

Seminar Speaker: Christopher Blattman (University of Chicago Harris School)

Title: “Gang rule: Understanding and countering criminal governance”

Abstract:

Criminal groups govern millions worldwide. Why do they rule? Many argue that criminals step into vacuums of order. If so, increasing state services should crowd out gang rule. But interviews with Medellín gangs suggest this overlooks an indirect incentive to rule: governing protects other illicit businesses, such as drugs. We show how a need for civilian loyalty could drive gangs to respond to stronger states by intensifying governance. Empirically, we show this is what happened in Medellín over 32 years. When new borders exogenously increased access to government services on some blocks, gangs raised their civilian rule in protective response.