical framework.

The main objective of gathering evidence through fieldwork was not to ensure representativeness (whereas it would have been for, say, survey research). This was not simply because of the difficulty of acquiring data in challenging settings, as outlined above. Rather, the evidentiary “snapshots” I gathered were fundamentally important in the process of theory-building, and for then probing the different mechanisms within my causal chain. Nonetheless, I did make an effort to visit, and speak with a range of actors familiar with, a wide range of MUCs from across the cities in question. Though not a representative sample, when used in conjunction with other forms of data, this was sufficiently rich to enable me to evidence the different stages of my causal chain at my chosen level of analysis.

Indeed, great efforts were made to triangulate information relating to specific events, trends, and changes raised by interviewees, comparing and contrasting these with the testimony of a diverse array of other actors to mitigate potential bias (Beach and Pederson, 2019), as well as with media reporting, and other archival sources (Bennett and Checkel, 2015). In some cases, particularly Rio de Janeiro and Medellín, there was also a considerable amount of secondary literature that could be drawn on to help contextualize the original qualitative data I collected. This was crucial in helping ensure the *reliability* of the evidence, another concern that qualitative researchers encounter when conducting research on sensitive activities relating to crime and violence. I was cognisant of the fact that many interview subject might have incentives to misrepresent, or at least not reveal information. Police might not openly concede their inability to control territory in areas to which they had assigned, and would be very unlikely to admit their low-autonomy from OCGs; MUC residents might refrain from revealing

evidence of police corruption or OCG control for fear of their own safety; and elites were more likely to sugar-coat their reasons for intervening in OCG-controlled territories, preferring to cite altruistic and civically-minded motivations, over political or economic self-interest. Triangulating from multiple different sources was therefore essential to ensure the reliability of my evidence.

2.3 Territorial Control Beyond Latin American MUCs

Finally, my study has focused on explaining variation in territorial control in a very specific context: *marginalised urban spaces in Latin American cities, where territorial OCGs operate, in post-Third Wave democracies*. While clear scope conditions have benefitted the process of theory-building, this limitation of the study does present certain questions going forward.

In the first instance, although the external validity of my argument has been enhanced by drawing on a diverse array of subnational examples from different States, one might well wonder how this framework travels beyond the context of Latin America. As shown in Chapter 3, patterns of urban territorial control have been shaped by important region-wide junctures and structural forces, ensuring comparable background conditions. Testing the applicability of this framework outside Latin America, in Africa or Asia, would therefore help clarify whether its relevance and portability is indeed geographically bounded. As I discuss in the final subsection of this chapter, I *do* expect the core tenets of this argument— the interaction of security threats, elite coordination, and capacity— to have widespread relevance to shaping patterns of territorial control elsewhere. However, researching (shadow) cases from South Africa or the Philippines, where OCGs also operate in marginalised communities and informal settlements, would put this to the test, and therefore represent ideal next steps in advancing this research agenda.

Additionally, can this theory explain variation in territorial control in other contexts? In some instances, the answer seems clear. Take city centres, or “non-marginalised” urban communities. As my theory has shown, where States have sufficiently high police capacity, they can effectively contain OCG threats, ridding non-marginalised areas of OCG insecurity and ensuring that State territorial control is unrestricted by these actors. However, what of, say, rural areas? In rural contexts, where population density is much lower, the incentives for both political elites and OCGs are likely to differ, as is the *very nature* of territorial control. Urban settings concentrate populations, and thus valuable resources— including votes, rents, and markets— that make very fixed forms of territorial control (as well as governance) important to both States and OCGs. In rural areas, it is entirely plausible that different causal processes might emerge to shape variation in territorial control, and indeed that different *conceptualisations* of territorial control might need to be employed for meaningful analysis to be undertaken. Still, it is reasonable to expect that multi-level elite coordination and the localised capacity of State coercive institutions are likely to play an important role in affecting these outcomes.

My theory also clearly begins to encounter problems in contexts of OCG subnational territorial capture (or “colonisation”, to employ Trejo and Ley’s (2020) terminology) that go *beyond* marginalised urban communities. When OCGs become heavily imbricated not simply in the politics and governance of *slums and informal communities*, but in the de facto administration of *subnational governments*, efforts to disentangle State and OCG territorial control and governance may well become effectively redundant. Far greater work— both conceptual and empirical— is therefore needed to understand such “subnational criminal governance regimes” (again, see Trejo and Ley, 2020), examples of which began to emerge in the late 20th century in Colombia, and increasingly in Mexico since the War on Drugs began in 2006. How should we conceive of State and OCG territorial control in contexts where criminal actors effectively “call the shots” at the municipal level? Does elite coordination continue to be relevant in these cases? Do police *resources* help increase State territorial control if police *autonomy* is

non-existent, thanks to OCGs and law enforcement being effectively one and the same? The framework developed here is not designed to speak to these important questions, which must be left for future analyses.

In focusing on post-Third Wave democracies, with the decentralisation that this implies, my study has allowed multi-level politics to come to the fore. However, given that OCG-controlled territories also exist in regimes with questionable democratic integrity, we should question how the politics of extending State territorial control in such contexts might differ. For example, we could look to Nicaragua or Venezuela. Given OCG-related urban insecurity in both cases, as well as contexts of marked democratic backsliding, understanding how their (increasingly) non-democratic governments contend with areas of OCG territorial control in their major cities would be a fruitful line of enquiry.

President Nayib Bukele's authoritarian crackdown on gangs in El Salvador, under a plan explicitly named "*Control Territorial*" might plausibly confound some of my framework's assumptions about the importance of multi-level alignment, given the centralisation of power in the Presidency. Indeed, it appears that the mass detentions that have undergirded the success of Bukele's approach (including of many thousands of Salvadorean citizens on highly questionable charges), have significantly reduced violence and allowed for increased State presence in many MUCs across the country. That said, the long-term success of this approach is questionable. Should a reversion to democracy and due process lead to prisoners being released, it seems likely that OCG territorial control will return to the country's MUCs unless the security reforms necessary to strengthen law enforcement institutions are undertaken. The importance of closely examining El Salvador also lies in the fact that security policies across Latin America have tended to *diffuse* regionally— a trend exemplified throughout my thesis, which showed that many subnational governments sought to emulate Medellín. Given that criminal

violence continues across the region unabated, it is *highly likely* that other Latin America leaders will look to adopt similar approaches to Bukele's in an attempt to recreate El Salvador's "success".

3. Theoretical Contributions

This thesis contends with core questions across the social sciences, shining light onto the development of political order, the dynamic (co)production of governance, and the multi-level politics of security and violence. In doing so, it makes widespread theoretical contributions to distinct bodies of literature. I explore these now in the final section of this chapter, breaking down the discussion thematically into three subsections.

3.1 Explaining Variation in Territorial Control: A Step Forward

This thesis sought explain variation in territorial control, a crucially important variable in both the civil war and organised criminal violence/criminal governance literature. Given the dearth of scholarship explaining territorial control and its variation (Aronson, 2024; Rubin, 2019), especially beyond civil war contexts, this thesis makes an important contribution to the literature by virtue of contending with this puzzle.

However, in the spirit of full transparency, some final reflections on its strengths are in order. Accepting that OCG security threats, elite coordination, and police institutional capacity were all individually *necessary* to explaining outcomes across my case studies,⁴⁵⁴ the question of their *sufficiency* in explaining increases in State territorial control in MUCs still remains. As I have already acknowledged, the confluence and interaction of these factors does not rule out the possibility of arriving at other

⁴⁵⁴ In Chapter 2, I outlined that OCG security threats effectively serve as a precondition for the theoretical framework in which elite coordination and police capacity interact to shape my outcome of interest. I also argued that although elite coordination and police capacity both offered indispensable elements to my framework, elite coordination was ultimately of greater theoretical importance in actually driving forward the theory. Nonetheless, taken as a whole, it remains true that OCG security threats, elite coordination, and police capacity are *all* individually *necessary* to explain my outcome of interest.

outcomes. Indeed, without accounting for precisely why State authorities elect policies designed to build State territorial control in OCG turfs over other possible choices, and instead presenting a probabilistic argument, *multifinality* cannot be ruled out. Thus, while my framework *did* hold up across my case studies, and offered consistently greater leverage than plausible alternatives, taken together the variables that comprise it are arguably still *insufficient* to account for my outcome of interest. In other words, States may display high levels of elite coordination *and* police capacity in response to OCG threats, but still may elect to pursue policies that are not amenable to increasing State territorial control in MUCs. While not observed in this thesis, the possibility remains open.⁴⁵⁵

Moreover, it is plausible to also argue for *equifinality*: is my framework the only means through which States can increase territorial control in MUCs controlled by armed criminal groups? As I have suggested, by adjusting the scope conditions only slightly, and including cases of *backsliding* democracies such as El Salvador, it appears that indeed there may well be other paths towards increasing State territorial control in OCG-dominated urban spaces. Whether (and how) elite coordination responds to OCG threats in contexts of democratic backsliding, to what extent alignment between political elites at national and local tiers of government matters when power is heavily centralised, and to what degree economic elites influence the politics of urban security in such contexts, remains to be seen. Given the important role that elite coordination played in my framework as the primary driver of efforts to build territorial control in MUCs, these questions are clearly not

⁴⁵⁵ One possibility is that an unobserved variable shapes the outcome, and if incorporated into my theoretical framework, this missing piece of the puzzle would make the argument *sufficient* to account for my outcome of interest. I do not believe this to be the case. Indeed, *many* different variables, often idiosyncratic to the cases, interacted to shape the particular outcomes we observed in each instance. For example, the external pressure from the Brazilian megaevents in the case of Rio. To this we could add the role of the US (and US economic interests) in local security management in Ciudad Juárez, a border city. Or the role that State-paramilitary collaboration played in defining the trajectory of State responses to OCG insecurity in the Colombian case studies. These factors are all, of course, relevant to the particular cases. However, by drawing from multiple different case studies, and engaging in an iterative dialogue between theory and empirics (using both inductive and deductive methods), the theory-building process I undertook in this thesis enabled me to cancel out a lot of case-specific “noise” from each city, and isolate the *most theoretically relevant factors* for shaping variation in territorial control. It is those factors that jointly comprise my framework.

insignificant. While further research is needed before determining decisively whether equifinality is apparent, the possibility cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Embracing the possibility of both *multifinality and equifinality*, as an exercise in theory-building this thesis still makes clear and important contributions towards understanding variation in territorial control. Having already acknowledged its limitations, scholars seeking to explain variation in territorial control going forward should nonetheless look to this theory as a reference point: probabilistically, my findings indicate that it is *highly likely* that both *elite coordination* and the *institutional capacity* of the State's security forces in a given locale will play a fundamental role in shaping the distribution of territorial control therein, conditioning the willingness and ability of States to attempt to build territorial control in areas in which armed nonstate actors operate. In this sense, we might consider the factors that comprise my framework to be those that *at minimum* researchers looking to explain variation in territorial control should consider *theoretically relevant* and take into consideration. Indeed, while I expect these factors to have far greater explanatory leverage in non-civil war settings, they may *nonetheless* be relevant to understanding patterns of territorial control in *certain* conflict settings, such as those characterised by low-intensity violence (as opposed to full-blown revolutionary situations). To reiterate, based on this study, those seeking to understand patterns of territorial control would be wise to first consider the role that both elite coordination and localized institutional capacity play in shaping these outcomes.

3.2 Security, Elites, and Governance

This thesis makes theoretical contributions to distinct bodies of literature. Firstly, in having evidenced how elite incentives shape State responses to security threats in distinct ways, it offers important insights to the scholarship on (urban) security. States do not always seek to repress OCGs; not all OCG activities threaten the interests of political elite decisionmakers; and only under specific conditions do OCG activities threaten *both political and economic elites* in such a way as to galvanize high

levels of elite coordination. In having elucidated the selective, interest-driven construction of security threats in particular cities, findings from this thesis can directly add to debates on the process of securitisation and the construction of security issues (McDonald, 2008; Baldwin, 2001). In addition, by studying the specific context of urban Latin America, my research engages in dialogue with extant studies on policing and “crackdowns on crime” across the region. Scholars have made progress in understanding the emergence of cross-national security paradigms (Cutrona et al., 2024; Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 2021; Bonner, 2019), assessing the efficacy and impact of law enforcement strategies (Arias and Ungar, 2009; Muggah, 2018; Malone and Dammert, 2020), and the processes that enable or restrict security reform throughout the region (González, 2020; Denyer Willis and Mota Prado, 2014; Moncada, 2009). My research speaks to *all three* of these themes and *also* shines light on the *political processes* that produce divergent responses to OCG-related insecurity. These in turn, do not *simply* affect violence, public opinion, the rule of law, and human rights protections, but fundamentally shape the distribution of “stateness” in urban settings.

By placing elite coordination front and centre of this analysis, I also reinforce extant findings from the political science literature pertaining to multi-level governance, as well as on the influence of elite lobbying on policy outcomes. As previously acknowledged, the literature on criminal violence in Latin America has already underscored the relevance of multi-level politics and inter-governmental alignment on shaping localized security outcomes (Trejo and Ley, 2020; Durán-Martínez, 2018). By once more underscoring the importance of national-subnational coordination in my theory, I do not claim to be breaking new theoretical ground. What my study does, however, is *extend* this logic to show its importance for also explaining the varied capability of States to expand their territorial control. Still, more innovatively, this research has shown the profoundly important role that *economic elite actors* can have in moulding local security policy, ensuring its longevity over successive democratic administrations, and indeed in *facilitating* inter-governmental coordination. Scholars have previously

shown that private sector buy-in has been highly beneficial to State efforts to combat insecurity in Latin America at both the national level (Angelo, 2024; Flores-Macías, 2012; 2022; Rodríguez-Franco, 2016) and the subnational-level (Conger, 2014; Ley and Guzman, 2019; Moncada, 2016). Still, my study explores precisely *why* this is the case in much greater depth. Rather than assuming that economic elites simply respond mechanistically to structural conditions or OCG violence— as some have implied— in my research I have sought to unpack both the particular *interests and incentives* of economic elites, showing that even when these actors are affected by insecurity, they may not turn to *the State* for protection. Indeed, their capacity to meaningfully influence State policy is dependent on their particular endowments (or *instrumental capacity*, in Fairfield’s (2015) phrasing). In this regard, this thesis also offers insights to studies on economic elite lobbying, resonating with work that shows how economic elites hold a disproportionate sway over public policy (Gilens and Page, 2014; Bartels, 2008), as well as how and when they are able to meaningfully impact policy deliberations and outcomes (García-Montoya and Manzi, 2023). Large-N studies have uncovered important tendencies relating to economic elite influence on politics. However, through its fine-grained case study analysis, this thesis contributes towards understanding the *incentives* (and conditions) that lead economic elites to intervene in policymaking, the *mechanisms* through which they support and help sustain actions amenable to their interests, and *how and why* they shape policy areas *beyond* taxation and economic redistribution— the areas in which political scientists typically study their influence.

This thesis also clearly contributes to the burgeoning literature on (criminal) governance and organised crime-related violence.

Firstly, by describing the particular structural trends that resulted in urban marginalisation, as well as the propagation of organised criminal structures throughout the region in Chapter 3, I identified key permissive conditions that have allowed micro-level criminal governance regimes to spread

throughout urban settings across Latin America. While more comparative micro-level research is needed to sharpen our understandings of the causes and consequences of variation in criminal governance, I have argued that uncontrolled urbanisation, and the perpetuation of urban marginalisation, have been highly propitious for criminal governance structures to take-root throughout Latin America.

Secondly, my research has argued that increases in State territorial control do not *necessarily* “increase” or “decrease” the intensity of criminal governance; they do however encourage OCGs to adapt, and change their behaviour, altering how governance in MUCs is produced. OCGs adapt in different ways depending on whether/how closely they collaborate with law-enforcement agents. Although important work on the effects of law enforcement on criminal governance have been undertaken (Blattman et al., 2021; Magaloni et al., 2020), we are still only beginning to unpack the mechanisms that shape why, when, and how OCGs adapt to State incursions into their territories. By emphasizing how *distinct facets* of police institutional capacity affect OCG behaviour, this thesis contributes towards advancing this understanding.

Thirdly, and relatedly, my research has evidenced the complexities of the relationship between territorial control and governance. While territorial control is *generally a prerequisite* for governance, I have shown the nuances of this dynamic: OCGs will not necessarily govern civilians in the territories to which they lay claim, and facets of State governance can be found in areas in which State territorial control is actively restricted. While increasing State territorial control is very likely to augment State sanctioned governance, this too is not guaranteed. In sum, States, rebels, and OCGs *often* seek to govern populations in the territories they control, but not always. Disentangling these concepts, and understanding when they do *and do not* accompany one another, as I have sought to do here, is both theoretically and empirically important, contributing to evolving debates in the literature on hybrid

and (armed nonstate) governance (Post et al., 2017; Rubin, 2019; Jentzsch and Steele, 2023; O’Conner and Jongerden, 2023; Waterman, 2023).

3.2 New Directions in the State-Building Literature

Lastly, in having outlined a framework to explain *if*, *when*, and *how* States are willing and able to increase their territorial control in areas dominated by OCGs, this thesis is also positioned to speak directly to the scholarship on State-building. Indeed, an ambition of this research is to begin connecting the scholarship on organised crime related violence and (criminal) governance more explicitly with that on State-building.

The State-building literature has tended towards studying *longue durée* processes occurring at the macro-level, and has thus displayed both a historical and a whole-nation bias. This is as true for studies in the European context (Tilly, 1985; 1992; Anderson, 1974; Ertman, 1997; Olson, 1993; Spruyt, 1994) as it is Latin American States (Centeno, 2002; López-Alves, 2000; Soifer, 2015; Kurtz, 2013; Schenoni, 2020) and indeed other postcolonial States (Migdal, 1988; Herbst, 2000). From these studies we know that institutions are sticky, generally difficult to reform, and that the varied fortunes of different States derive from long-term, path-dependent causal processes, which may well be *sui generis* (Fukuyama, 2014). In the Latin American context, as Mazzuca bluntly puts it, State weakness is a “birth defect”, which has hobbled its states *ever since* their violent conception in the 19th century. By this logic, shorter-term explanations of variation in State “strength” or “weakness” are therefore of only limited use to scholars, distracting from the historical root-causes of these phenomena (Mazzuca, 2021, p.1).

This argument holds when considering State capacity in the aggregate, at the *macro-level*. Still, at the core of this thesis has been an effort to *disaggregate* the State, and embrace the temporal, institutional, and territorial variation encountered *within* States, as well as identify and sequence the (agentic) political

processes which explain this variation. Indeed, irrespective of whether Latin America's States have been "defective" since birth, and arguably *precisely because of this fact*, understanding the processes through which these States become "stronger" and build their constituent parts, or indeed ebb further towards "weakness", decline, and failure, is *critically important*. My thesis helps to advance this goal, revealing the agentic, contested and highly political processes that lead to States (re)establishing control *over the very centres* of their nominal dominions— major cities.

Indeed, when placed into dialogue with the State-building scholarship, this thesis underscores the benefits of *scaling-down*, and of narrowing the scope of State-building analyses both geographically and temporally. This allows us to appreciate the contemporary State-building processes that have arisen in regions including Latin America in the face of growing security challenges. By scaling down, we do not *stop* studying State-building, but rather better understand its intricacies— that is, the processes which shape State-building at the *micro-level*.

The relevance of this endeavour becomes clear when we see how findings from the subnational, or micro-level, resonate with, and complement, findings from the national, or macro-level. That is, when we understand expansions of State territorial control in cities as *expressions of State-building at the micro-level*, it becomes evident that certain factors and processes remain relevant to explaining State-building outcomes *regardless* of our "locus of choice" (Arjona, 2019). Firstly, when re-examining my case studies as examples of micro-level State-building, they support the view that State-building is not 'neutral', but rather a process influenced by actors with ideological and strategic— that is, inherently *political*— interests (Centeno et al., 2017, p.420). As Fukuyama puts it, "State building is above all a political act" (2014, p.212). The dynamic, agentic, process of elite coordination in this thesis supports this contention, albeit on the city-scale. Moreover, echoing patterns seen at the micro-level in this thesis, it is also the case that coalitions of *both governing and non-governing elites* have been deeply influential to

shaping long durée analyses of State-building (Slater, 2010; Soifer, 2013; Fukuyama, 2014). Patterns of elite collaboration, therefore, emerge as key to determining the fortunes of state-building processes at different levels of analysis.

This thesis also resonates with findings that low capacity, “weak” States cannot always simply impose their will on their nominal territories and the actors within them, and instead need to account for existing power dynamics and incentivise cooperation from actors who otherwise might resist State authority (Onoma, 2014). Indeed, States may be required to motivate cooperation from all manner of unsavoury non-state actors in order to advance their long-term goals. As Staniland puts it: States do not emerge from the decisive shattering of other actors, but instead through their co-optation, coercion and incorporation” (2012, p.254). Needless to say, augmentations in territorial control documented in this thesis did not occur in the traditionally conceived Weberian fashion: State and armed nonstate actors often *continue to share territory and governance of civilian populations*, even in instances of successful *State Territorial Expansion*. Accommodations between the State and violent nonstate actors may not be intrinsic to the *physiology* of Statehood in the advanced, high-capacity States of the global north, but we cannot dismiss them as simply *pathologies* of “incomplete”, “defective”, States and the State-building processes they undertake in the global south. When we study State-building processes at the higher resolution of the micro-level, disquieting, unexpected alliances and accommodations are in fact *more likely* to be observed than when we look to grand historical trajectories. The scholarship will be richer for recognizing and embracing this reality.

Finally, this thesis can be viewed as another step towards understanding the relation between State-building and organised crime. Indeed, given that in my account, OCGs do not intrinsically– but rather, *contingently*– threaten the State and elite actors, their relationship with the State-building process is complex. OCG activities do occasionally galvanize State action, however criminal groups are also

frequently ceded de facto control over territory by the State, and thus *enabled* to consolidate systems of armed nonstate governance. Moreover, the power that OCGs exercise does not always arise from their opposition to the State, or simply from their own ability to impose themselves on society, but instead it very often emerges from collaborative linkages with the State itself. The complexities of the State-building/organised crime nexus are further underscored when we acknowledge that organised crime is inherently an (inadvertent) consequence of State regulation. In succinct terms, Koivu argues, “organised crime is best understood as a phenomenon *driven by and driving* the State-building process” (2018, p.49), simultaneously emerging from and spurring-on State regulative activities.

In sum, there is much we have yet to adequately theorize about the interconnections of State-building and organised crime. This is made especially clear if we return to the example of Mexico, where the colonisation of subnational State institutions by organised criminal groups— often working in tandem with State actors— continues unabated. Indeed, this process was significantly catalysed by the commencement of Calderón’s ill-fated War on Drugs, itself explicitly cast as a *State-building endeavour* (Lessing, 2018, p.278). Precisely how the integration of organised crime into the State’s structure, and the institutionalisation of violence across the country that has accompanied this, is shaping Mexico’s ongoing State-building process has yet to be sufficiently theorised. However, it *does not suffice* to view Mexico’s ever evolving security situation— or that of any other case— as simply emblematic of longstanding State “weakness”. Re-theorizing the role that organised crime plays in shaping State-building, with reference to diverse contemporary cases, is therefore an essential avenue for future research.

The security challenges currently facing Latin America are tremendous. Organised criminal groups control territories, govern populations, (violently) bargain with the State, and collaborate with State actors and institutions. Latin America’s illicit economies are vast, sustaining the livelihoods of many

across the region, and endowing some of the hemisphere's criminal groups with enormous political power. This thesis has necessarily been limited in scope. Nonetheless, in its own small way, it makes important theoretical and empirical contributions, adding another piece to the puzzle of our evolving understanding of the State-crime nexus. Many more are needed before we fully comprehend how the politics of organised crime condition the making and unmaking of the State.

Appendix: Further Information on the Interviews

A total of 214 interviews were undertaken as part of my data collection for this thesis. In this appendix, I elaborate further on my interviewing process in the field, positionality, and then include a list of the interviews undertaken. Note that all interviews were carried out in full compliance with the University of Oxford's research ethic's review board (CUREC),⁴⁵⁶ under reference R78681/RE001.

Interviewing in the Field

As discussed in the introduction, interviews were undertaken between 2021-2023 and relied on “cold calling” and “snowballing” techniques, whereby I would reach out to potential interviewees via my institutional email, and eventually ask them to refer any known contacts relevant to my research and who might be willing to talk to me. I have already acknowledged the biases that can be generated through snowball sampling. To this, we can add the problems of “missingness”, as well as the potential ambiguity of data collected through fieldwork of this sort. I restate that triangulating data from multiple different primary and secondary sources has been key to raising the reliability of the evidence presented herein.

Interviews would *generally* last for around an hour, though this varied considerably. The shortest interviews I conducted lasted approximately twenty minutes, whereas the longest stretched over many hours. Interviews were generally undertaken in person, though they were also conducted on video-calling software and occasionally on my professional mobile phone. As per my CUREC approval, all participants provided informed oral consent prior to beginning the interview. Oral consent was chosen over written consent given the often sensitive nature of the topics under discussion. The majority of

⁴⁵⁶ For full CUREC guidelines, please see: <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources>

interviewees participated in this study under condition of anonymity, and so have only been identified throughout this thesis by their unique alphanumeric identifying code (as well as other contextual information, and the date of the interview). Other participants, often public figures, academics, or analysts were happy to have their names included in this study. Still, even in some cases where participants chose to participate with their names included, I made clear that I retained the right to anonymize their identity should I deem this appropriate. I did this on several occasions where interviewees discussed particularly sensitive topics that would have the potential to compromise or endanger them should they be made public.

Many interviews were recorded on a portable recording device (with interviewees' consent), with recordings then transcribed, and later destroyed. Many other interviews—particularly those undertaken in OCG-controlled territories—were not recorded. This was due both to safety concerns as well as my awareness of how the presence of recording devices can change the dynamics of face-to-face interactions. Indeed, I was especially cognisant of the need to put MUC residents at ease during our conversations. Unlike other interview participants (such as certain elites), I was aware that many MUC residents would not be used to being interviewed, talking to foreigners, discussing potentially sensitive subjects, and that they might have had previous unpleasant interactions with authority figures (given that interviewees were aware that I was visiting from an elite academic institution, I was conscious that some participants might view me as such). Consequently, I eschewed recording in these instances. Instead, I took handwritten notes. On some other occasions in MUCs, where I felt that the presence of a notebook would unsettle the interviewee or draw unwanted attention, I did not take notes during the interview, but immediately wrote up my recollections once I was back in a secure setting.

In my introduction I outlined some of the practical safety concerns associated with undertaking interviews on topics such as security and crime in areas controlled by OCGs. To elaborate further,

prior to entering my field sites I had already undertaken a prolonged period of background research on the city in question, usually lasting months. This involved reading local media, studying maps to understand the city's layout and the location of different neighbourhoods, and having informal conversations with local researchers and journalists on the practicalities of traversing and studying these places. In the case of Rio de Janeiro, I also began learning Portuguese the year prior to undertaking fieldwork, in order to equip myself with the necessary language skills to converse on sensitive topics competently, and negotiate access to the city's MUCs with locals.

To reiterate, I only accessed MUCs controlled by organised criminal groups in the company of locals who were familiar with these areas (and were thus usually known to the local OCG). Establishing trust with local contacts was often a long process, sometimes requiring many informal conversations before I entered an MUC. In order to mitigate risk, I did not adopt a rigid research schedule, which allowed me to adjust my plans in response to heightened insecurity and any new developments on the ground that might complicate data collection in MUCs. The fact that I spent extended periods of time in most of my field sites (months in some cases), was very beneficial in this regard, affording me a great deal of flexibility.

My visits to MUCs, and the notes I took during these visits, informed this thesis in many ways. Indeed, to reflect on this process briefly, visiting these communities was extremely important for understanding the nuances of criminal territorial control and governance.⁴⁵⁷ For example, in Rio de Janeiro, OCGs exercised a very overt form of territorial control in the city's favelas, openly moving around these communities with assault rifles and selling drugs from street stalls for all to see. Ironically,

⁴⁵⁷ It was also an *immediately* very informative process, allowing me to very quickly understand certain physical qualities of these communities, as well as social realities. These were often stark. For example, within ten minutes of one of my first visits to an MUC in Medellín (my first field site), my guide and I walked past the local *combo* beating and interrogating a man under the goalposts of a rudimentary football pitch. That their actions were so public was very revealing.

despite the obvious presence of firearms and illicit merchandise, I felt far safer in Rio's favelas than I did in many other field sites. Community life in many favelas was vibrant, and residents generally seemed relaxed and occupied with going about their daily lives. In Buenaventura, by contrast, I never saw a weapon and was only made aware of the immediate presence of OCGs on one or two occasions.⁴⁵⁸ However, the silence which fell upon the streets of the city's MUCs after sundown, and how they emptied of life, was indicative of the insecurity in these spaces, where OCGs are known to patrol, predate viciously, and routinely engage in violence. Being able to observe and experience these differences across the region was extremely important, affording me a very nuanced understanding of what OCG territorial control and the criminal governance of civilians *looks like* on the ground.

My fieldwork also provided important insight into the diverse nature of urban marginalisation across Latin America. For example, the MUCs I visited in Ciudad Juárez and Monterrey were far more developed than many of those I saw in Colombia, especially in the far-flung peripheries of Medellín, or the palafitte, *bajamar* neighbourhoods of Buenaventura. Indeed, access to formal services was common throughout the Mexican MUCs I visited,⁴⁵⁹ given that many were legally recognised, or even initially developed with State assistance, unlike in other field sites. Levels of development in turn textured OCG territorial control and governance. In the Mexican MUCs I visited, paved roads had allowed for OCGs to patrol their territories in vehicles (but *also* allowed State security forces ready access to these spaces). Moreover, the presence of formal services meant that criminal actors faced few incentives to try and involve themselves in "taxing" these markets or providing these public goods.

⁴⁵⁸ For example, when my local guide (a journalist) and I were followed during a visit to one MUC, and when I witnessed an extortion payment in a corner shop in another such community.

⁴⁵⁹ An important exception to this would be the numerous MUCs I visited in Acapulco, Mexico. While the data from this field site was ultimately not included in this thesis, the level of development in Acapulco's MUCs was far lower than that seen in either Monterrey or Ciudad Juárez. This is due to the particular histories of development of each city over the course of the 20th century. Still, to be clear, in both Juárez and Monterrey, I still also visited MUCs where levels of development were extremely low, and residents lived in constructions made from wood, cardboard, tarpaulin and sheet-metal, and lacked any formal services. From what I was told, and from what I saw, these sorts of settlements were atypical, with most MUCs in these cities being well developed and with access to a wide range of services.

By contrast, in less developed MUCs, such as some of those I visited in Colombia, where State infrastructure was minimal, OCGs were heavily involved in charging residents for services. Vehicular access was impossible, meaning that police presence was heavily restricted for basic logistical and practical reasons, besides any of the theoretical motives I have identified in this thesis. Being able to visit many marginalised urban communities across Latin America has therefore been incredibly illuminating, allowing to appreciate nuances and variation to which I would have otherwise been oblivious.

Positionality and Self-Awareness

Interview testimony has provided invaluable empirical evidence for this thesis. My nationality (British, of Mexican heritage), complexion (light-skinned), gender (male), and background in an elite academic institution have doubtlessly all been useful in helping me gain access to interview subjects of interest, and thus collect the original data used herein.

These facets of my background affected how people interacted with me, my studies at Oxford being of particular interest to many elite interviewees, perhaps increasing their receptiveness to my cold calling and enquiries. My mixed white-Latino background was also very useful in helping me gain access to many MUCs, given the degree of anonymity this afforded me in these spaces. Generally, I did not look like an obvious “outsider” on my visits to MUCs, a challenge that other researchers from different backgrounds might have faced. My command of Spanish and Portuguese was sufficiently high to be able to communicate with sensitivity about difficult topics with my interviewee participants, as well as understand a lot of the slang and colloquiums in my field sites (particularly Mexico). In Brazil, my status as a foreigner with imperfect Portuguese was on some occasions very useful, as interviewees would often rephrase and attempt to clarify their statements of their own accord to make sure I had understood their meaning fully. This allowed for greater precision in their answers to my

questions. In Colombia, to my surprise my status as a foreigner also proved to be quite beneficial for my data collection. I found that interviewees were very open to talking to me about all manner of topics, volunteering information about violence and crime without my prompting. Both local researchers and interviewees themselves suggested that this was likely due to the fact I was *not* Colombian: they reasoned that had I been a local, interviewees may have been less open to questioning, out of a desire to avoid touching on contentious, politicised topics.⁴⁶⁰

Both prior to meeting interviewees, and then when in conversation with them, I made clear that my research was being undertaken for purely academic purposes. This was particularly important when speaking to MUC residents, many of whom lived in extremely difficult circumstances, and who may have hoped that—given my background—their interview testimony might attract attention to particular causes, or amplify grievances, and thus yield a political impact. Thus, when interacting with MUC residents, I made sure to very carefully explain the nature of my research, where it would be published, and its ultimate purpose as a work of scholarship. I found that by engaging in relaxed conversation with MUC residents to find out about their lives, and explaining who I was and what I was doing, these interviewees were generally very receptive to my questions, keen to participate, and supportive of my work. Indeed, I was very struck that many interviewees seemed eager to share their experiences of OCG territorial control, governance, and State security interventions, which were often deeply personal, and sometimes upsetting. It seems that for many MUC residents the interview process was extremely cathartic, something that I had not anticipated.

⁴⁶⁰ On some occasions, I was made aware that my status as an outsider made locals hesitant to talk with me. For example, in Mexico, after meeting one interviewee in a café, the participant asked to reschedule our conversation to a phone call later that day. He reasoned that given my accent, I might be mistaken for a DEA agent by any criminal actors that might be nearby. Looking back, this was somewhat paranoid given the circumstances of where we were. Nonetheless, his reaction reflected the fear and very real insecurity that many people in Mexico face. The interviewee was, after all, a journalist.

Interview List

Below is included a list of the 214 interviews conducted for this thesis. These are presented in accordance with their alphanumeric identifier (“Code”). This list includes interviews that were undertaken for a shadow case study of Acapulco, which was ultimately not included in the final draft of the thesis due to word constraints.

<u>Interview List</u>			
	Code	Interviewee Description	Date
1	01eor	NGO worker, runs programmes associated with FICOSEC Chihuahua	22/08/2022
2	09f56	MUC resident and social worker, Monterrey	06/08/2022
3	0nolh	Orlando García, community leader Comuna 1, Medellín	23/02/2022
4	0nolh.2	Orlando García, community leader Comuna 1, Medellín	02/03/2022
5	0qr1i	David Gómez Bernal security analyst for ProPacífico, Buenaventura	02/02/2022
6	0t118	Photojournalist, Acapulco	04/09/2022
7	0unob	Yolanda Echeverri, Technical Secretary of the Comité del Paro Cívico, Buenaventura	09/03/2022
8	0z6et	Santiago Londoño, former Medellín city councillor and civil servant.	08/02/2022
9	0zs8l	MUC resident, La Playita, Buenaventura	13/03/2022
10	1bz9d	Academic and organised crime expert, Medellín	14/12/2021
11	1gsgt	Former UPP captain with experience in Mangueira, Santa Marta and Cidade de Deus, Rio de Janeiro	23/04/2023
12	1uwy4	JAC Leader and MUC resident, Miramar, Buenaventura	23/03/2022
13	1yjfo	Reinaldo Spitaletta, journalist, Medellín	07/02/2022
14	20qsh	Former social worker in Medellín’s MUCs	08/12/2021
15	255u4	Antonio Carballo Blanco, GPAE director and former security official, Rio de Janeiro	10/04/2023
16	255u4.2	Antonio Carballo Blanco, GPAE director and former security official. Rio de Janeiro	27/04/2023
17	2c8kg	MUC resident from Barrio Ciudadela, Buenaventura	20/03/2022
18	2e9xn	Luiz Eduardo Soares, former Subsecretary of Security (Rio) and former National Secretary for Public Security	26/04/2023
19	2o7ro	NGO worker, focused on Security monitoring in Chihuahua	22/08/2022

20	2qnka	Leonard Renteria, activist and community leader, Buenaventura	08/12/2021
21	2saqa	Adriana Espinosa, researcher and contributor to the Truth Commission report on the Colombian Pacific	05/02/2022
22	2sli0	Víctor Álvarez, historian and expert on Medellín business community	20/01/2022
23	32p9y	MUC resident, Southern Ciudad Juárez	27/08/2022
24	3bze1	Max Yuri Gil, expert on Human Rights and Organised Crime in Medellín	05/04/2022
25	3ryfb	JAC President, El Popular, Comuna 1, Medellín	18/02/2022
26	3vcb9	Víctor Hugo Vidal, Mayor of Buenaventura (2019-2023)	18/03/2022
27	4ympo	NGO worker, funded by FICOSEC and FECHAC, working in MUCs in Chihuahua and Juárez	27/08/2022
28	4yrzm	MUC resident, Alta Vista, Medellín	03/03/2022
29	4yuu3	Social worker in the Distrito TEC, working in the Campana area, Monterrey	09/08/2022
30	520su	Rafael Rincón, former student leader and Human Rights Ombudsman (1995-1998), Medellín	08/02/2022
31	520su.2	Rafael Rincón, former student leader and Human Rights Ombudsman (1995-1998), Medellín	15/02/2022
32	52pss	MUC resident, Comuna 7, Medellín	10/02/2022
33	56ktn	Resident of Cidade de Deus, Rio de Janeiro	05/05/2023
34	58gf4	Alejandro Hope, analyst and former senior official at CISEN	01/09/2022
35	59rrp	Ricardo Aricapa, journalist, author and previous communications director for Mayor Luís Pérez, Medellín	09/02/2022
36	5gvsk	Ricardo Realivazquez, Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez	25/08/2022
37	5pc5u	Senior member of the Fundación de la Sociedad Portuaria, Buenaventura	05/03/2022
38	61qio	Social worker and ex-gang member, Ciudad Juárez.	26/08/2022
39	6hhj4	MUC resident, Independencias, Buenaventura	13/03/2022
40	6lbtf	Leading crime reporter at “El Colombiano”, Medellín	16/02/2022
41	6q3ti	Tatiana Arambide, former director of the Instituto de la Juventud Regia (2011-2012), Monterrey	30/08/2022
42	6rjdj	MUC Resident, with experience of living in a conflict zone, Colombia	05/03/2022
43	7brnl	Resident of Complexo do Alemão and NGO worker in Complexo da Maré, Rio de Janeiro	28/04/2023
44	7c1gp	Researcher and social worker, Rio de Janeiro	28/03/2023
45	7owdp	Pedro Strozenberg, Lawyer and Senior figure in the NGO Viva Rio. Rio de Janeiro	07/04/2023
46	7zvtx	Academic who participated in the creation of the Fuerza Civil, Monterrey	17/06/2022

47	836ut	Orlando Castillo, politician and community leader, Buenaventura	09/03/2022
48	84dh2	Journalist from Buenaventura	26/11/2021
49	87nf	Researcher on violence and policing, Rio de Janeiro	03/04/2022
50	8a4qs	Journalist, Acapulco	06/09/2022
51	8tx47	Academic at UANL, Monterrey	22/06/2022
52	8v4wd	Milady Garces Arboleda, President of Buenaventura's Chamber of Commerce	11/03/2022
53	9ej52	Daniel Misse, former coordinator of UPP Social. Rio de Janeiro	08/05/2023
54	9ko2k	MUC resident, Southern Ciudad Juárez	26/08/2022
55	9vtyp	Community activist and organizer, Complexo da Maré. Rio de Janeiro	04/04/2023
56	9y4w8	Rodrigo García, historian, Universidad de Antioquia. Medellín	19/01/2022
57	a1axa	Óscar Naranjo, former Colombian Vice-President and General of the National Police	17/06/2022
58	a1stt	MUC resident and NGO worker, Complexo da Maré. Rio de Janeiro	03/05/2023
59	a8g3f	MUC resident in Northern Ciudad Juárez	29/08/2022
60	agal1	MUC resident, with links to the local Combo. Comuna 3, Medellín	26/02/2022
61	ajbx8	Former UPP Coordinator in Cidade de Deus and Complexo do Lins. (2010-2016). Rio de Janeiro	24/04/2023
62	ar2kj	Journalist and MUC resident from Buenaventura	17/01/2022
63	b0pxn	Academic from Cali, who worked in Buenaventura in the early-2000s	29/11/2021
64	ba06c	Youth leader involved in Comité del Paro Cívico, Buenaventura	22/03/2022
65	blkxh	Activist and rapper, La Pesquería, Monterrey	26/07/2022
66	bsmkc	MUC resident, Comuna 13, Medellín	27/02/2022
67	bwxjs	Raúl Soto, former senior FICOSEC official, involved in the Mesa de Seguridad	28/07/2022
68	bx2mr	MUC resident and business owner, Acapulco	08/09/2022
69	bxbat	Government liaison in Buenaventura	02/12/2021
70	c23ul	Police officials, Chihuahua	22/08/2022
71	clmpy	MUC resident, Southern Ciudad Juárez	26/08/2022
72	cyx3x	MUC resident (lived in Cidade de Deus, Rocinha, now a west zone militia territory), Rio de Janeiro	29/04/2023
73	dhy1e	MUC Resident, peripheral area of Comuna 1, Medellín	18/02/2022
74	dlz43	MUC resident and Social worker, Monterrey	12/08/2022
75	drjed	Senior police official, Ciudad Juárez	24/08/2022
76	dwkv9	MUC resident, Acapulco	04/09/2022

77	e1so3	MUC resident from El Progreso, Buenaventura	03/02/2022
78	efw8n	Teacher, Alta Vista, Medellín	03/03/2022
79	es85e	Lia Rocha, sociologist with experience researching local violence. Rio de Janeiro	11/04/2023
80	euhck	José Carlos Rivas, ProPacífico, former director of district planning, Buenaventura	19/02/2022
81	f4fhg	MUC resident, Comuna 4, Buenaventura	19/03/2022
82	fb52b	Police Captain, and Police Patrol Officer, Comuna 13, Medellín	02/04/2022
83	ffdts	Naval officer formerly stationed in Buenaventura	21/01/2022
84	fghe1	NGO worker at Luta Pela Paz, Complexo da Mare. Rio de Janeiro	28/04/2023
85	fnomf	Luis Aguirre, former Secretary of Public Security, Ciudad Juárez (2016-2021)	26/08/2022
86	fx7q3	Municipal Worker and MUC Resident, Comuna 13, Medellín	03/02/2022
87	fx7q3.2	Municipal Worker and MUC Resident, Comuna 13, Medellín	01/03/2022
88	fyexz	Former Paramilitary Commander, Bloque Central Bolívar, Colombia	17/02/2022
89	g1wzd	Michel Misse, sociologist and Rio security expert. Rio de Janeiro	26/04/2023
90	gei92	Municipal attorney, Buenaventura	22/03/2022
91	gik6p	MUC resident, La Independencia, Monterrey	11/09/2022
92	grxyf	Former senior official in the Secretariat for Social Development, Nuevo León government	09/08/2022
93	gv4wh	Academic and election observation coordinator, Valle del Cauca.	15/12/2021
94	gyb6m	Academic who has researched social intervention in Buenaventura	27/11/2021
95	gzomn	MUC resident, Southern Ciudad Juárez	26/08/2022
96	h4aai	Carlos Rodríguez historian Universidad Nacional, Colombia	14/01/2022
97	h4aai.2	Carlos Rodríguez historian Universidad Nacional, Colombia	20/01/2022
98	h1af9	Javier Bermúdez, Colonel of the Coast Guard, Buenaventura	08/03/2022
99	hoh74	MUC resident (FOMERREY 35) and former-government employee, Monterrey	05/08/2022
100	hrmo3	Worker for the state Secretary of Human Development and Wellbeing, Ciudad Juárez	26/08/2022
101	hyewy	Angela Sánchez, coordinator of the Mesa de Seguridad, and mesa member for over 10 years. Ciudad Juárez	25/08/2022
102	hzmdi	Journalist, Buenaventura	13/12/2021
103	i3gur	Former resident of La Independencia, Monterrey	14/09/2022
104	ib7g5	Journalist, Acapulco	26/08/2022
105	imkim	Harrinson Cuero Campaz, Member of the Comité del Paro Cívico.	19/03/2022

106	imkim.2	Harrinson Cuero Campaz, Member of the Comité del Paro Cívico	21/03/2022
107	inuam	Academic from Buenaventura,	24/12/2021
108	iqnre	Senior JAC Confederation leader, Comuna 13, Medellín	01/03/2022
109	ir3s5	Social worker, Monterrey,	15/06/2022
110	irtup	Social worker from Buenaventura	29/11/2021
111	jcy1f	José Juan Olvera, Journalist and Academic, Monterrey	22/07/2022
112	jogb6	MUC resident and JAC leader, Comuna 1, Medellín	12/02/2022
113	jrxq9	Journalist from Buenaventura	21/12/2021
114	jxj8p	Senior JAC leader, Buenaventura	09/03/2022
115	k0svp	Architect and Urban planner, involved in Distrito Tec, Tec de Monterrey	27/02/2022
116	k1iwj	MUC resident, Altavista, Medellín	15/02/2022
117	k4nce	Sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. Monterrey	19/07/2022
118	k4nce.2	Sociologist and Fuerza Civil training consultant. Monterrey	03/08/2022
119	k63dp	Robson Rodrigues, former UPP Commander and researcher, Rio de Janeiro	09/04/2023
120	kaqu2	Sonidero (musician), La Independencia, Monterrey	04/08/2022
121	kdl4d	Robinson Rentería, President of the city council of Buenaventura	22/03/2022
122	kidu7	Mauricio de Jesus Cadavid, former Assistant to Head of the Presidential Council for Medellín	24/02/2022
123	kp0k2	NGO official who has worked in different Colombian MUCs	21/01/2022
124	l2jxk	Journalist, worked for many years in Buenaventura	24/03/2022
125	l81nk	Journalist, Buenaventura	25/11/2021
126	la4v6	Former researcher for Rio's Security Secretary. Rio de Janeiro	14/04/2023
127	laco2	MUC resident, Priest, Comuna 13, Medellín	12/02/2022
128	lb7w6	Architect involved in Distrito Tec Projects, TEC de Monterrey	02/07/2022
129	lblwt	MUC resident and youth leader, Buenaventura	29/01/2022
130	lc1ub	MUC Resident, Comuna 2, Medellín	10/12/2021
131	lf416	Civil servant based in Monterrey, with experience working at FICOSEC (Ciudad Juárez), and in Federal and state government	17/08/2022
132	lgnre	Journalist, Medellín	09/02/2022
133	lo57q	Community leader, Complexo do Alemão. Rio de Janeiro	03/05/2023
134	v614l	Freddy López, directive board of the Comité del Paro Cívico, Buenaventura	18/03/2022
135	m1t2r	Social worker and academic, Monterrey	17/06/2022

136	m6gay	Three senior police officials in charge of security in Buenaventura	22/03/2022
137	msbza	MUC resident, Comuna 13, Medellín	20/02/2022
138	myw8p	Social worker and MUC resident, Buenaventura	27/11/2021
139	mz98d	Transport union leader, Buenaventura	13/03/2022
140	n1ah8	Jhon Reina, Comité del Paro Cívico leader and spokesperson, Buenaventura	26/02/2022
141	n1ah8.2	Jhon Reina, Comité del Paro Cívico leader and spokesperson, Buenaventura	07/03/2022
142	n9suv	Social worker in MUCs, Monterrey	08/08/2022
143	nck2s	Community worker, Altavista, Medellín	03/03/2022
144	nem3a	MUC resident, Comuna 3, Medellín	11/02/2022
145	nk1yv	Damian Platt, former Rio de Janeiro NGO worker and author	16/06/2023
146	nyloi	Two Journalists who have spent years in Acapulco investigating security	28/07/2022
147	oh38a	Juan David Valderrama, politician with experience working for GEA members, under Salazar, Gaviria and Gutiérrez. Medellín	25/02/2022
148	ojit9	MUC resident, Complexo do Alemão, Rio de Janeiro	03/05/2023
149	omu9y	Former official who worked for Rio's Security Secretary (2012-2016). Rio de Janeiro	17/04/2023
150	p0wvc	MUC resident and social worker, Buenaventura	14/12/2021
151	p0x55	Sandra Ramírez Patiño, Economic Historian, Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín	15/12/2021
152	pdpz1	Former resident of La Independencia, Monterrey	13/09/2022
153	pkpm4	Urban crime analyst, works on USAID programmes, Ciudad Juárez	09/09/2022
154	pfppr	MUC resident, Southern Ciudad Juárez	27/08/2022
155	qgj9n	Community leader who works on the Mesa de Víctimas, Buenaventura	10/03/2022
156	qt5a5	Doriam Borges, academic at UERJ and former Security Secretary worker, Rio de Janeiro	03/04/2023
157	qv3pa	Alejandro Echeverri, academic and former director of the PUI, Medellín	20/01/2022
158	qv5ak	Electoral observer, MUC resident, Buenaventura	18/03/2022
159	qv8f2	JAC Leader, peripheral area of Comuna 1, Medellín	18/02/2022
160	rdmxj	Former government worker focused in La Indepe and La Campana, Monterrey	11/08/2022
161	rdmxj.2	Former government worker focused in La Indepe and La Campana, Monterrey	10/09/2022
162	regpk	Local PAN mobilizer (clientelist broker) in an MUC in Northern Ciudad Juárez	26/02/2022

163	rexdm	Academic, resident of Guadalupe. Monterrey	09/06/2022
164	rexdm.2	Academic, resident of Guadalupe. Monterrey	04/08/2022
165	rgu5v	Two community leaders from the “AP” and “Quinza” areas of Cidade de Deus. Rio de Janeiro	06/05/2023
166	rt0h4	Social worker and former gang member, Ciudad Juárez	27/08/2022
167	rvtv6	Municipal Worker and MUC resident, Acapulco	05/09/2022
168	s0bfe	Journalist and MUC resident, Buenaventura	14/12/2021
169	s0gpn	Social Leader, Comuna 3, Medellín	21/02/2022
170	s0gpn.2	Social Leader, Comuna 3, Medellín	02/04/2022
171	sf49t	Journalist and MUC resident, Buenaventura,	03/12/2021
172	shpsk	MUC resident and rapper, Southern Ciudad Juárez	27/08/2022
173	so1y1	Gilberto Loya, Security Secretary for Chihuahua state, based in Ciudad Juárez	24/08/2022
174	so692	Ignacio Cano, expert on violence and insecurity in Rio. Rio de Janeiro	13/04/2023
175	sqjp2	MUC resident, Southern Ciudad Juárez	26/08/2022
176	sr7ln	Julio César Zuluaga, expert on business relations in the Valle del Cauca	24/01/2022
177	su7zq	Monterrey resident with experience working in La Independencia, Monterrey	10/09/2022
178	t83cm	MUC Resident, La Independencia, Monterrey	04/08/2022
179	tbjgc	MUC Residents, La Escombrera, Comuna 13, Medellín	13/02/2022
180	tg1gv	MUC resident, Southern Ciudad Juárez	27/08/2022
181	toos0	Former resident of La Independencia, Monterrey (2021-2022)	14/09/2022
182	u8f6s	MUC Resident, Comuna 2, Buenaventura	19/03/2022
183	u8s6n	Police Generals, Gustavo Franco Gómez and Javier Josué Martín Gamez, Medellín	02/03/2022
184	u8yuz	Community leader, Espacio Humanitario Puente Nayero, Buenaventura	09/03/2022
185	ug69x	MUC resident, Comuna 3, Medellín	26/02/2022
186	ujkua	City councilor and MUC Resident Buenaventura	13/03/2022
187	uq4v7	Community Leader, La Sierra, Medellín	22/02/2022
188	us7ws	Regidora in Monterrey Municipal Government	10/08/2022
189	uwdio	Director of MUC youth programme, funded by FICOSEC, Chihuahua	22/08/2022
190	uymor	Academic with expertise on security, Acapulco	07/09/2022
191	uyxp7	Ana Villareal Montemayor, academic researcher, Monterrey	15/05/2023

192	uzrc7	“AKA”, artist, social leader and activist, Comuna 13	11/04/2022
193	v4gol	Navy Captain, with experience working throughout the Pacific, Buenaventura	22/01/2022
194	v6asy	Arturo Luján, state director of FICOSEC, Chihuahua	22/07/2022
195	v6asy.2	Arturo Luján, state director of FICOSEC, Chihuahua	23/07/2022
196	v80zi	Former UPP officer stationed in Pavão-Pavãozinho, Mangueira, Rocinha, and Complexo São Carlos. Rio de Janeiro	17/04/2023
197	vmjev	José Domingo Cantillo, Colonel of the Marines, Second Brigade, Buenaventura	10/03/2022
198	vv2r7	María Victoria Llorente, Fundación Ideas para La Paz, Colombia	07/04/2022
199	vwk06	Tatiana Muñoz, economic historian, Medellín	09/12/2021
200	vzh1b	Luís Arbey Arias, Ombudsman coordinator, Buenaventura	23/03/2022
201	w2usd	ProPacífico worker, involved in Compromiso Valle. Buenaventura	27/01/2022
202	wekqr	Lukas Jaramillo, NGO Worker and Activist, Comuna 13, Medellín	11/02/2022
203	wvv38	Diego Giraldo, director of territorial planning at ProPacífico, Buenaventura	03/02/2022
204	xi14h	Social worker, Monterrey	30/08/2022
205	xomp9	MUC resident, JAC leader. Independencias, Comuna 10, Buenaventura	13/03/2022
206	xuud3	Social leader from Juan XIII, Buenaventura	14/01/2022
207	xxjhc	Senior figure in a favela-based NGO (Afroreggae)	26/04/2023
208	ya91u	Journalist, Acapulco	06/09/2022
209	ypwlw	MUC Resident, early 40s, male, Palma Sola, Acapulco	04/09/2022
210	yr5fy	MUC Resident, Comuna 3, Medellín	26/02/2022
211	yrguu	Andrés Mariño, historian, Colombia	29/11/2021
212	yxkkb	David Canales, local Historian, Monterrey	10/08/2022
213	zbngt	MUC resident, Comuna 12, Buenaventura	19/03/2022
214	zk47o	MUC resident, Northern Ciudad Juárez	30/08/2022

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