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When rivals emerge: Strategic interaction between organised crime groups under policing pressure

Abstract

Organised crime groups in many urban environments often function as dominant, quasi-monopolistic suppliers of various illicit services, extracting payments from both businesses and local populations. Although the literature has extensively examined the internal structures of these organisations and their interactions with the authorities, comparatively little attention has been devoted to the strategic processes that unfold when a rival group attempts to challenge an established dominant organised crime group. This study seeks to fill that gap by proposing a game-theoretic model that captures the strategic interplay between an incumbent organised crime group and a potential entrant competing within the same illegal market.

By situating this competitive interaction within a context of law enforcement characterised by varying levels of intensity, the paper analyses how policing efforts shape the strategic choices of organised crime groups, particularly with respect to extortion practices. It identifies the circumstances under which either cooperative arrangements or direct competition are likely to arise. Special emphasis is placed on understanding how the possibility of entry shapes the incumbent's behaviour, as well as how the entrant's decision to enter the market depends on both the incumbent's strategic response and the degree of enforcement pressure.

Findings offer relevant insights for developing more effective policies to target extortion and enhance public security.

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