

The impact of the kingpin strategy on extortion and kidnapping in Mexico

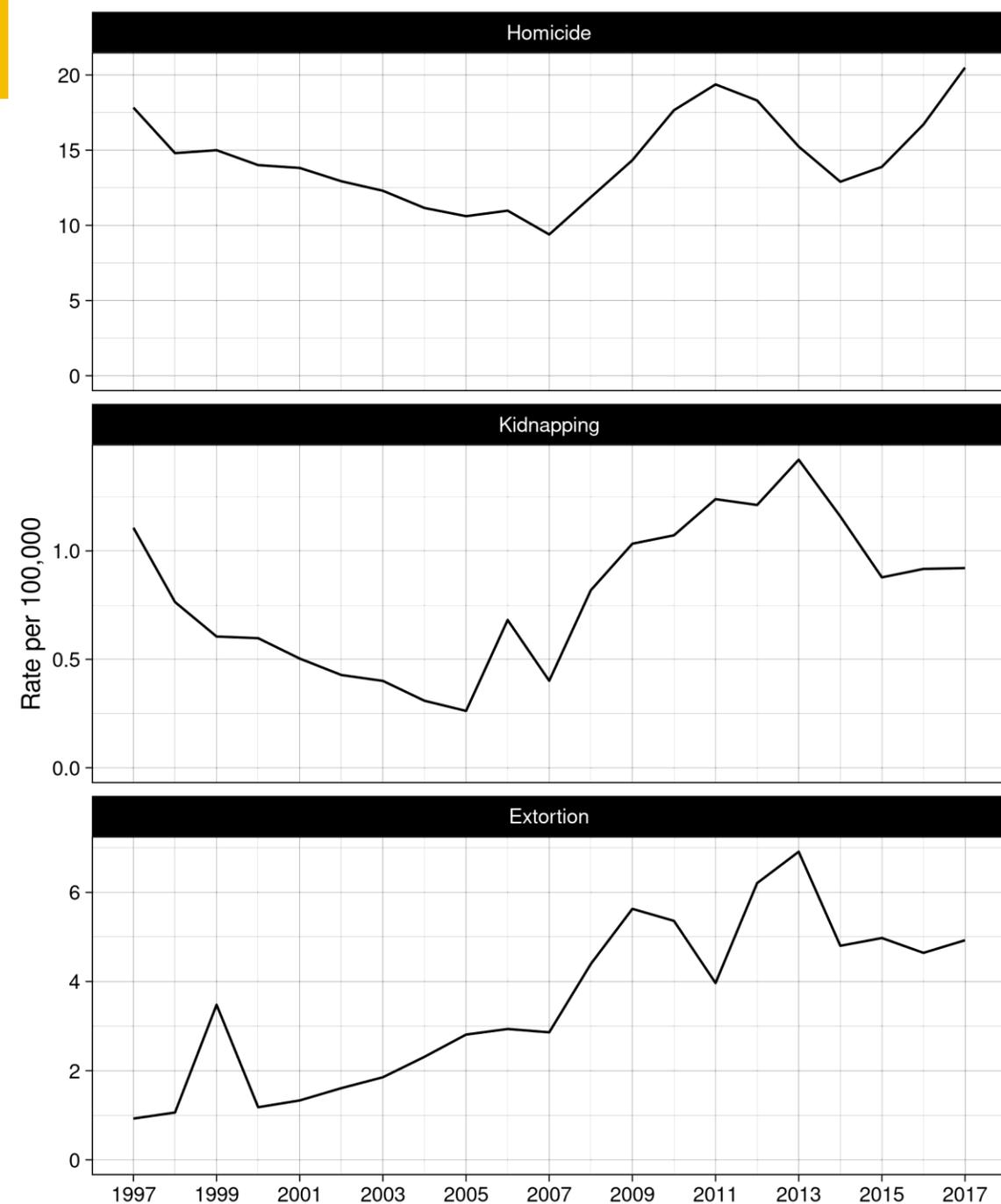
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The logo for the 24h Conference on Global Organized Crime. It features the number "24" in a large, bold, grey font, with a lowercase "h" to its right. To the right of the "24h" is the text "CONFERENCE ON GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME" in a smaller, bold, grey sans-serif font, arranged in four lines.

Background

- During last 20 years, Mexico has seen a dramatic increase in homicides, as well as in most types of criminal violence.
- Violence is mainly driven by organised crime structures that have diversified beyond illicit drugs to other criminal activities, such as extortion and kidnapping.
- Extortion and kidnapping have seen worrying increases since 2005.



Kingpin strategy

- Kingpin strategy: Main counter-OC policy of the Mexican government
- Focused on arresting or killing top-level figures of notorious criminal groups, (aka: leadership removals or *neutralisation*).
- Part of Mexico's "war on organised crime", which has "successfully" dismantled many large criminal organisations.
- But evidence suggests it has contributed to exacerbating violence in the country.



This study

- Most studies have examined the impact of leadership removals on homicides.
- Unclear if leadership removals affect other organised criminal activities, such as extortion and kidnapping.
- Between 2007 and 2017, the incidence of kidnapping doubled, and extortion rose by 70%.
- We directly test if arresting or killing a criminal leader by Mexican authorities impacts the incidence of extortion and kidnapping in the following 6 months in a municipality or its neighbours.

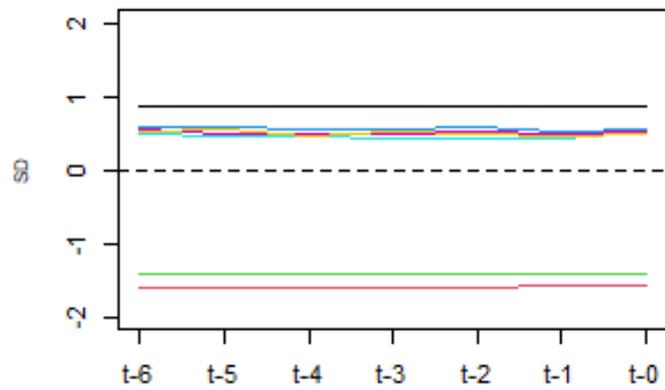


Methods

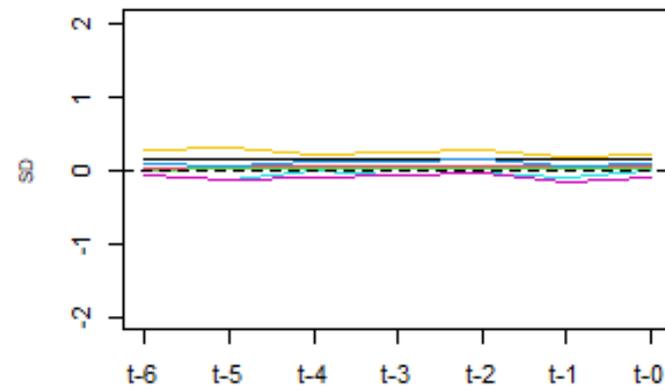
- Difference-in-difference framework with matched panel data (Imai et al. 2020) using PanelMatch R package.
- Treated municipalities-months (those with neutralisations or with neutralisations in a neighbour) are matched with other municipalities with the same *treatment history* (6 months).
- Matched sets (each treated municipality-month and matched controls) then need to be refined so that co-variate balance is achieved.
- Refinement was done with propensity score matching using population, poverty, deprivation, robbery, vehicle theft, burglary and homicide.

Covariate balance due to Matching over the Pre-Treatment Period

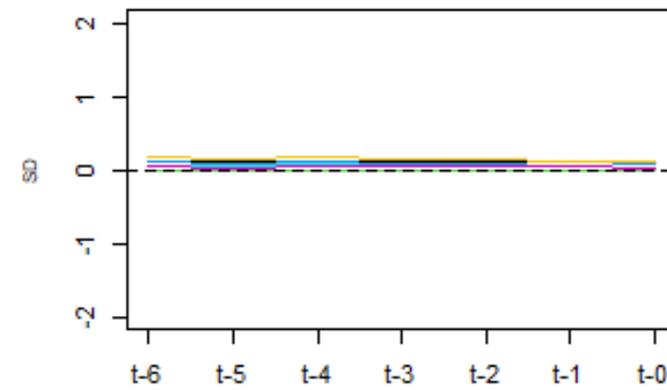
Kidnapping before matching



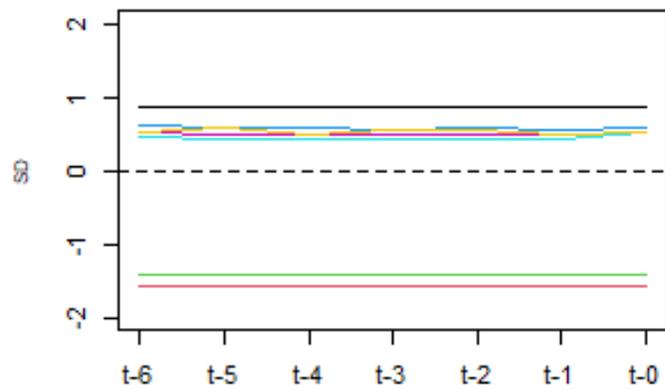
Kidnapping local-effect after matching



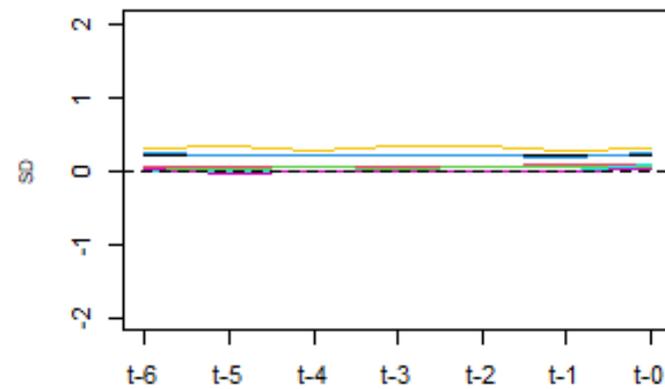
Kidnapping neighbouring-effect after matching



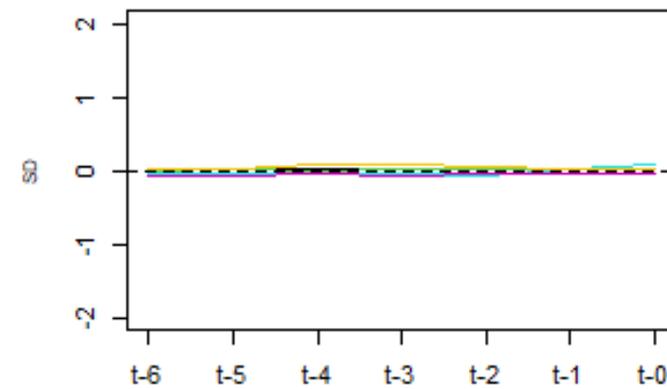
Extortion before matching



Extortion local-effect after matching



Extortion neighbouring-effect after matching



— Population
— Deprivation

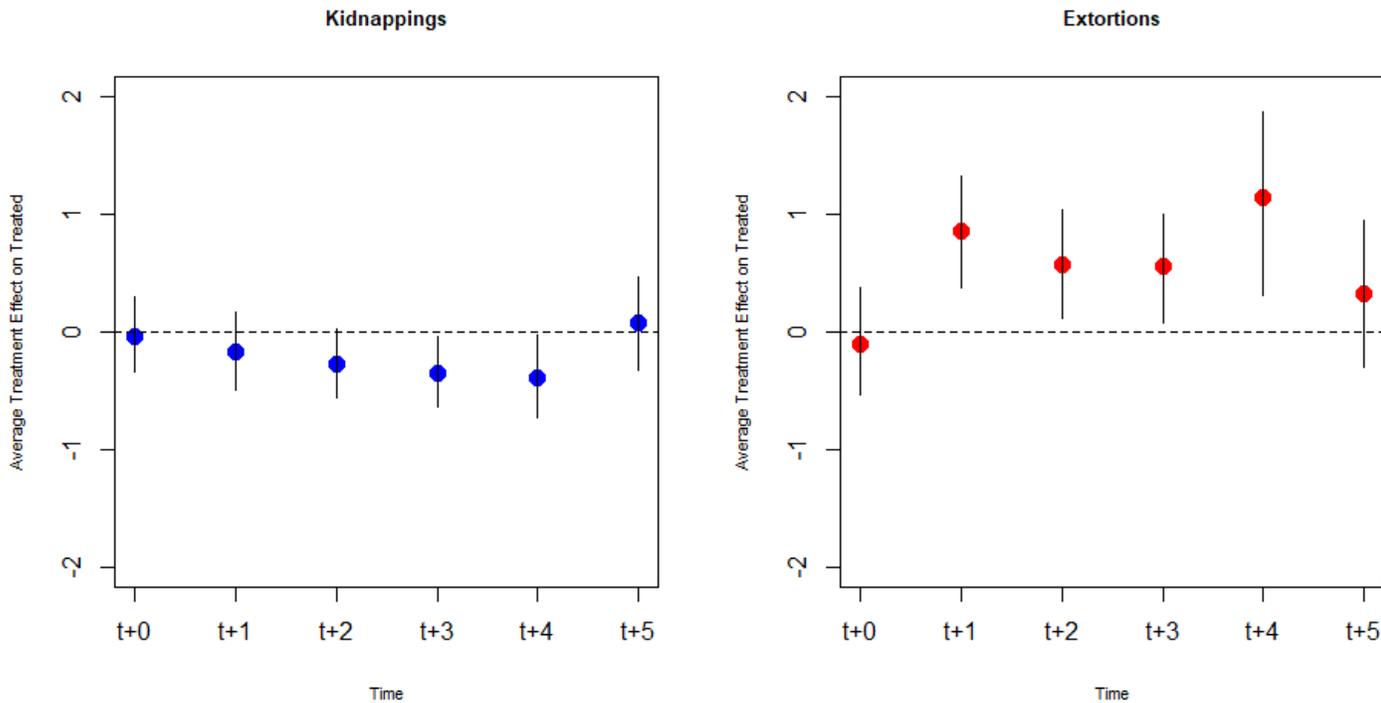
— Poverty
— Vehicle theft

— Robbery
— Burglary

— Intentional homicide

Results – Local impact

Estimated local effects of leaders' neutralisations over time



- Neutralisations had contrasting effects on kidnapping and extortion.

- Kidnappings decreased after a neutralisation (only significantly in months 4 & 5).

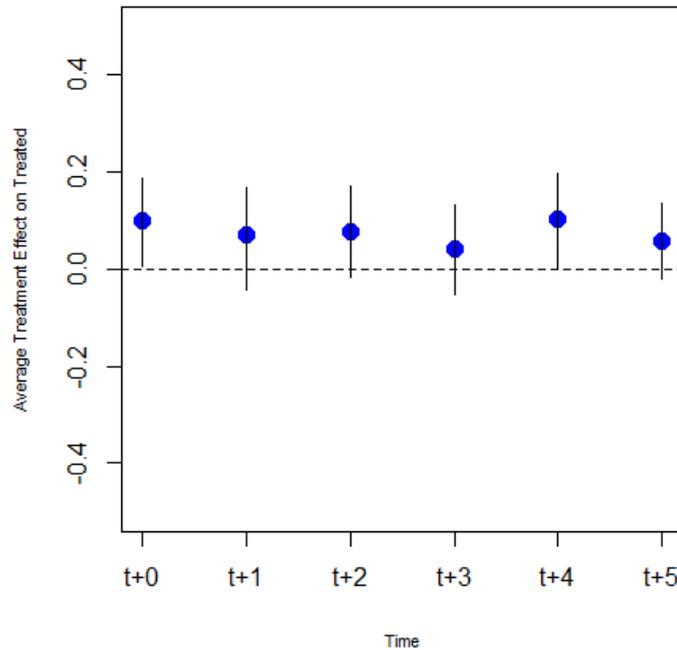
- Extortions increased significantly after a neutralisation.

Results – Impact on neighbours

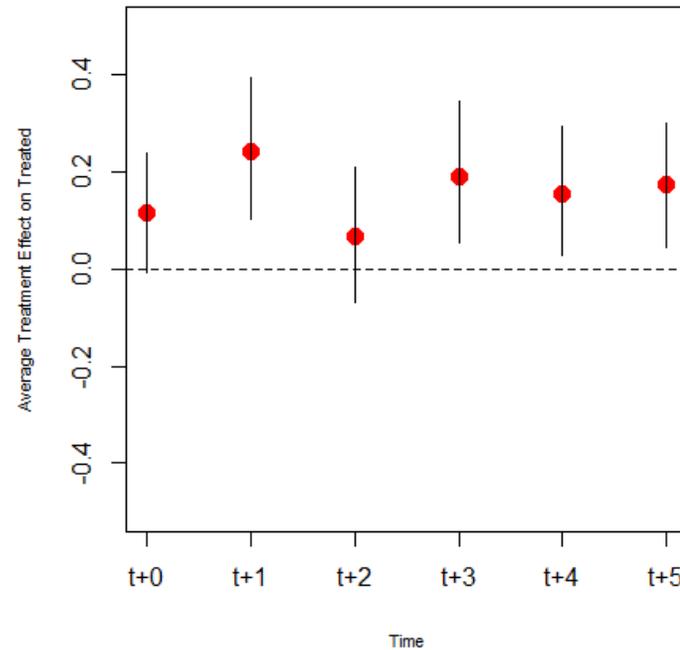
- Impact on neighbouring municipalities was more consistent for both crime types.

Estimated neighbouring effects of leaders' neutralisations over time

Kidnappings



Extortions



- Kidnappings increased after neutralisations, but only significant in two months.
- Impact on extortion in neighbouring municipalities was similar to the local impact.

Discussion

- Net effects suggest that removing criminal leaders has positive net effects on kidnapping and extortion (i.e. crimes increase more than they decrease).
- Indicates that **the kingpin strategy probably has contributed to net increases in organised criminal violence** beyond homicides.
- Decrease in kidnapping may be due to reduced operational capacity of criminal structures, increase in perceived risk of offending, or displacement to neighbouring municipalities.
- Increase in extortion may be due to changes in criminal governance (inciting new players to move into a relatively low-risk criminal activity), or tactical displacement by criminal structures

Conclusions

- Limitations: crime measurement issues, impossible to link activities to certain groups.
- Study adds to the evidence base indicating that the kingpin strategy often makes organised crime problems worse.
- Future research: explore impact on other criminal activities, explore mechanisms, synthesise impact of kingpin strategy on different crimes and different settings (meta-analysis).

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