

# URBAN VIOLENCE, POLITICAL ECONOMY, AND TERRITORIAL CONTROL

## Insights from Medellín

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*Abstract: Urban violence is an emerging challenge to development and democracy across Latin America. How do cities negotiate this challenge alongside pressures to compete in global markets and enable greater political participation? This article analyzes the politics of urban violence in the intriguing case of Medellín, Colombia, which international donors and policy makers herald as having reshaped its urban governance and economic appeal through its response to violence. The article provides a within-case comparative analysis of contrasting outcomes in the trajectories of the political projects Medellín launched in response to urban violence amid the drug wars of the early 1990s and the subsequent urbanization of the Colombian civil war. I argue that a focus on urban political economies and patterns of armed territorial control contributes to our understanding of the politics of urban violence, reveals limitations for the diffusion of the Medellín model, and identifies promising avenues for future research.*

In 2014 Medellín added the Innovative City of the Year award to the long list of accolades that Colombia's second largest city has earned over the past decade for its transformation from the world's most violent city into a model of urban governance. Upon accepting the award, Mayor Aníbal Gaviria (2012–2015) noted that despite the city's troubled history, Medellín is "constantly reinventing itself."<sup>1</sup> But to what extent is this seeming reinvention more a reconfiguration of powerful political, economic, and criminal interests?

In the early 1990s and the mid-2000s Medellín attempted innovative political projects in response to violence that aimed to channel socioeconomic investment into poor and violent parts of the city while fostering new forms of political participation among marginalized populations beyond the historical reliance on clientelist exchange. Despite their similar intentions, the projects took starkly different trajectories. Whereas in the 1990s the project did not prompt the political and social transformations that its architects sought, a decade later a similar project was sustained and became the basis for international acclaim. This article shows that attention to urban political economies and patterns of armed territorial control

I thank the three anonymous reviewers for *LARR* for their careful readings and constructive feedback, which greatly improved this article. The research for this article was made possible by support received from the American Society of Criminology, the Smith Richardson Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Fulbright-Hays program, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, and the Drugs, Security, and Democracy program from the Open Society Foundation and the Social Science Research Council.

1. A video of the mayor's speech is available at <http://online.wsj.com/ad/cityoftheyear> (accessed January 17, 2014).

*Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4. © 2016 by the Latin American Studies Association.

advances our understanding of this puzzling within-case variation. The analysis also has broader scholarly and policy implications given the active export of the Medellín model to other violent, developing world cities.

Urban violence poses complex challenges for democracy and development (Koonings and Kruijt 2007; Moncada 2013a). Latin America is the world's most urbanized region with over 80 percent of its population residing in cities, and it is also the world's most violent region, accounting for over one-third of the world's homicides in 2012 (UNODC 2013). Violence compounds poverty by disproportionately impacting marginalized populations (Moser and McIlwaine 2006). Inequality, in turn, is positively correlated with violence (Fajnzylber, Lederman, and Loayza 2002). Insecurity accompanied by declining public trust in state institutions can prompt vigilantism (Godoy 2006). Violence hinders economic growth (Muggah 2012), erodes the legitimacy of political institutions (Pérez 2003), and has complex effects on political behavior (Bateson 2012; Ley Gutierrez 2014). But the wave of decentralization that washed over much of the developing world starting in the late twentieth century (Dickovick 2011) has equipped cities with a range of powers and resources with which to confront urban violence. Unpacking the politics of urban violence thus provides new insights into the broader question of who governs in developing world cities.

#### BUILDING ON EXISTING RESEARCH

Within research particular to Medellín, scholars identify and explain the origins and actions of the numerous armed actors within the city (Ceballos 2000; Salazar 1990; Salazar and Jaramillo 1992, 1993, 1994; Gutiérrez and Jaramillo 2004). Other researchers deconstruct the interconnections between local violence and the Colombian civil conflict (Alonso, Giraldo, and Sierra 2007; Angarita, Gallo, and Jiménez 2008; Jaramillo, Ceballos, and Villa 1998; Quijano 2004; Rozema 2007). Several studies assess the efficacy of violence prevention initiatives and logics, including the reshaping of public space (Blanco and Kobayashi 2009; Holmes and Gutiérrez de Piñeres 2014), the expansion of public transportation (Brand and Dávila 2011), and socially conscious urban planning (Castro and Echeverri 2011; Brand 2013).

Few studies, however, focus explicitly on the politics behind Medellín's responses to violence. Gutiérrez and colleagues (2013) introduce a valuable comparative lens to explain responses to violence across several Colombian cities, including Medellín. Maclean (2014) situates the city's contemporary transformation in a historical analysis. I complement these studies by constructing a within-case comparative study (George and Bennett 2005) to further theory development using what has previously been studied as a single case. Abello-Colak and Guarneros-Meza (2014) unpack the strategies that criminal actors in Medellín deploy at the neighborhood level to extract rents from violence-prevention initiatives. I complement this micro-level approach with a broader city-level analysis.

Within the wider study of urban violence, scholars interrogate the relationship between inequality and violence (Briceño-León and Zubillaga 2002) and account for the behavior of varied armed actors, including vigilante groups (Huggins

1991) and gangs (Cruz 2010; Jones and Rodgers 2009). Others study the ways in which relations between states and armed actors yield distinct patterns of urban violence (Arias 2013) and how control over illicit markets shapes violence (Snyder and Durán-Martínez 2009). While several studies examine the links between urban violence and social capital (Moser and McIlwaine 2006), others examine how violence reshapes local social networks (Arias 2006; Leeds 1996). Studies increasingly approach urban violence through the lens of racial dynamics (Moncada 2010; Vargas and Alves 2010). And recent studies unpack the interdependency between democracy and violence at multiple scales, including cities (Arias and Goldstein 2010; Pearce 2010).

Yet little research has analyzed the role of the urban private sector in the politics of urban violence.<sup>2</sup> Studies that do so focus on the reshaping of urban geography to satisfy private sector interests (Caldeira 2000; Davis 2013; Rodgers 2004). I extend this important line of research by problematizing the relationship between political and business actors to develop a more dynamic understanding of how distinct political economies intersect with criminal politics to shape the institutional outcomes of urban violence.

#### DRUGS, CIVIL WAR, AND THE BREAKDOWN OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Both violence and responses to violence are interlinked with broader conflicts and political phenomena that do not fit neatly within city boundaries.<sup>3</sup> Hence it is important to consider the extent to which these multilevel dynamics influence the phenomena under study. This section identifies how several such factors influence urban violence in Medellín.

The first dynamic we must consider is Colombia's illicit drug trade, which in the 1960s was largely limited to the production of marijuana on the country's Atlantic coast. Increased global demand for cocaine reconfigured the trade's organizational and geographic dynamics with the emergence of powerful urban drug-trafficking organizations, including the Medellín drug cartel (Bagley 1988). State efforts to dismantle the Medellín cartel in the 1980s prompted increased violence as the cartel enlisted the aid of armed groups that exerted territorial control across portions of Medellín's poorest districts.<sup>4</sup> Between 1988 and 1991, Medellín's homicide rate climbed from 213 to 381 per 100,000 people. Funds and weapons provided by the cartel enabled some groups to increase their coercive capacities and better defend territories and illicit markets. The lethal dimensions of the conflict thus manifested most tangibly within the city, but they also generated political space to consider the broader socioeconomic and political drivers of

2. See Rettberg (2007) and Wood (2000) on the private sector's role in the politics of civil war duration and conclusion. See Moncada (2013b) for a subnational analysis of the private sector's role in urban violence.

3. See Moncada and Snyder (2012) on bounded and unbounded political phenomena at the subnational level.

4. On the origins of the Medellín drug cartel see Bagley (1988). Medellín is divided into sixteen districts called *comunas*.

local conflict, as well as mobilization by actors whose interests were threatened by demands for more inclusionary forms of local governance.

A second, related dynamic is Colombia's decades-long civil war between left-ist insurgencies, right-wing paramilitary forces, and the state.<sup>5</sup> Whereas the war historically unfolded in the countryside, its urbanization in the late twentieth century impacted the country's cities in several ways. In Medellín, these impacts include the arrival of insurgent and paramilitary forces (Duncan 2005), intra-urban displacement (Naranjo 2005), and clashes between rival groups for control over territory and illicit markets (Rozema 2007). Yet violence in Medellín was not a microcosm of the civil war (Blair, Grisales Hernández, and Muñoz Guzman 2009). The conflict intersected with preexisting local cleavages, including divisions between local armed actors as well as historical spatial and socioeconomic inequalities. Thus local violence reflected multiple interacting divisions that drew the interest and influence of actors located within and outside of the city.

National political reforms in the 1980s set the stage for the politics of urban violence in Medellín. Among the reforms were direct elections for city mayors in 1988 and a new constitution in 1991 that shifted powers and resources to municipalities as part of fostering a more participatory democracy.<sup>6</sup> City mayors became responsible for numerous policy domains (Echavarría, Arbeláez, and Gaviria 2002), including health, education, and public housing, as well as citizen security. By reconfiguring the historically centralized nature of security policy making, decentralization made political projects in response to violence valuable opportunities for advancing particularistic interests. This was particularly the case in Medellín, which until the early years of the twenty-first century had the country's highest homicide rate, rendering security one of the city's most politically salient issues.

But not all local politicians were beholden to the traditional Liberal and Conservative Parties that had long controlled Colombian politics. Reforms to facilitate participation by alternative political forces led to the deinstitutionalization of the Colombian party system, resulting in fragmented traditional parties, particularistic political movements (Bejarano and Pizarro 2002), and the rise of political independents and "professional politicians" with limited ties to traditional elites (Dargent and Muñoz 2011, 54).<sup>7</sup> And while clientelism had long been coordinated by regional elites, politicians loosely linked to or completely detached from traditional parties could now seek to build individual clientelist networks (Gutiérrez and Dávila 2000; Leal and Dávila 1990). But as we shall see, a longitudinal lens shows that not all local political actors in Medellín aimed to develop clientelist exchange. Some viewed the security crises as an opportunity to build the programmatic distribution of goods and services and deepen local political participation. Thus while national political reforms distributed mandates for local politicians

5. Of the 220,000 civil war victims between 1958 and 2012, nearly 82 percent were civilians (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013). The Colombian government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) signed a peace agreement on June 23, 2016.

6. Decentralization can be disaggregated along political, fiscal, and administrative dimensions (Falletti 2010).

7. On party system institutionalization, see Mainwaring and Scully (1995).

to tackle urban violence uniformly across territory, they cannot explain temporal variation in the institutional outcomes of the politics of urban violence.

#### DEVELOPING THE ARGUMENT AND WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS

In this section I argue that a focus on urban political economies and patterns of armed territorial control contributes to our understanding of the politics of urban violence in Medellín. By urban political economy I mean the nature of the relationship between city mayors as heads of local governments and dominant urban business. Both actors have long shaped patterns of local political order (Portes and Walton 1976). Studies on the political economy of development at the national level (Evans 1995; Haggard et al. 1997; Kingstone 1999) as well as urban development in the global North (Stone 1989) and South (Walton 1977) concur that government-business relations influence developmental outcomes. Strong collaborative relations foster mutual trust that joins public and private resources toward shared objectives. Public sector resources include formal governing authority and control over bureaucratic infrastructure, whereas private sector resources include capital and specialized knowledge (Kingstone 2001; Payne 1994; Schneider 2004). In contrast, limited collaboration reduces the potential for joining compatible resources and, more broadly, can lead each actor to focus on advancing their individual interests to the detriment of the collective good (Stone 1989).

I find analogous dynamics in Medellín. Throughout much of the twentieth century the governance of security in Medellín, along with other policy domains, was shaped by close collaboration between local political and economic elites (Botero 1996; Jaramillo 1995; Espinal 2002). Yet by the early 1990s, historically close public-private sector linkages had weakened as a result of broader changes in the political landscape introduced by decentralization and party system deinstitutionalization. The resulting disengagement challenged efforts to stem and prevent urban violence. In contrast, similar efforts to confront violence in the 2000s were bolstered and sustained in part by close public-private sector collaboration.

Armed actors within cities seek to establish territorial control in part to coordinate lucrative illicit markets (Arias 2013; Gutiérrez and Jaramillo 2004),<sup>8</sup> wherein variation in territorial control is associated with distinct levels of violence.<sup>9</sup> This variation can range from the monopolization of territorially based illicit markets by one or more large groups of armed actors (high coordination) or its fragmentation across many competing armed actors (low coordination). The limited competition associated with a high degree of coordination yields low violence in the regulation of illicit markets, whereas low coordination incentivizes recourse to violence to defend and expand individual territories (and thus illicit rents).

In Medellín during the early 1990s, low coordination of illicit markets across hundreds of competing armed actors posed challenges for the political project

8. Armed actors build a range of institutions within territories under their control to regulate political and associational life as well as licit economic markets (Arias 2013).

9. This is a point made in the literatures on both civil war (Kalyvas 2006) and illicit markets (Gambetta 1993; Volkov 2002).

launched to stem and prevent violence. By contrast, high coordination a decade later under the control of paramilitaries linked to the drug trade facilitated sustaining the city's response to urban violence. The combination of shifting political economies and patterns of territorial control thus help account for the dramatic developments in Medellín.

*Medellín in the 1990s: Disengaged Relations  
and Low Coordination in Territorial Control*

In the 1990s the national government and civil society in Medellín collaborated to stem and prevent local violence. President César Gaviria (1990–1994) established the *Consejería Presidencial para Medellín* (Presidential Council for Medellín, hereafter “the council”) to sever the links between the Medellín cartel and marginalized youth from the city's poorest districts. To lead the council, Gaviria appointed María Emma Mejía, one of his presidential campaign managers and a member of an elite local family. Mejía coordinated closely with the leaders of varied civil society organizations, including the *Corporación Región* (CR) and the *Instituto Popular de Capacitación* (IPC). The IPC worked on sustainable community development and political participation, while the CR supported decentralization and participatory forms of governance.

Mejía viewed civil society leaders as conduits into parts of the city otherwise inaccessible due to violence and multiple competing armed actors.<sup>10</sup> Interviews with leaders from both the CR and IPC indicate that they leveraged Mejía's reliance on them to advocate for expanding the council's focus to address historical socioeconomic and political inequities.<sup>11</sup> The council's objective was thus redefined to “reconstruct [Medellín's] social structure” (PPMAM 1992, 3) by directing socioeconomic investment into poor conflictive districts while fostering more inclusionary forms of political participation to erode ties between communities and drug traffickers, but more broadly, to weaken clientelist exchange as the dominant state-society linkage (PPMAM 1992, 11–16). To explain the challenges the project faced we turn first to the urban political economy.

*From Historical Collaboration to Disengagement*

A small and united ruling class of political and economic elites historically ruled Medellín and maintained social control through clientelism and paternalism (Botero 1996; Franco 2006). Yet the rise of a new professional political class in the 1970s and the deinstitutionalization of the party system prompted regret among business elites as the city's once unitary source of political and economic leadership diverged (Leyva 2014, 130–131). Business elites consciously retreated

10. Interview with María Emma Mejía, August 12, 2009.

11. Interviews with IPC leader, MDE13, October 16, 2008, and Clara Inés Restrepo, former director of the CR, October 21, 2008. It is important to note how this alignment between civil society and the national government, actors with historically conflicting perspectives on the distribution of political and socioeconomic resources, was made possible in large part by the particular dynamics of violence, which is normally associated with disorder.

from a political arena increasingly controlled by unfamiliar political faces to focus on their private interests, and were further encouraged to do so by growing economic uncertainty associated with deindustrialization and market liberalization (Botero 1996, xvii). This generated space for emerging politicians to secure power and build individual clientelist networks only tangentially linked to the traditional parties, which widened the disconnect between new political leaders and traditional business elites (Naranjo, Hurtado, and Peralta 2003; Uribe de Hincapié 2001). Thus, precisely at the moment when the council sought to reshape local governance to confront violence, disengagement characterized relations between the historical protagonists of local governance.

Business interests in Medellín were long configured in cross-sectoral groupings based on familial ties and interlocking directorates (Botero 1996; Walton 1977). Of important note is the lack of any significant role for foreign capital in the region's industrialization, which fostered intense pride among business elites as well as sensitivity regarding the city's image (Twinam 1980; Walton 1977, 74). By the second half of the twentieth century, intersectoral ties were the bedrock of large economic groups, including the Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño (Economic Group of Antioquia, or GEA).<sup>12</sup> The GEA, founded in the late 1970s in response to the threat of takeovers by outside investors, relied on interlocking directorates to encompass over 140 firms from different sectors. Whereas the city had been an industrial hub throughout the twentieth century, slowed industrial growth led GEA leaders to envision a knowledge-based economy geared primarily toward providing professional services for global corporations, capital markets, and tourists (CCM 1994).<sup>13</sup> But while the collaborative public-private sector relations of the past would have facilitated building a global city to advance this economic vision, disengagement now posed a significant barrier (Franco 2006).

The mayor at the time, Luis Alfredo Ramos (1992–1994), was the leader of Equipo Colombia, one of several factions that grouped emerging politicians loosely linked to the fragmenting regional Conservative Party. Ramos viewed traditional economic elites as the allies of the old political class that rejected the new political forces detached from the city's traditional political leaders.<sup>14</sup> Given the need to develop his clientelist network, Ramos would attempt to capture the council's resources while largely rebuffing demands for more inclusionary governance. Before analyzing these efforts we must also consider what the particular pattern of territorial control would mean for the council's efforts.

### *Intense Violence amid Low Coordination*

The low coordination that characterized armed territorial control in Medellín featured competition among many powerful armed actors. Among these were several hundred *bandas* consisting of young men that used violence to maintain

12. The GEA is also referred to as the Sindicato Antioqueño.

13. For important discussions on the city's historical economic trajectory and the resulting interplay with the drug trade, see Roldán (1999, 2003).

14. Interview with former aide to Luis Alfredo Ramos, MDE6676, January 21, 2010.

territorial “monopolies or mini-fiefdoms” (Jaramillo 1994, 15) that required constant defending from rivals and state security forces. And while some *bandas* carried out work on behalf of the cartel, Salazar and Jaramillo (1992, 91) found that no more than 30 percent worked for the cartel. *Milicias* born out of the national government’s failed peace negotiations with insurgent groups in the mid-1980s operated in the city’s northern and western districts (Ceballos 2000, 390–392). Whereas *milicias* responded to community demands for security (Gutiérrez and Jaramillo 2004, 21), their rapid growth fostered increasingly predatory behavior and incursions into illicit markets (Jaramillo 1994, 31–33).

*Combos* were groups of young men engaged in armed robberies and house invasions and who lacked the high coercive capacity of other groups in the city. But they too controlled territory to extract rents from the local populations (Vélez Rendón 2001, 66). And death squads composed of elements of the police and military, as well as hired assassins, targeted young men assumed to be members of *bandas* or *milicias*. These also veered into the use of violence to regulate and profit from illicit economies in the territories under their control (Salazar 1990).

Beneath the layer of violence fueled most directly by the drug wars—and within which poor young men were the primary victims—was a fragmented pattern of territorial control that exhibited intense lethal violence given numerous competing armed actors with varied links to the political conflict, the drug trade, and territorially configured illicit economies. How did low coordination in territorial control and the disengagement between local government and business challenge the council’s efforts?

### *Preserving Clientelism and Claims Making*

Mayor Ramos sought greater control over the council’s resources in order to blunt its threat to clientelist exchange and his ability to lay claim to the provision of goods and services, a key dividend of clientelism (Chubb 1982). While the council was originally given authority to manage its own budget, Ramos enlisted the aid of several former colleagues in the national Congress from when he had served as a senator to pressure national officials to provide him with greater discretion over the council’s resources.<sup>15</sup> To the dismay of the council’s staff and particularly local civil society, the executive branch concurred.<sup>16</sup> Council staff members indicated that under this arrangement Ramos “would often drag [his] feet” on the implementation of violence prevention and participation initiatives until receiving assurances of control over “when and where” investments were initiated, including new schools, community centers, and early participatory budgeting initiatives.<sup>17</sup> Requests for funds by the council’s staff were often returned with trimmed budgets and recommendations that contracts be awarded to vendors

15. Ramos served as senator from 1990 to 1991. Interview with former aide to Mayor Luis Alfredo Ramos, MDE6676, January 21, 2010.

16. Interview with national government representative in the Council, MDE05, on October 27, 2008.

17. Interview with MDE13, October 16, 2008.



supportive of the mayor.<sup>18</sup> After Mejía privately confronted Ramos, he publicly declared that the council was a political threat to local sovereignty and that its priorities would have to align with his own.<sup>19</sup>

Mejía then approached representatives from the GEA to request that they press Ramos to give the council greater autonomy.<sup>20</sup> Yet business leaders responded that they no longer had the same level of “*palanca*” (a colloquialism for “influence”) in the mayor’s office. This contrasted sharply with the historical influence of the private sector in nearly every aspect of local governance (Botero 1996) but reflected the growing rift between the local public and private sectors amid party system deinstitutionalization. Another council leader indicated: “The private sector neither helped nor opposed us when it came to the mayor; instead they wanted to be left alone to focus on taking care of their firms.”<sup>21</sup> Thus amid this disengagement Ramos was able to constrain the council’s fiscal independence and neutralize the threat it posed to his political power.

### *Challenges in Resocializing Armed Actors*

Low coordination in territorial control generated both practical and political challenges for the council’s efforts to resocialize armed actors.<sup>22</sup> Illustrative of these dynamics is the story of “Armando,” a former member of a banda in La Independencia I neighborhood in the western part of the city who participated in a job-training workshop sponsored by the council.<sup>23</sup> The workshop was held on the weekends in a school classroom. Participants soon noticed that cars filled with strangers would circle the school during the workshops. One day, three workshop participants disappeared shortly after leaving the school. According to Armando, neighborhood residents who witnessed the disappearance indicated that armed men riding in the same cars that had been circling the school had forced the workshop participants into the vehicles before disappearing. The tortured bodies of the three young men appeared several days later, abandoned not far from the school. Soon thereafter, as news of the incident spread throughout the neighborhood, workshop attendance plummeted out of sheer fear for individual security.<sup>24</sup>

In response to civil society demands for investigations into such incidences, the mayor’s office used the fragmented nature of territorial control to deflect criticism and profess helplessness. One civil society leader was told by a mayoral aide that the “anarchy in this city’s poor neighborhoods” made it “impossible to assign blame” for violent acts.<sup>25</sup> Fragmented control thus also provided political

18. Interview via telephone with council staff member, MDE100, April 25, 2014.

19. “Medellín para todos,” *El Tiempo*, April 18, 1993.

20. Interview with María Emma Mejía, August 12, 2009.

21. Interview with MDE100, April 25, 2014.

22. Interview with former community organization staff members, MDE 0014 and MDE 0015, August 10, 2009.

23. Armando is a pseudonym. Interview with former banda member, MDE111, October 15, 2008.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Interview with MDE22709, February 27, 2009.

opponents of the council with a way to deflect demands for greater accountability in the governance of security.

The fluid nature of power relations among armed actors within the fragmented setting also challenged the council's efforts. Conflicts between armed actors over territory and illicit market shares often translated into the breakdown of pacts negotiated with the help of community leaders and council staff. These breakdowns frustrated efforts to encourage members of armed actors to give up their weapons and join resocialization efforts.<sup>26</sup> The uncertainty of the pacts instead reaffirmed distrust between armed actors and fostered reluctance to commit to the resocialization initiatives.<sup>27</sup> Thus the fragmented nature of territorial control often constrained the council's efforts to resocialize members of armed groups.

### *Resisting the Political Opening*

The disengagement between local government and business also created space for Ramos to rebuff the council's calls for more inclusionary forms of governance. The council organized a series of public forums intended to bring together the city's public and private sector elites with civil society and community leaders to identify ways to deepen citizen participation in local policy making. Yet analysis of primary archival materials and interviews with several forum coordinators revealed frustration with both Ramos's opposition to and the private sector's limited support for advancing the local political opening.

The forums culminated in a "Social Pact" endorsed by several hundred community leaders and intended to serve as "grand accord among the city's centers of power" (PPMAM 1992, 64) to provide for greater inclusion of civil society and historically marginalized populations in local governance. Among its recommendations was the institutionalization of civil society participation on municipal boards coordinated by political and economic leaders that shaped policies across a range of areas, including urban infrastructure and municipal services.<sup>28</sup> Ramos, however, refused to endorse the Social Pact.

The council's requests that business leaders again pressure Ramos prompted little support.<sup>29</sup> As one civil society leader and member of the city's human rights ombudsman's office noted, business elites were notoriously "absent" in the political debate regarding the pact and, more broadly, the council's efforts to foster more participatory governance.<sup>30</sup> The council's coordinators harshly criticized the limited commitment to structural change displayed by the city's political leaders and business elites (CPMAM 1993, 227). Ramos countered that his primary obligation was to the "pact" that he had already established with "all of Medellín's residents" by winning the mayoral elections.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, disengagement again created space for the mayor to focus on protecting his particularistic interests

26. Interview with Clara Inés Restrepo, October 21, 2008.

27. Interview with MDE100, April 25, 2014.

28. See Botero (1996) for a historical analysis of the role that such boards played in local governance.

29. Interview via telephone with council staff member, MDE100, April 25, 2014.

30. Interview with MDE22709, February 27, 2009.

31. "Salir de la crisis, compromiso paisa," *El Tiempo*, August 12, 1992.

while the private sector stayed on the sidelines of the political debate, with both actions constraining the council's ability to enact political change.

Mejía resigned from her position as director of the council in 1993. By this point Ramos was engaged in what one council representative described as a "public relations smear campaign" against the council for not fully demurring to the mayor's authority.<sup>32</sup> During her last press briefing in Medellín, Mejía strongly critiqued the mayor's office for failing to collaborate with the council.<sup>33</sup> As the then director of the CR noted, the council struggled to overcome the reticence and resistance from the mayor's office and the lack of support from influential business elites.<sup>34</sup> Civil society leaders viewed the council as having failed in its stated objective of restructuring local governance (CPMAM 1995, 33–35; Quijano 2004).

*Medellín in the 2000s: Collaborative Relations  
and High Coordination in Territorial Control*

In 2003 a political independent became mayor of Medellín for the first time in the city's history. Sergio Fajardo was an academic who had been developing education policy for Proantioquia, a think tank financed by the GEA. Fajardo proposed tackling urban violence through novel violence prevention measures while also deepening political participation via transparent and participatory governance. A focus on the changes in the city's urban political economy and pattern of armed territorial control can help us understand how this political project in response to urban violence was sustained in contrast to the trajectory of the similar response in the early 1990s.

*Rebuilding Collaborative Relations*

By the mid-2000s relations between local government and business were markedly more collaborative. To explain this shift in the political economy we must consider how the city's economic elites fared in their efforts to advance their economic interests in the time leading up to Fajardo's election. GEA leaders continued seeking to change the city's image long defined by violence in a way that would attract foreign investment, but also to reestablish direct influence within local government to support the broader interest of building a global city (Londoño 2004). Thus in the late 1990s Proantioquia coordinated with then mayor Juan Gómez Martínez (1998–2000), a longtime Conservative Party leader with extensive personal and professional links to traditional economic and political elites, to implement several initiatives in response to urban violence amid the growing incursion of the civil war.<sup>35</sup> These initial steps toward collaboration stalled when the GEA-backed candidate in the 2000 mayoral elections, Conservative Jaime Alberto Arrubla, lost to Luis Pérez Gutiérrez (2001–2003), the leader of a Liberal Party

32. Interview with national government representative in the council, MDE05, October 27, 2008.

33. "Renunció La Consejera de Medellín," *El Tiempo*, January 23, 1993.

34. Interview with Clara Inés Restrepo, October 21, 2008.

35. Interview with former director of Entretodos, MDE18, January 14, 2009.

faction. Pérez managed to unite competing Liberal factions and their individual clientelist machines behind his candidacy in exchange for political appointments and clientelist exchanges upon assuming office (Gutiérrez et al. 2013). This further frayed relations with the economic elites that had endorsed his main opponent. One instructive example of this dynamic is Pérez's governance of the city's utilities firm, Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM).

A close public-private sector collaboration historically governed the EPM, which produced low turnover in management and relatively high firm efficiency compared to its regional counterparts (Vélez Álvarez 2013). Yet, over the objection of traditional business leaders, Pérez replaced nearly a dozen of the firm's managers and senior leaders with largely unqualified political allies. He then froze energy rates while promising to use EPM's profits to provide subsidized computers to Medellín's poorest residents. As international ratings agencies revisited their assessments of the EPM,<sup>36</sup> Pérez rebuffed the GEA's demands for greater transparency and instead discontinued the initiatives that Proantioquia had developed to stem violence.

GEA leaders then reached out to the CR and the IPC, which they deemed would be willing to collaborate with business to confront the mayor given Pérez's equally antagonistic stance toward civil society.<sup>37</sup> Behind business's outreach, however, was a strong desire to regain the influence in local governance that business needed to reshape the city in support of its economic interests. As a former director of Proantioquia indicated, if business "was going to win the next election," the private sector would need to bring together "radical" civil society's "power to convene" the masses with "the political and financial resources of the capitalists."<sup>38</sup> Thus during the 2003 elections, leaders from both the GEA and civil society assumed key roles in *Compromiso Ciudadano*, the political movement that propelled Sergio Fajardo into the mayor's office. In contrast to the disengagement of the early 1990s, collaborative public-private sector relations in the mid-2000s would advance and sustain the city's response to violence.

#### *An Emerging Criminal Hegemon: High Coordination in Territorial Control*

The incursion of both insurgent and paramilitary forces into Medellín in the late 1990s marked the start of the shift from low to high coordination in territorial control. Insurgents co-opted milicias and battled with bandas for territory, while paramilitaries allied with the bandas and collaborated with elements of the Colombian military against insurgent forces (Blair, Grisales Hernández, and Muñoz Guzman 2009, 36–40). But the paramilitaries also aligned with the city's innocuously named "offices" that offered criminal organizations either weapons or assassins for hire while also helping run illicit economies. Among these was the powerful *Oficina de Envigado*, which was headed by Adolfo Paz (aka Don

36. "Las EPM, a rendir cuentas," *El Tiempo*, March 8, 2003.

37. "Yo no frené la paz," *El Tiempo*, October 20, 2002.

38. Interview with MDE23, January 15, 2009.

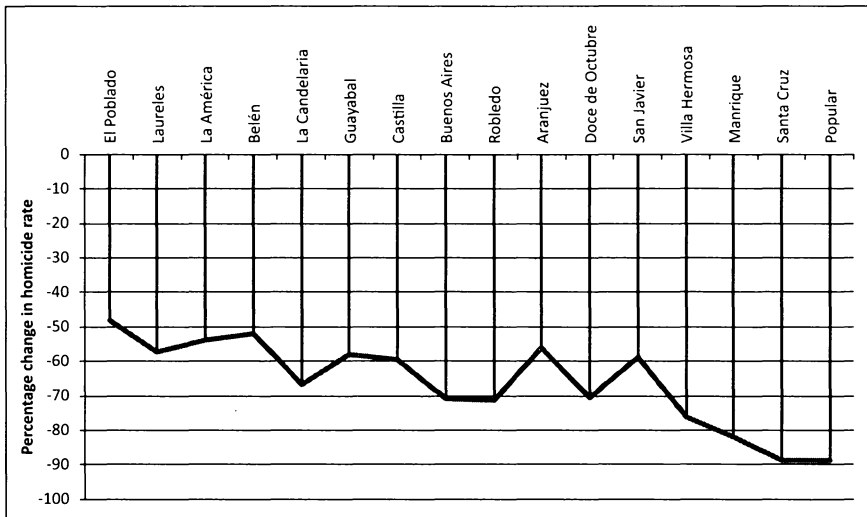


Figure 1 Changes in homicide rates across Medellín's districts (2003–2006). Author's calculations based on data from the Secretaría de Gobierno de Medellín. Districts are organized along socioeconomic class from the wealthiest (left) to the poorest (right) based on a housing indicator.

Berna). Don Berna became commander of a new paramilitary group known as the Bloque Cacique Nutibara (BCN). By 2002 Medellín had over 650 armed groups under insurgent or paramilitary control (Giraldo 2008, 105). Yet it was Don Berna that would emerge as a criminal hegemon for several reasons.

The BCN and its criminal allies eliminated their milícia rivals with the help of the national government's 2002 military operation in the milícia-controlled district of San Javier.<sup>39</sup> Operation Orión, part of President Álvaro Uribe's (2002–2010) hard-line stance against guerillas, was plagued by accusations of human rights abuses and allegations that state security forces had cooperated with the BCN (Amnesty International 2005). Don Berna filled the resulting power vacuum and soon also displaced rival paramilitary units operating in Medellín. With expanded territorial control, illicit rents, and command over armed actors, the BCN demobilized in 2003 during negotiations with the central government.<sup>40</sup> Don Berna emerged from the demobilization as the key interlocutor between the local government and the demobilized paramilitaries, and as the head of a hierarchically organized criminal structure built on the remnants of the BCN's territorial control. Don Berna now commanded a powerful criminal organization composed of the majority of the city's armed actors. Figure 1 shows how

39. The operation was concentrated in the neighborhoods of 20 de Julio, Las Independencias, Belencito, El Corazón, Nuevos Conquistadores, and El Salada.

40. The demobilization featured numerous challenges, including the participation of non-paramilitaries and the absence of oversight mechanisms (Palou and Llorente 2009, 14).

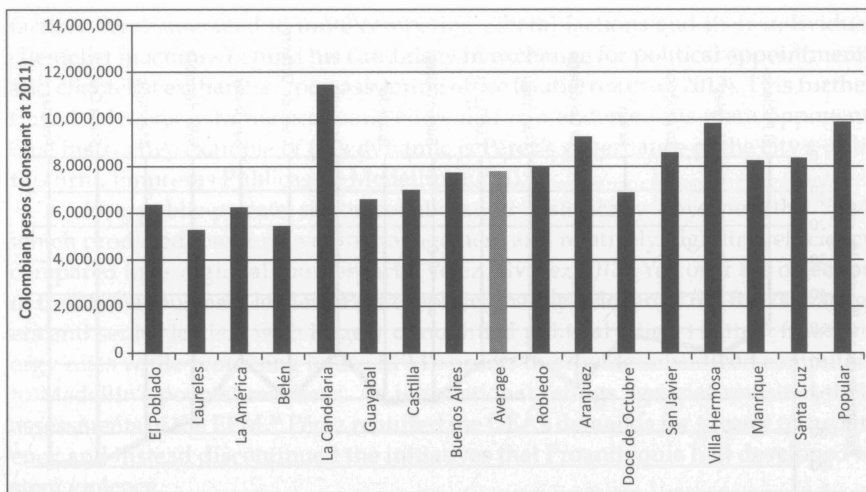


Figure 2 Average per capita municipal investment across Medellín's districts (2004–2011). Author's calculations based on data from the *Secretaría de Gobierno de Medellín* and *Medellín Como Vamos*. Districts are organized along socioeconomic class from the wealthiest (left) to the poorest (right) based on a housing indicator.

the decline in lethal violence during this period was most pronounced in the city's poorest districts. How then did the collaborative local government-business relations and the emergence of a criminal hegemon impact the trajectory of the proposed response to violence?

#### FUELING SOCIOECONOMIC INVESTMENT

Under Fajardo efforts to stem and prevent violence included socioeconomic investment directed at the city's poorest districts, including in education, health, and housing. This approach continued under Fajardo's successor, Alonso Salazar (2008–2011), who cofounded the *Compromiso Ciudadano* movement and also counted on support from the GEA. As shown in figure 2, per capita investment in Medellín between 2004 and 2011 largely favored the city's poorest districts.

Between 2004 and 2013, nearly 86 percent of all municipal expenditures in Medellín went to social investment, facilitated in part by increased tax rates and robust economic growth. Yet these cannot be understood without considering the changing political economy and pattern of armed territorial control.

The year before Fajardo became mayor, a national survey singled out Medellín as having the largest percentage of business owners that believed local public sector corruption to be increasing.<sup>41</sup> Fajardo thus prioritized transparency

41. The Departamento Nacional de Planeación and Confecámaras coordinated the survey, <http://www.hacienda.go.cr/centro/datos/Articulo/Encuesta%20empresarial%20sobre%20corrupci%C3%B3n-Colombia.pdf> (accessed June 26, 2016).

in the use of municipal tax revenue and made information on the city's finances and procurement processes publicly available. This facilitated business leaders agreeing to increases in local tax rates, including on construction in the city's wealthiest district, El Poblado (Gutiérrez et al. 2013). The public and private sectors also coordinated initiatives to reshape Medellín's economy around a set of interlinked clusters that built on the city's industrial past while fostering emerging markets, including professional services, health tourism, and information technology. The cluster initiative generated substantial increases in municipal tax revenue.<sup>42</sup> Local government also established the Agencia de Cooperación e Inversión de Medellín y el Área Metropolitana (ACI) to attract foreign investment. Between 2002 and 2009, foreign direct investment (FDI) into Medellín increased tenfold,<sup>43</sup> and the city was deemed among the top Latin American metropolises for doing business.<sup>44</sup> Finally, leaders of the GEA's principal firms also provided financing and in-kind donations for specific socioeconomic initiatives as part of the response to violence. For example, executives from the GEA's three principal firms, Suramericana, Nacional de Chocolates, and Argos, became members of the governing boards of several public schools in impoverished neighborhoods.

The drop in violence fueled by high coordination in territorial control under Don Berna also enabled municipal authorities and business elites to frame Medellín as a city transformed. As an ACI representative indicated, the decline in violence to levels "comparable with those of other major cities in the region" bolstered Medellín's economic competitiveness.<sup>45</sup> Foreign investors were reassured that the drop in violence reflected not only improved security conditions but also a capable government able to effectively address key urban challenges, such as violence. Both collaborative relations and high coordination in territorial control thus facilitated economic conditions needed to produce revenue for socioeconomic investment as major component of violence prevention efforts.

### *Reshaping State-Society Relations through Social Urbanism*

Local government emphasized reshaping the built environment within the city's poorest districts to restructure state-society relations. The *Proyectos Urbanos Integrados* (PUI) initiative proposed a more territorially equitable distribution of public infrastructure through several innovative designs in architecture and planning, including cable car transport systems to link poor districts with the city center as well as library parks and high-tech educational facilities in northeastern districts that featured the city's lowest quality of life indicators (Brand and Dávila 2011).

Collaborative public-private sector relations aided infrastructural development

42. "Los 6 clústers de Medellín," *El Espectador*, November 30, 2014.

43. Author's calculations based on data from the Banco de la República.

44. "Las mejores ciudades para hacer negocios, 2013," *América Economía*, December 23, 2013, <http://www.americaeconomia.com/negocios-industrias/ranking-2013-las-mejores-ciudades-para-hacer-negocios-de-america-latina>.

45. Interview with MED4011, January 16, 2009.

by increasing municipal revenue that could be channeled into the significant investments. The first cable car system built in the northeastern part of the city alone cost approximately \$33 million.<sup>46</sup> But the private sector also faced particularistic incentives to support infrastructural development. For example, the leader of the GEA, Nicanor Restrepo Santamaría, was also the head of the board of Concreto S.A., the construction firm that built the city's first cable car line.<sup>47</sup> Thus private interests indirectly profited from the reshaping of the city's image, but also from direct participation in the development of infrastructural projects integral to that revised image.

The territorial monopoly facilitated social urbanism by providing access to spaces long seen as inaccessible during the intense violence amid low coordination in territorial control in the 1990s (González Vélez and Carrizosa Isaza 2011, 127). One of the projects considered emblematic of Medellín's reinvention is the library park, Parque Biblioteca España, located in the historically conflictive Santo Domingo Savio neighborhood. Local and national officials as well as the King of Spain attended the park's inauguration in 2007. Developing this initiative, however, entailed engagement between former paramilitaries that controlled the local territory and municipal officials, including the team of architects that designed the library park (Holmes and Gutiérrez de Piñeres 2014). Similar dynamics unfolded in other areas of the city targeted for infrastructural investment (Angarita 2008). Indeed, as Fajardo himself indicated during an interview with the author, developing local government's infrastructural, and thus institutional, presence in the city's poorest districts often required "negotiation" with the existing criminal structures to maintain access in these areas.<sup>48</sup> Thus important elements of local government's efforts to extend its presence into such spaces benefited from both collaboration with the private sector and the high coordination in armed territorial control.

### *Deepening Political Participation*

Collaboration between local government and the private sector facilitated deepening the political participation of social sectors long excluded from local governance at multiple levels. This can partly be traced back to the coordination between the GEA and civil society leaders within Fajardo's Compromiso Ciudadano movement. Once in power, Fajardo brought supporters from both sectors into local government. For example, to lead the EPM, Fajardo appointed Juan Felipe Gaviria, who was the rector of EAFIT University—a prestigious business school in Medellín—and who had previously held posts in several firms that were part of or aligned with the GEA.<sup>49</sup> But Fajardo also appointed the director of the CR, Clara Inés Restrepo, as municipal secretary of social development. And of particular note was Alonso Salazar's appointment as secretary of government,

46. The municipal government provided 60 percent of the total cost, with the operator of the system responsible for the remainder. "Sistema metrocable se extiende," *El Tiempo*, May 13, 2007.

47. "Adjudican segundo metrocable paisa," *El Tiempo*, September 28, 2006.

48. Interview with Sergio Fajardo, October 20, 2008.

49. Among these firms are Enka, a producer of synthetic fibers, and Concreto, a major construction firm.



the position responsible for citizen security in the city. Salazar was a journalist and longtime researcher of drug trafficking and youth violence in Medellín who had helped establish the IPC (see Salazar 1990).

Thus while Fajardo's election enabled business to again assume an influential role in local governance, the path that led to the election of the city's first political independent also generated space for civil society to become part of the governing apparatus. Certainly working in a municipal administration where the city's economic elites maintained substantial influence generated varied challenges for civil society leaders who wanted "faster and more radical" change in local governance.<sup>50</sup> Yet the fact that civil society was represented in high-level positions with local government signified a major shift in the historical pattern of local governance. As Restrepo, the secretary of social development, noted: "Bringing civil society into positions of formal power gave us a degree of legitimacy we had never before had, and even more so because we were governing alongside the city's business elites."<sup>51</sup>

High coordination in territorial control impacted the development of participatory initiatives at the ground level. In 2004 Medellín adopted participatory budgeting through which community residents and leaders could debate and vote upon local investment projects on an annual basis. Over 60,000 people voted in 2013 on projects worth approximately \$750,000.<sup>52</sup> Research suggests that participation in budgeting exercises encourages residents to engage in other types of formal political activity (Uran 2010).<sup>53</sup> Participatory budgeting was but one of numerous ground-level initiatives designed to provide institutional spaces for historically marginalized communities to exercise political voice. The reduction in lethal violence under Don Berna also created some "breathing room" for residents of long-violent neighborhoods to engage in participatory processes and, according to the director of one such initiative, "finally feel like citizens."<sup>54</sup> These same participatory institutions, however, also attracted the attention of armed actors seeking to capture public resources.

Among the strategies used by armed actors was co-opting community organizations engaged in participatory institutions and processes at the neighborhood-level (Abello-Colak and Guarneros-Meza 2014, 12–14). The head of one such community organization, Corporación Picacho con Futuro, which worked on youth leadership and violence prevention, indicated that he was under near constant pressure by former paramilitaries to replace the organization's board with individuals loyal to Don Berna who could then capture the public funds

50. Interview with representative from Paisa Joven, MED02, October 24, 2008.

51. Interview with Clara Inés Restrepo, October 21, 2008.

52. Alcaldía de Medellín, *Planeación Local y Presupuesto Participativo: Asambleas Barriales y Veredales: 2013*, <http://www.medellin.gov.co/irj/go/km/docs/wpccontent/Sites/Subportal%20del%20Ciudadano/Desarrollo%20Social/Secciones/Noticias/Documentos/2013/10-Octubre/ultima%20version%20Asambleas%20ByV%202013%20Resultados.pdf> (accessed January 29, 2014).

53. While the construction of such localized participatory venues was mandated by the decentralizing reforms of the early 1990s, Medellín's advances in these areas outpaced those of comparable cities, such as Cali (Moncada 2013b).

54. Interview with former director of the Programa de Paz y Reconciliación, the municipal agency charged with resocializing former paramilitaries, January 8, 2009.

the organization was receiving.<sup>55</sup> Allies of Don Berna, including demobilized paramilitaries, also entered into elections for local planning committees and the City Council. And though Palau and Llorente (2009, 18) found that the majority of these candidacies failed to secure office, the new mechanisms of political participation certainly generated incentives for armed actors operating under a criminal hegemon to seek to colonize localized political and social institutions as a way to seize resources and expand their influence.

## CONCLUSION

How do Latin American cities negotiate the challenge of urban violence alongside pressures to increase economic competitiveness and deepen local democracy? Addressing this question is of increasing importance given the region's high levels of violence driven by the complex intersection between criminality and varied forms of inequality. This article contributes to our understanding of the politics of urban violence through a focus on two factors: urban political economies and patterns of armed territorial control. To illustrate the analytical utility of this focus I developed a within-case comparative analysis of contrasting outcomes in trajectories of similar political projects launched in response to urban violence in Medellín. Both projects emphasized socioeconomic investment in poor and violent districts and new forms of political participation beyond clientelist exchange. Yet the analysis shows that whereas in the early 1990s disengagement between local government and business coupled with low coordination in territorial control generated political and practical challenges for the political project, a decade later, collaborative relations and high coordination in territorial control sustained the response to violence. Thus a focus on urban political economies and patterns of armed territorial control furthers our understanding of this critical case but also raises issues for future research and policy interventions.

First, future research on the politics of urban violence requires developing more multilevel theoretical frameworks. Such frameworks should be able to unpack the relevant political dynamics within cities while also theorizing the conditions under which the efforts of actors operating at other territorial and institutional scales are able to influence the institutional outcomes of the politics of urban violence.<sup>56</sup> Here scholars of urban violence might draw from and connect their work to the growing literature on subnational authoritarianism (Fox 1993; Gibson 2013; Giraudy 2015) that examines the conditions under which nondemocratic subnational enclaves thrive or collapse.

Second, this article has argued that distinct patterns of territorial control impact the sustainability of responses to violence. Future studies should disaggregate such responses along dimensions that will enable more granular assessment of their sensitivity to armed territorial control. For example, public relations campaigns via media to alter social norms regarding violence may be indifferent to

55. Interview with the director of Corporación Picacho con Futuro, MED600259, February 25, 2009.

56. For work that has begun developing such an approach in the study of political reform, see Eaton (2008).

patterns of armed territorial control versus initiatives to introduce infrastructural development.<sup>57</sup> Further empirical study is needed to establish whether the core elements of political projects in response to violence are equally vulnerable to armed regulation.

Finally, this article's findings suggest that policy makers and international donors should proceed with caution in their export of the Medellín model to other settings. Certainly the tragic loss of human life and the challenges for development and democracy that urban violence produces helps to explain why practitioners are eager to replicate the seeming successes registered in Medellín. However, as I have shown, complex configurations of political, economic, and criminal actors with both individual and shared interests were behind the Medellín miracle. Without careful attention to such configurations, efforts to transplant the Medellín model may not produce similar outcomes.

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57. I thank one of the anonymous referees for pointing this out.

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