Improving the measurement of extortion victimisation: The case of Mexico

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Outline

1. The problem of extortion

2. Measuring extortion victimisation

3. Types of extortion

4. Flawed measurements, and how to improve them

5. Concluding remarks
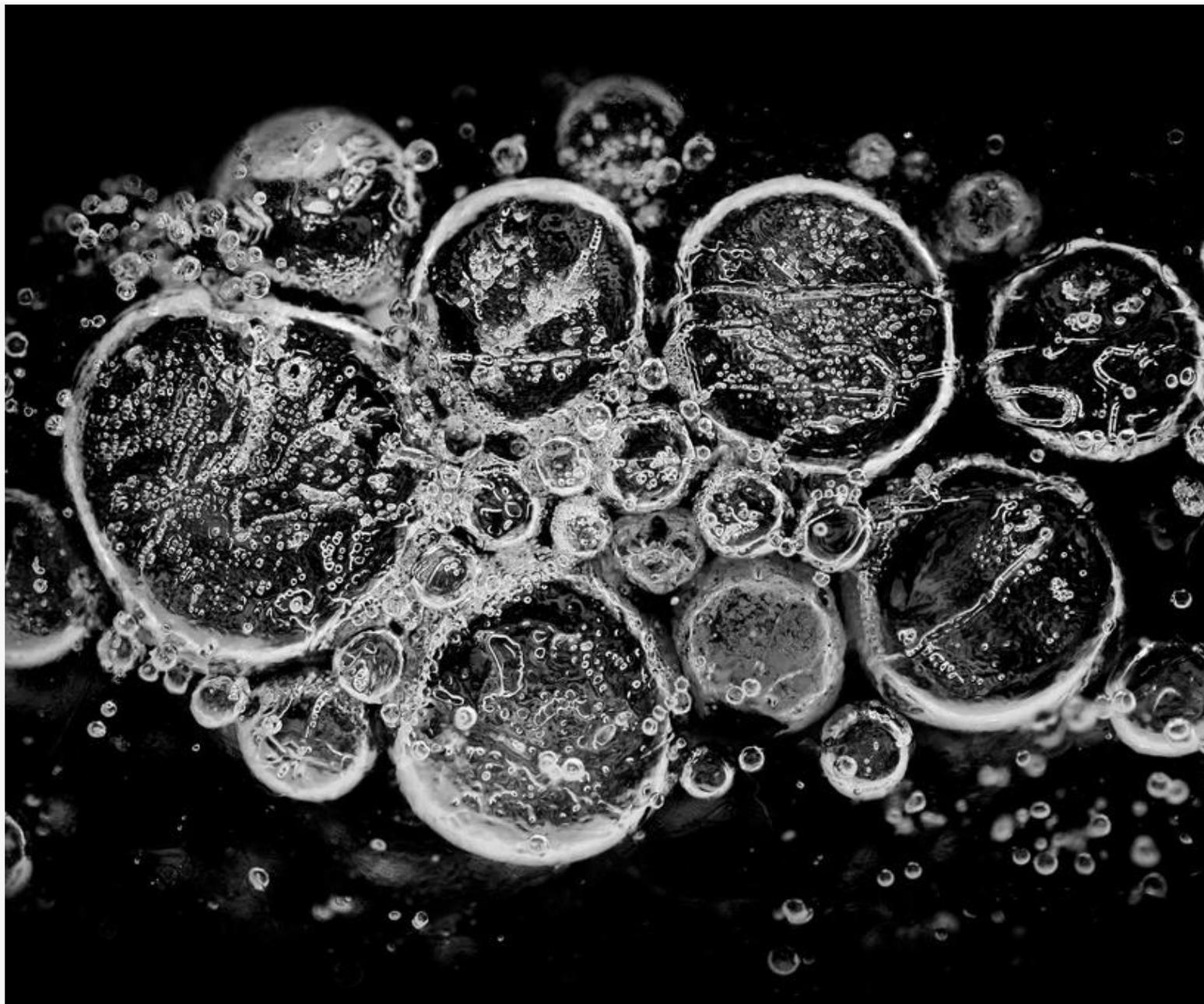
The problem of extortion

- The "quintessential" organised crime activity

- Obvious example of OC infiltration of the legal economy

- Economic, political and social implications

- Endemic extortion tied to extra-legal governance

Measuring extortion victimisation in Mexico

- Administrative records not reliable: large *dark figure*, no info on victim type

- Two victim surveys
  - Households (ENVIPE)
  - Businesses (ENVE)

- Recent research* suggests extortion concentrates on a few chronic victims.

Extortion incidents per 10,000

Year

Businesses — Households

Source: INEGI
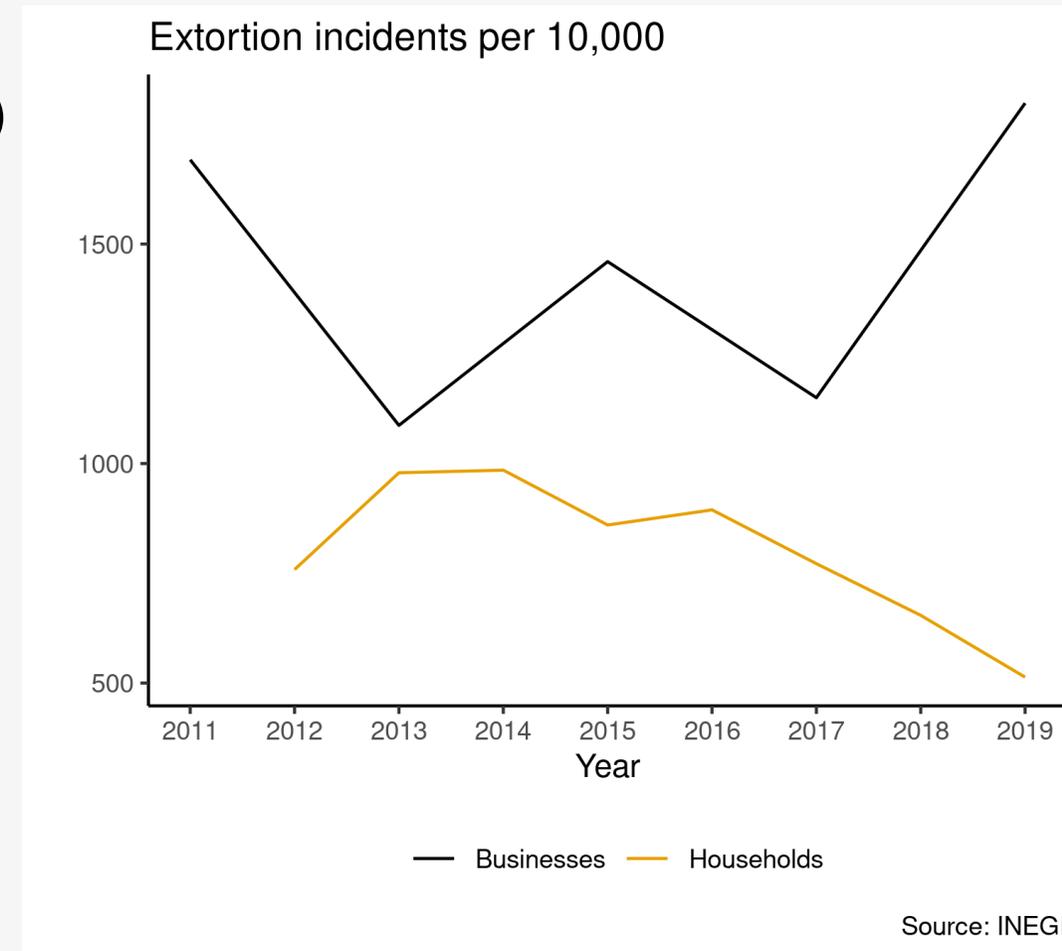
* Estévez-Soto, P.R., Johnson, S.D. & Tilley, N. (2020) Are Repeatedly Extorted Businesses Different? A Multilevel Hurdle Model of Extortion Victimization. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*

What kind of extortion?

- ## Two types of extortion in Mexico:
  - Remote (telephone) extortion
  - In person extortion (*cobro de piso*)

- ## Extortion types have different:
  - Concentration patterns*
  - Risk factors*
  - Success rates**
  - Modus operandi

Percentage of in person extortions
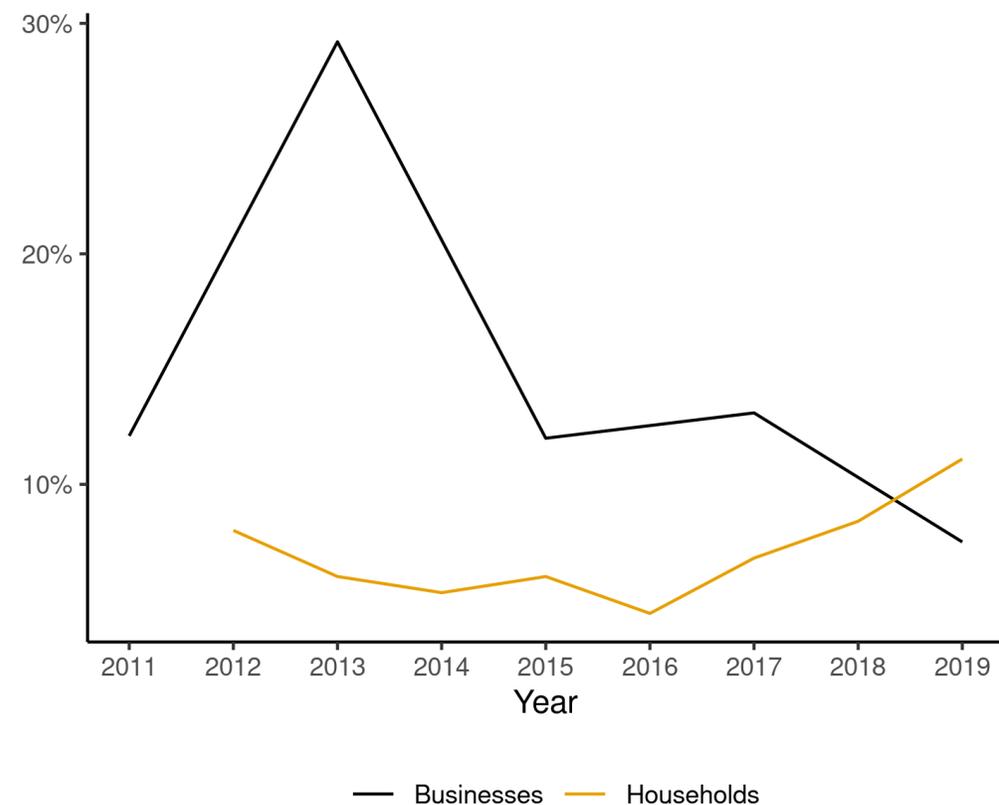
Source: INEGI

* Estévez-Soto, PR. (2020) Organised crime and repeat victimisation: Modelling victimisation patterns against Mexican businesses. Doctoral thesis (Ph.D), UCL (University College London)
** Estévez-Soto, P. R. (2021). Determinants of Extortion Compliance: Empirical Evidence From a Victimization Survey. *The British Journal of Criminology*.

Flawed measurements of extortion, and how to improve them

- Extortion types are combined in the screening stage (capturing prevalence and incidence)

- More details are captured in the victim forms, but these are capped

- Cannot reliably estimate the incidence (and concentration) of remote and in person extortion

- Remote and in person extortion should be considered as **different crimes**

- Each should have it's question in the screening stage, and specific victim forms

- Keep original question for a few sweeps to assess how series is affected

Concluding remarks

- To prevent crime, we must understand the opportunity structures that underpin them

- Aggregating different extortion types implies assuming that remote and in person extortions are fuelled by the same opportunity structures

- Empirical evidence strongly refutes such assumption

- The distinctions between remote and in person extortion need to be incorporated into measurement instruments (including victim surveys and administrative statistics) and crime prevention policies.

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